

## Practical issues

### Schools closed

#### Digital education has not yet been perfected in all its aspects:

- How do you maintain contact with pupils?
- How do you differentiate (age and level)?
- Are all teachers sufficiently familiar with the technical aspects and methods?
- How do you give practicals and lessons in arts subjects?
- Does every child have internet access, a computer, and a quiet space at home?

#### Concern and stress among parents:

- How is it possible to combine childcare and working at home? This is much more of a burden for primary school children but also for children with (behavioural) problems.

### Schools open

#### Concern and stress among parents:

- “My kids are not guinea pigs”

**Fear among children/teachers** of infecting others or becoming ill themselves

**Sufficient focus on carrying out all basic measures at school** (see box below), also during breaks (canteen, staffroom) and the journey to/from school (adequate public transport).

**This means mandatory face mask** for teachers and secondary school children. Some find this difficult.

#### Open schools mean clustering of people and this increases the risk of infection

- Clustering of (grand)parents when picking up (grand)children
- Clustering of children on way to school on the bus or train
- During breaks, children cluster in the playground or canteen

**The safety measures adhered to by educational institutions, education personnel and pupils, ensure that the virus can spread much less easily.**

**This is how we prevent transmission:**

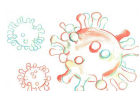
\* Stay at home if you are ill. \*

\* Wash your hands. This removes any virus particles on your skin. \*

\* When you practise physical distancing, the droplets fall on the ground.\*

\*By wearing face masks, you prevent droplets and micro-droplets from spreading.\*  
Ventilation dilutes and evaporates any possible micro-droplets.

**Source: Onderwijs Vlaanderen**



## Other considerations

### General

Corona has had an enormous impact on all of us, and for the time being we will have to live with it. **This recommendation has been drawn up on the basis of current knowledge that is very inadequate.** We are still learning about this epidemic and the consequences of certain choices.

This continuous learning process is also taking place within education. **The recommendation concerns the impact of a total closure. On the basis of current insights, alternative measures are more likely, with the aim of minimising the learning delay and offering a safe place to those children that need it.** Examples include half-capacity classes, lessons just for certain children, re-arranging timetables.

**These meetings took place during an upsurge of the virus.** This influences the current recommendation. Experiencing first hand the serious effects of the virus can also change the arguments.

**The number of children suffering abuse has risen despite schools being partially closed and therefore fewer opportunities for teachers to alert the CLB.** These figures could therefore be an underestimation

**Children can also transmit Covid-19, although the current scientific research shows that they transmit the virus less than adults. Everyone needs to continue respecting the basic guidelines as regards contact with children.**

**As a society, we have to make choices.** Do you take measures that curb the economy or do you close the schools? What takes priority? The decision to close schools should not be taken too lightly because this will probably result in learning delays and possibly more child abuse.

**Schools can play a role in continuing to motivate children to respect the general guidelines** (see previous page), even during non-school and after-school activities. **This promotes uniformity and can reduce anxiety among parents, children and teachers and school management, as well as polarisation between groups.**

### Primary school

It is important to keep schools open because they are an entry point for **reaching all population groups.**

In this way you can reach people that the normal media can't reach.

**School offers security and structure for children.** This is particularly important for children whose home life is difficult.

### Secondary school

Young people are more likely to follow the guidelines in a **controlled school environment** than when there is no supervision.

If we close the schools, we therefore have less knowledge about what young people are doing.

School is also important for young people because of **the structure/security, regularity and social contacts,** especially for those with a difficult home life.

### Suggestions for further research

**This recommendation exposes many gaps in our current knowledge. Here we list a few that may be of added value in substantiating this research.**

\*What is the effect of school closure on the mental well-being of children, teachers and parents?\*

\*How many infections actually take place at school?\*

\*How can we motivate young people to respect the guidelines?\*

## Summary

This recommendation is based on current scientific insights; however, these are inadequate.

The greatest evidential value consists of the fact that school closure probably causes a large learning delay and possibly more child abuse. At the same time we must balance the number of infections in the total population, something that helps determine whether schools should close.

School is a crucial element of children's and young people's lives.  
It is here that they develop themselves, their future and in so doing all our futures.  
We should therefore think very carefully before closing schools.  
New scientific insights will have an effect on this recommendation.

With this recommendation we make a leap from scientific insights to general recommendations for a specific question. We look at scientific studies and weigh these up against other arguments from a broad panel of stakeholders and report which have played a role.

Dealing with uncertainty is not a new phenomenon.  
In the medical world too, only 1/3 of decisions are based on scientific evidence.

### Panel members:

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