

Latrobe mine fires

Q&As – for school parents

1. Why has the decision been made to temporarily relocate children attending schools on or south of Commercial Road?

- Our main concern is the health and safety of the children and staff at our schools.
- The Environment Protection Agency (EPA) has issued high smoke alerts for the last few days. The source of some of the smoke is the Hazelwood Mine, which is located close to these education and childcare facilities (on or south of Commercial Road).
- The Department of Health has advised that exposure to smoke can affect people's health – especially children, older people, pregnant women, smokers and people with asthma or heart disease.
- The Department of Health has advised that some children attending schools and early childhood facilities close to the Hazelwood Mine (on or south of Commercial Road) have shown signs of smoke irritation including itchy eyes, sore throat, runny nose and coughing.
- As these signs clear up once away from the smoke, the Chief Health Officer of the Victorian Government has told the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) to temporarily move our children to give them a break from the smoke.

2. Which schools and early childhood centres have been advised to relocate their children?

- The schools and early childhood facilities affected are those on or south of Commercial Road. These include:
 - Commercial Road Primary School
 - Sacred Heart Primary School
 - Berry Street School – Morwell campus
 - Maryvale Crescent Kindergarten
 - Gunai Lidge Child Care Centre
 - Good Start Early Learning Morwell.

3. Is it expected that children from other schools and early childhood centres will be asked to relocate over the coming days?

- At this point, Commercial Road Primary School is the only government school that is being temporarily relocated.
- Air quality changes constantly and is being monitored daily by the Environmental Protection Agency. Advice will be provided to the Department of Education and Early Childhood based on that monitoring.
- In addition to air monitoring currently being conducted by the EPA, DEECD will also test and monitor the air quality at all schools and early childhood facilities in Morwell.

4. Where will children be relocated to?

- We can confirm that from Thursday, 20 February we have made arrangements for children from Commercial Road Primary School to attend one of the following schools in Moe: Newborough Primary School, Newborough East Primary School and Elizabeth Street Primary School.

5. How long will the relocations last?

- Air quality changes constantly and is being monitored daily by the Environmental Protection Agency. Advice will be provided to the Department of Education and Early Childhood based on that monitoring.
- While some progress has been made to contain the fire, there is still at least several weeks of work ahead.
- In addition to air monitoring currently being conducted by the EPA, DEECD will also test and monitor the air quality at all schools and early childhood facilities in Morwell to help determine which facilities can remain operational.
- To help families plan, these relocations will remain in place until Friday 28 February when the situation will be reviewed.

6. Will transport be provided for school children being relocated?

- Yes. Details of transport arrangements will be provide directly to impacted families by their principal.

7. Who will teach my child when they are relocated to another school?

- To minimise disruption, all students will be relocated with their entire class and current teacher, and will continue to be taught together as a group by the same teacher at their new location.
- Your principal can assist with any questions.

8. Should I send my children to school if they are located close to those on or south of Commercial Road?

- Children are encouraged to attend schools as normal.
- However, parents should manage their child's health especially if they are an asthmatic or have a pre-existing health problem. This includes ensuring that your school has your child's current treatment plan for existing health conditions.
- If your child usually walks or cycles to school, consider an alternative such as car-pooling with a friend or neighbour.
- Please discuss any queries with your principal or early childhood centre director.

9. Can I keep my child at home?

- Children are encouraged to attend school as normal.
- If you and your family are temporarily staying with a friend or relative living outside the smoke-affected area, and your child will not be attending school, please let us know where your child

is and when they are expected back. Through your child's school we can provide learning materials which will reduce the impact of any break from school on their learning and achievement.

- Please also ensure that your school and early childhood centre have your current contact details. If your child is absent, please talk to your child's teacher about school work they could do while they are away.

10. If air quality is bad, what should schools and early childhood facilities do?

- To help reduce the exposure of children to smoke, schools and early childhood facilities are minimising physical activity and keeping children indoors as much as possible.
- All windows and doors are closed and where schools have air conditioners, they are set to 'recycle' or 'recirculate' to reduce smoke coming inside, or turned off where this function is not available.
- If there is a break in the smoky conditions, schools will try to take the opportunity to air out the facility to improve indoor air quality.
- Where possible, schools will bring forward any planned excursions to locations outside of the smoke-affected area.
- Schools and early childhood facilities will seek immediate medical advice for any child who is suffering from obvious distress, as outlined in their respective school or facility health policy.

11. My child has asthma, what should I do?

- Exposure to fine particles can aggravate existing heart or lung conditions, including asthma.
- People with asthma should follow their personal asthma plan.
- For further information about asthma go to the Asthma Foundation of Victoria website at: www.asthma.org.au or call 1800 278 462.

12. What are the long term impacts of exposure to smoke?

- Any break from exposure will reduce the impact of smoke.
- All smoke can potentially be harmful for your health so people with pre-existing health conditions should take their medication, follow their treatment plan, and seek immediate medical advice if symptoms occur.

13. Where is EPA monitoring air quality?

- EPA has a permanent monitoring station in Traralgon and has set up two monitoring stations in Morwell this week at Morwell Ronald Reserve and at the Bowls Club, Traralgon in Kay St.

14. Where can I get more information?

- **Nurse on Call** - 1300 60 60 24 (this is a phone service that allows you to discuss any health related issue with a registered nurse, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for the cost of a local call from anywhere in Victoria).
- **EPA Victoria** on 1300 372 842 (24 hours) or visit: www.epa.vic.gov.au

- **Department of Health** - More information on the health effects of smoke, or on the use of water from rainwater tanks contact 1300 761 874 (during business hours) or go to www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/bushfires.htm
- **Asthma Foundation** - www.asthma.org.au or call 1800 278 462
- **Latrobe City Council** - call 1300 367 700 or go to www.latrobe.vic.gov.au/Home
- Victorian Bushfire Information Line: Freecall 1800 240 667. (Callers who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech/communication impairment can call via 1800 555 677)
- **VicEmergency** website: www.emergency.vic.gov.au
- **CFA Social Media**: Facebook (facebook.com/cfavic); Twitter (Twitter @ CFA_Updates)

15. How do we stay informed about the relocation?

- Your principal and early childhood director will keep you posted with regular updates.
- You can also keep up to date with the FireReady app or visit the VicEmergency website www.emergency.vic.gov.au and www.education.vic.gov.au/emergency