

# Hygiene Manual for Boarding Schools - CoVid-19

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## Introduction

This hygiene manual is a new and abbreviated version of the original CoVid-19 hygiene manual for boarding schools. The abbreviation resulted from the gratifying fact that the number of infections in Austria remains low and, therefore, the health crisis team of the federal government announced an easing of the hygiene regulations. The measures listed here are based upon the generally-applicable requirements established by the Austrian Federal Health Crisis Unit. These measures were determined jointly by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research in cooperation with the Federal Ministry for Social Affairs, Health, Nursing and Consumer Protection.

Pursuant to Section 7 (3) of the CoVid-19 Relaxation Ordinance - CoVid-19-LV, BGBl II, No. 197/2020, students are allowed to enter accommodation establishments for the purpose of attending school (e.g., boarding schools, apprentice's dormitories, etc.).

Living in boarding schools is comparable to living in communal setting such as shared apartments for students during a predetermined period of time in order to participate in an educational program. In such cases, a defined group of people share specific living areas such as bathrooms, kitchens, dining rooms, living rooms, bedrooms and lounges.

According to §11, par. 7, then, those resident in boarding schools are legally-defined as equivalent to all those living in temporary, communal housing. It is recommended, however, that if living in a boarding school's facilities is not necessary, it should be avoided and commuting to and from the school preferred.

The Ministry requests that the responsible persons in all boarding schools take the following measures listed into account and to instruct boarders concerning these.

## **Arriving at the Boarding School**

These rules and requirements specified by the Federal Ministry's crisis team apply in both public and private areas:

*While traveling to boarding school:*

- mouth and nose protection must be utilized in all public transport.
- compliance with a minimum of one meter social distancing to others is to be maintained to the extent that this is possible given the number of passengers in transport, seating arrangement and during entry and exit from the transport vehicle.

*When entering the boarding school facilities:*

- avoid large gatherings of people in enclosed areas.
- if possible, arrivals and check-in should be organized such that large groupings of people are avoided (e.g., staggered arrival times or appointments).
- if staggered arrival times is not possible, suitable waiting areas should be established and utilized.
- residents of the boarding facilities should be informed beforehand as to the number and location of the room or facilities reserved for them.
- students should be housed, if possible, with other students of similar age and program and their accommodations should be as close as possible to their instructional facilities.

## **Hygiene Regulations for Boarding School Staff and Students**

Upon arrival, all persons must immediately wash their hands thoroughly with water and liquid soap (30 seconds minimally). Alternatively, hands can be cleaned with disinfectant. Fundamentally, hand washing should take place not only immediately upon entrance to the facilities, but several times throughout the day, every day; especially after coughing, sneezing or blowing one's nose, before dining and necessarily after utilizing the toilets. Hands should also be washed before moving to another room. All dorm residents should be reminded of this several times daily.

*During residency in boarding school facilities:*

- eyes, nose and mouth should not be touched as this allows viruses to enter the body through mucous membranes.
- students and staff should cough or sneeze either into their elbow or into a paper tissue which is disposed of immediately. Students and staff should not sing, scream or speak loudly around others.
- students and staff members may freely utilize mouth and nose masks at any time.
- all must maintain a regularly-updated awareness of the CoVid-19 situation in the school, neighborhood, city and region. Several government ministry websites provide this information and is regularly updated.
- Should symptoms develop which are suspiciously similar to CoVid-19 symptoms, the telephone hotline (#1450) should be called for consultation and the person should be isolated as soon as possible until the situation is clarified.
- all third-party visits to the school dormitories must be documented so that in the case of infection the source and further spread of the virus can be appropriately determined and managed by providing the health authorities with this information.
- anyone in contact with boarding students and staff (e.g., day students, faculty members, administrators, kitchen staff, etc.) who do not reside in the boarding facilities, are prohibited from entering these facilities when they are ill.

- those at higher risk include:
  1. individuals with severe chronic lung disease (COPD or Cystic Fibrosis).
  2. individuals with advanced chronic kidney disease.
  3. individuals with advanced heart disease or insufficiencies.
  4. individuals currently receiving chemotherapy or having completed a chemotherapy in the previous six months.

A risk analysis by the proper health authorities should be carried out and followed in such cases.

*Minimizing Contact:*

- Close groupings of people in small areas are to be avoided when possible.
- Sleeping arrangements should be established whereby students are 1.5 meters apart in their dormitory rooms if possible. Only the students assigned to particular rooms are to sleep there; students from other rooms or other members of the student body are prohibited from sleeping in rooms allocated to others except when required to reside in the school infirmaries.
- Generally, boarding school infrastructure is not designed with social distance requirements in mind. Therefore, it is recommended that attempts should be made to reduce the number of people and their encounters with others by staggering the daily routine when possible. Mixing of groups with one another should be avoided when possible. Also, frequent changes in staff, cleaning staff and teaching faculty members should also be avoided. Large groups should generally be avoided when it is possible to do so.
- In areas which frequently attract larger numbers of students, it is recommended that measures be taken to avoid droplet infection through maintaining social distancing (e.g., student lounges).
- The Ministry's regulations and guidelines for mass sport or group exercise must be maintained faithfully in a boarding school setting (<https://www.bmkoes.gv.at/Themen/Corona/H%C3%A4ufig-gelte-Fragen-Sport-Veranstaltungen.html>)

## **Hygiene Measures in the Boarding Facilities**

- Increased hygiene measures such as frequent cleaning are required throughout the boarding facilities in order to ward off CoVid-19 infections. In general, thorough normal cleaning is recommended alongside the use of disinfectants in places of particularly high use and exposure (e.g., desktops, bathroom facilities, door handles, etc.)
- All generally-accessible sanitary facilities must be equipped with sufficient liquid soap and towel dispensers (cloth or paper).
- All dormitory rooms occupied by residents must be ventilated daily for a minimum of five minutes every hour (cross ventilation if possible).

*Hygiene Measures for Meal Provisions/Kitchens:*

- All regulations and relevant guidelines of the Ministry apply to all canteens, kitchens and food preparation facilities in boarding schools.
- In buffet-style food distribution facilities, the kitchen staff must maintain all relevant hygiene requirements and regulations which apply generally to such facilities (HACCP). Food in buffets must be presented in such a way as to eliminate that it can be touched by several people.
- The kitchen staff in boarding schools must maintain strict adherence to the guidelines established by the appropriate ministry. These include regulations regarding buffet service, kitchen, food preparation areas as well as proper cleaning and the training of the kitchen staff.

*Regulations for Kitchen Staff:*

- Uniforms are to be washed daily at 60° C minimally.
- Hand disinfectant is to be used regularly.

- Surfaces and buffet areas are to be regularly cleaned and disinfected.
- Tables for dining must also be regularly cleaned and disinfected.
- The kitchen staff must ensure that the prescribed safety distance of one meter between staff members is maintained. Appropriate floor markings are to be utilized to check and maintain such safety distancing.
- The number of staff members who can serve food at the same time in dining areas is to be specified. It is advisable to remove extra tables and chairs that are not required so that proper distancing can be observed.
- The kitchen and cleaning staff of the kitchen must be properly trained by the operator.

*Hygiene Measures During Meals for Boarding Students and Staff:*

- Group sizes at meals should be reduced appropriately by staggering schedules.
- Accumulation of persons at the buffet is to be avoided. All students and staff members are to respect these measures and act responsibly during dining.
- If students or staff members cough or sneeze during meals they are to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue or elbow.
- Students must wash their hands or disinfect them thoroughly before dining.

*Vending Machines:*

- The operator of vending machines must ensure that they are appropriately cleaned and disinfected regularly.

*General Cleaning and Disinfection Measures:*

- All staff members responsible for cleaning are to be informed and instructed appropriately about CoVid-19 protective measures. Corresponding specifications must also be required of external cleaning company staff.
- Cleaning plans and schedules are to be set with cleaning times and persons noted on such plans.
- Cleaning of facilities in which boarding students, educators and administrative staff regularly reside, must be carried out at least once a day.
- All trash containers must be emptied at least once a day.

## **Promoting Awareness**

- All boarding school educators, staff and administrators are to acquire sufficient knowledge concerning CoVid-19 safety measures and are to use these to expand their personal competencies. (e.g., application of hygiene measures, knowledge of at-risk persons, etc.). It is recommended that all boarding school personnel be required to attend a virtual team workshop before opening of the school's dormitories to ensure that all employees are equally aware of these requirements and procedures. The goal should be that all employees work together in a uniform manner.
- At every appropriate opportunity, all boarding school residents should be made aware that the collective use of objects from outside the living environment should be avoided as far as possible.

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