



Brussels, 12th March 2020
2020-03-LD-21/GM

UPDATE 12/03/2020

COVID-19 outbreak

NEW

The World Health Organization has declared COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic (<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>). Everybody knows which measures have been taken in Italy. The relevant Belgian Authorities have reported “an increase in the number of new cases. Our hospitals also see more and more persons suffering from lower respiratory tract infections. This might be the sign of a real epidemic in our country.” (<https://www.info-coronavirus.be/en/2020/03/11/47-new-covid-19-infections/>). Several Member States in Europe have closed all schools.

In the European Schools, new cases of infected **relatives** of members of the school community have been on the increase in recent days. This is a source of growing uncertainty for pupils, parents and staff members and makes it increasingly difficult to maintain a calm atmosphere within the school communities.

It is a fact that schools do not have the same structure as offices. Students move from one place to another, they meet for different activities, with different students and with different teachers/adults and have close physical contact in play that professionals, in a working environment, do not normally have.

Mixing amongst pupils in a school environment is extremely pronounced, even more pronounced in the European School system. This mixing of pupils is found in a variety of contexts in the ES system, such as:

- classes and groups that change every hour and pupils who are mixed across sections and levels,

- after school activities,
- school transport (bus),
- canteen and/or cafeteria,
- playground,
- corridors,
- study rooms and libraries,
- sport halls and changing rooms,
- toilets.

These are all examples of different places where one pupil can meet other pupils (and/or teachers or staff) and can be (sometimes obliged to be) in close contact with them (less than 1 meter of distance).

Moreover, in schools based in the same city, many families have children in different schools, and this includes members of staff. Some teachers also teach in different schools.

Given:

- the present situation of the declared pandemic,
 - the nature of the European Schools population, largely composed of expatriated families,
 - the illustrated amplified risk of contamination in a school environment,
- as a preventive measure, it is highly recommended to suspend the obligatory regular attendance of pupils (art. 30 “General Rules of the European Schools” Ref. : 2014-03-D-14) and suspend lessons in situ in all European Schools, starting from next Monday 16th March 2020 and up to 29th March 2020 inclusive.

School management and teachers will do their utmost to guarantee pedagogical continuity using distance communication tools. Legal representatives of pupils are invited to support pupils’ efforts at home.

This communication is issued in advance, so that schools and families have some time prepare themselves.