

# Safety Alert No. 88

## BAN ON KNIVES IN SCHOOLS

Tuesday, May 18, 2021

### To:

All Executive  
Deputy Secretaries, School Performance  
Executive Directors, Public Schools NSW  
Director Educational Leadership, Public Schools NSW  
Principals  
Health & Safety Directorate  
Legal Services Directorate

### BAN ON STUDENTS, STAFF AND VISITORS BRINGING KNIVES TO SCHOOLS

Following the recent serious incident at a metropolitan high school involving a knife carried for religious purposes, the Department is currently working with community representatives and government agencies to discuss how best to support students meet the needs of their faith while adhering to school safety policies.

While the Department conducts those discussions, the Department has decided to issue a temporary ban on students, staff and visitors carrying any form of knife to government schools. This temporary ban is to ensure the safety and well-being of students and staff at all of our school sites.

This ban covers all forms of knife including kirpans, which are a short, curved blade, worn (sometimes in miniature form) as one of the distinguishing signs of the Sikh faith.

### Background

The Department has a paramount duty to ensure the safety and well-being of students in attendance at its schools. This is a duty that the Department takes very seriously. Parents expect, when sending their children to school, that they will be safe.

The Department also has legal obligations under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 to eliminate or minimise risks to health and safety (so far as is reasonably practicable). The Department has an obligation to its employees who work at schools to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the health and safety of other persons is not put at risk from work carried out as part of the conduct of the business or undertaking.

In accordance with the Summary Offences Act 1988 (NSW) it is not illegal to have a knife at school for the preparation of food (which is relevant to some classes in school) or where possession is for genuine religious purposes. However, until the Department can ensure itself that knives can be safely carried at schools, they are banned from being brought to school.

When implementing this temporary ban principals are advised:

- To write to your school communities advising them of the ban and asking parents and carers to ensure that students do not bring knives, including those carried for religious purposes, to school. A [draft letter for parents](#) is provided which explains our duty of care to all students as well as our desire to respect all faiths in the community.

- DO NOT search students for knives.
- DO NOT remove knives carried for a religious purpose from students. Advise school staff not to remove these knives from students.
- Advise all staff that if they believe that a student is carrying a knife, the principal should be informed and the student should be asked to wait in the school office while their parents/carers are called. Parents/carers must be asked to attend the school immediately to take the knife away from school grounds. Knives may be securely stored in the school office for the day, if handed to the principal.
- Only call Police if the student with the knife is threatening violence. If this situation was to arise the normal incident notification and response procedures would apply. As noted above, it is not illegal to carry a knife for food preparation or religious purposes.
- If a student continues to bring a knife to school, even after they have been directly told not to, this should be reported as a notifiable incident to the Incident Report and Support Hotline and suspension considered under the Suspension and Expulsion of School Students – Procedures 2011.
- Maintain current practices in lessons requiring the use of knives. For example, in classes involving cooking or trades, each teacher should supply and supervise the use of the tools as they currently do.

We will communicate with all schools again, once we have discussed this issue further with community representatives and relevant government agencies.

#### Useful Links

- [No knives at school – parent factsheet](#)
- [No knives at school – student factsheet](#)
- [Suspension and Expulsion of School Students – Procedures 2011](#)
- [Legal Issues Bulletin 22 – Knives in Schools](#)

#### Further Information

In the first instance please contact your Director Educational Leadership for support.

If you would like support in engaging your culturally diverse communities please reach out to the Department's Multicultural Unit at [Multicultural.Programs@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:Multicultural.Programs@det.nsw.edu.au).

We remind schools that all incidents should be reported to the Incident Report and Support Hotline on 1800 811 523 in accordance with current policy and procedures.

Yours sincerely,

Executive Director, Health and Safety

18 May 2021

#### Our Contact details:

105 Phillip St, Parramatta, NSW 2150

GPO Box 35, Sydney, NSW 2001

Health and Safety Incident Report and Support Hotline: 1800 811 523