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Guidance

What parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges

Updated 27 September 2021

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This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-years-providers-schools-and-colleges-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/step-4-update-what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-years-providers-schools-and-colleges>

Main messages

As COVID-19 becomes a virus that we learn to live with, there is now an imperative to reduce the disruption to children and young people's education - particularly given that the direct risks to children are extremely low, every adult has been offered the opportunity for 2 doses of the vaccine, and all children aged 12 and over are now eligible for vaccination. However, as set out in the autumn and winter plan, the government will remain vigilant and take action where necessary to support and protect the NHS.

The main messages from this guidance are:

- nationally, education and childcare settings are open, and attendance is mandatory (for schools) and strongly encouraged (at childminders, nurseries and colleges)
- the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (<https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/key-topics/covid-19>) has made it clear that the overwhelming majority of children and young people still have no symptoms or very mild illness only
- continuing to take regular rapid tests will help you to identify infections early and reduce transmission
- there is no need for primary age pupils (those in year 6 and below) to test
- your nursery, school or college no longer trace close contacts - close contacts will be identified via NHS Test and Trace
- children and young people aged under 18 years 6 months who usually attend school, and have been identified as a close contact are no longer required to self-isolate
- your child no longer needs to remain in a consistent group ('bubble')
- the government has removed the requirement to wear face coverings in law but expects and recommends that they are worn in enclosed and crowded spaces where you may come into contact with people you don't normally meet
- all children aged 12 and over are now eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination
- changes to advice for clinically extremely vulnerable children and young people

Note: The use of the term 'college' relates to all further education providers throughout this content.

Attendance and remote education

Attendance is mandatory for all pupils of compulsory school age. This means it's your legal duty as a parent to send your child to school regularly if they are registered at one.

If you have concerns about your child attending, you should discuss these with your school or college.

Clinical studies have shown that children and young people, including those previously considered as clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV), are at very low risk of serious illness if they catch the virus. The UK Clinical Review Panel has recommended that all children and young people under the age of 18 should no longer be considered CEV and should be removed from the shielded patient list. The Chief Executive of the UK Health Security Agency and head of NHS Test and Trace has written to parents of these children to inform them.

Children and young people previously considered as CEV should follow the same COVID-19 guidance as the rest of the population. However, if a child or young person has been advised to isolate or reduce their social contact by their specialist, due to the nature of their medical condition or treatment rather than because of the pandemic, they should continue to follow the advice of their specialist.

Remote education if your child cannot attend school or college

Schools

All state-funded schools **must** provide remote education for school-aged children who are unable to attend school due to following government guidance or law relating to COVID-19 (for example if they need to self-isolate, or if they have tested positive but are well enough to learn from home).

Independent schools with pupils whose education is provided wholly through public funds also need to provide remote education in these circumstances.

Schools should provide remote education equivalent in length to the core teaching your child would usually get in school.

You can find out about your school's remote education offer on their website or by contacting your child's school directly.

Guidance is available to help you support your child while they are learning from home (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/supporting-your-childrens-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>).

You should talk to your child's teacher or headteacher if you have concerns about the amount or quality of the remote education they are receiving. If you have exhausted the school's complaints process and you still have concerns, you can raise them with Ofsted. Ofsted will consider the complaint and act where appropriate.

Schools should work collaboratively with you to put in place reasonable adjustments so that pupils with **SEND** can successfully access remote education.

Colleges

FE providers are expected to provide remote education for students aged 16 to 19 who cannot attend on-site for COVID-related reasons (for example - because they need to self-isolate, **or if they have tested positive but are well enough to learn from home**).

Colleges will use their best endeavours to deliver as much of students' planned hours as possible, recognising this may not be possible if your child's course involves practical teaching and training which involves:

- specialist equipment and supervision
- work experience and placements

You can find out more about your college's remote education offer on their website.

Help to get online

Contact your child's school or college if your child:

- does not have access to a device
- needs support with internet access for remote education

Schools and colleges have been allocated a number of devices and are distributing these to the children who need them most.

Online safety

Talk to your child about staying safe online and encourage them to talk to you if they come across something worrying.

Our guidance for parents and carers to keep children safe online (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-keeping-children-safe-online/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-parents-and-carers-to-keep-children-safe-online>) explains how to talk about online safety issues.

The guidance about staying safe online (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-staying-safe-online>) includes information on setting up age appropriate controls, on-line fraud, privacy settings, and screen time recommendations.

Helping make nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges as safe as possible

Nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges have their own health and safety risk assessments and keep them under review.

As part of this, there are certain control measures that we have asked nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges to continue to maintain to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in their setting. You can ask your nursery, childminder, school or college for more information.

Regional and local safety measures

All nurseries, schools and colleges will have outbreak management plans in place outlining how they would operate if the number of positive cases substantially increases in your nursery, school, or college, or in the local area. Central government may also offer local areas of particular concern an enhanced response package to help limit increases in transmission.

The contingency framework (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-local-restrictions-in-education-and-childcare-settings/contingency-framework-education-and-childcare-settings>) provides more information on the principles of managing local outbreaks of COVID-19 in education and childcare settings. Local authorities, directors of public health and health protection teams may recommend measures described in the contingency framework in individual education and childcare settings – or a small cluster of settings – as part of their outbreak management responsibilities.

Mixing ('bubbles')

We no longer recommend that it is necessary to keep children in consistent groups ('bubbles') or to keep groups apart as much as possible to manage COVID-19.

Assemblies and larger group activities can resume.

Any decision to recommend the reintroduction of 'bubbles' would not be taken lightly and would need to take account of the detrimental impact they can have on the delivery of education.

Face coverings

The government has removed the requirement to wear face coverings in law. Face coverings should be worn in crowded and enclosed spaces where you may come into contact with people you don't normally meet. This includes public transport and dedicated transport to school or college.

If the number of positive cases substantially increases in your nursery, school, or college, or if your nursery, school, or college is in an enhanced response area, you might be advised that face coverings should temporarily be worn in communal areas or classrooms (by pupils, staff and visitors, unless exempt).

Some FE courses, such as vocational training, healthcare-related courses and the performing arts may pose particular risks of aerosol, droplet and surface transmission and may therefore implement face coverings, ventilation or cleaning in accordance with guidance issued for the relevant professional working arrangements (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>).

Your child must comply with guidance on working safely (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>) if they work in commercial training environments such as:

- hairdressing, barbering and beauty salons
- sports and fitness facilities
- restaurants and external catering

Tracing close contacts and isolation

Education settings are no longer undertaking contact tracing. Close contacts will now be identified via NHS Test and Trace. This is likely to be a small number of individuals who would be most at risk of contracting COVID-19 due to the nature of the close contact.

Individuals are not required to self-isolate if they live in the same household as someone with COVID-19, or are a close contact of someone with COVID-19, and any of the following apply:

- they are fully vaccinated
- they are below the age of 18 years and 6 months
- they have taken part in or are currently part of an approved COVID-19 vaccine trial
- they are not able to get vaccinated for medical reasons

NHS Test and Trace will inform affected individuals, children or their parents or carers that they have been in close contact with a positive case, and advise them to take a PCR test. We would encourage all individuals to take a PCR test if advised to do so.

Children and young people aged under 18 years 6 months who usually attend school who have been identified as a close contact should continue to attend school as normal. They do not need to wear a face covering within the school, but it is expected and recommended that these are worn when travelling on public or dedicated transport. Further information is available in the stay at home: guidance for households (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>).

18-year-olds will be treated in the same way as children until 6 months after their 18th birthday, to allow them the opportunity to get fully vaccinated. At which point, they will be subject to the same rules as adults and so if they choose not to get vaccinated, they will need to self-isolate if identified as a close contact.

If there is a substantial increase in the number of positive cases in your nursery, school, or college, or if your nursery, school, or college is in an enhanced response area, you might be advised that some control measures need to be temporarily reintroduced.

Vaccinations

All children aged 12 and over are now eligible for Covid-19 vaccination. Those aged 12-17 are eligible for a first dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, although 12-17 year olds with certain medical conditions that make them more at risk of serious illness, or who are living with someone who is immunosuppressed are eligible for 2 doses. These children will be contacted by a local NHS service such as their GP surgery to arrange their appointments.

All other 12-15 year olds will be offered the vaccine via the school-based programme.

Young people aged 16-17 will be invited to a local NHS service such as a GP surgery or can access the vaccine via some walk-in COVID-19 vaccination sites.

Find out more about the in-school COVID-19 vaccination programme for children and young people (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-resources-for-schools/covid-19-vaccination-programme-for-young-people-guidance-for-parents>).

Symptoms and testing

Testing remains important in reducing the risk of transmission of infection within nurseries, schools and colleges. Continuing to take regular rapid tests will help you to identify infections early and reduce transmission.

Education and childcare staff, secondary school pupils and college students should continue to test twice weekly at home, with lateral flow device (LFD) test kits, 3 to 4 days apart. Testing remains voluntary but is strongly encouraged.

There is no need for primary age pupils (those in Year 6 and below) to test.

We recognise that there will be a wide range of challenges in delivering effective testing to children with SEND. We have developed specific guidance for testing in specialist settings (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-full-opening-special-schools-and-other-specialist-settings/mass-asymptomatic-testing-in-specialist-settings>) to fully consider their needs and the flexibilities which may be required.

Positive rapid lateral flow test results

Anyone with a positive test result will need to:

- self-isolate in line with the stay at home guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>) (if they test positive at school, you should arrange for them to be collected)
- book a free further test (<https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>) (a lab-based polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test) to confirm the result, whether the test was done at home, school or college. This still applies even if they have received one or more doses of COVID-19 vaccine

Whilst awaiting the PCR result, the individual should continue to self-isolate.

If the PCR test is taken within the 2 days following the positive LFD result, and is negative, it overrides the self-test LFD test and your child can return to nursery, childminders, school or college, as long as they don't have COVID-19 symptoms. However, you and your household must continue to self-isolate if:

- this PCR test result is positive
- you choose not to take a follow-up PCR test
- your follow-up PCR test was taken more than 2 days after the positive LFD test result

If you have any questions about the asymptomatic testing programme, speak to your school or college.

If you suspect your child has coronavirus or has a positive test

Do not send your child to their nursery, childminder, school, college or to an entry test for a selective school if:

- they are showing one or more coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/>)
- they have had a positive test result
- there are other reasons requiring them to stay at home, for example, they are required to quarantine (<https://www.gov.uk/uk-border-control/self-isolating-when-you-arrive>), or they are awaiting their PCR result after a positive lateral flow test

You should follow public health advice on when to self-isolate and what to do

(<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-and-treatment/when-to-self-isolate-and-what-to-do/>).

If you insist on your child attending nursery, school, or college when they have symptoms, they can take the decision to refuse your child if, in their reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect other pupils and staff from possible infection with COVID-19. Their decision would need to be carefully considered in light of all the circumstances and current public health advice.

Financial support to care for a child who is self-isolating

You may be eligible for a one-off Test and Trace Support Payment of £500 from your local authority if your child has been advised to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace.

Further information on claiming financial support under the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/test-and-trace-support-payment-scheme-claiming-financial-support/claiming-financial-support-under-the-test-and-trace-support-payment-scheme>) is available.

Assessments, awards and results

Assessments in primary schools

We are planning for a full programme of primary assessments to take place in the 2021 to 2022 academic year. This will include the introduction of the statutory Reception Baseline Assessment and Multiplication Tables Check.

Assessments in secondary schools and colleges

It is the government's intention that GCSE, A level and other exams will go ahead in summer 2022. Exams and assessments for vocational and technical qualifications will take place, in line with the latest guidelines, throughout the next academic year.

Education recovery

There is lots of support available to help your child catch up on any lost learning due to the pandemic, or boost their wellbeing.

Visit the education catch up website (<https://educationcatchup.campaign.gov.uk/>) to find out more about what support is on offer and who is eligible. You can also speak to your child's school or college.

Elective home education

If you are considering home education due to concerns around safety, you can discuss your concerns with your school, to see what safety measures have been put in place. If you would like to send your child back to school again, find out how to apply for a school place (<https://www.gov.uk/schools-admissions>).

Schools are not required to provide any support to parents who have withdrawn their child for elective home education. Local authorities can provide support and guidance to families who elect to home educate but this is discretionary.

For further information, refer to the guidance on elective home education (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education>).

Holidays and travel abroad

You should plan your holidays within school and college holidays as usual. Avoid seeking permission to take your children out of school or college during term time.

You should refer to the guidance on international travel (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/red-amber-and-green-list-rules-for-entering-england#new-rules>) before booking and travelling.

From 4am Monday 4 October 2021, the rules for international travel to England will change. More information is available in the guidance on the rules for travel to England from abroad (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/red-amber-and-green-list-rules-for-entering-england#new-rules>).

Keep in mind that you and your children may need to quarantine when you return from a trip overseas. Any quarantine should also fall within the school or college holidays.

Where your child is abroad and facing challenges to return, local authorities and schools should continue to work with you to understand your circumstances and your plans to return. They should encourage your child to return where they are able and it is safe. Your child can only lawfully be deleted from their school's admission register on the grounds prescribed in regulation 8 of the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 as amended (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2006/1751/regulation/8/made>).

Where able, schools should provide remote education for pupils facing challenges to return from abroad due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, for the period they are abroad.

All pupils travelling to England must adhere to travel legislation, details of which are set out in government travel advice (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/red-amber-and-green-list-rules-for-entering-england>). You should plan for any required quarantine to avoid any impact on your child's education.

You will need to respond to the latest rules on international travel, even if you have already left the UK, while also minimising the impact on your child's education. You can sign up for an email alert (<https://www.gov.uk/email-signup?topic=/coronavirus-taxon/entering-england>) to be notified when government travel guidance is updated.

Boarding and residential schools and colleges

You will need to confirm if you or your child can travel to the UK under the current rules if they need to travel from abroad to attend a boarding school. Your school or college will explain the rules to you.

Your child should not travel if the school has not confirmed that it has arrangements in place that allow for transport, quarantine accommodation and testing that meet the requirements in the guidance for boarding schools (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/quarantine-arrangements-for-boarding-school-students-from-red-list-countries>). Everyone travelling to England must follow the guidance set out in government travel advice (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/red-amber-and-green-list-rules-for-entering-england>).

All children and young people travelling to England should also follow the appropriate quarantine and testing guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-quarantine-when-you-arrive-in-england#rules-for-children-and-young-people>), based on their age and country of residency. Additional guidance is provided on the quarantine arrangements for boarding school pupils travelling to attend a boarding school in England (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/quarantine-arrangements-for-boarding-school-students-from-red-list-countries>).

School and college food

Schools and colleges, and some nurseries, will continue to provide free meals for eligible students, including those who are at home during term time due to COVID-19.

The guidance on providing school meals during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools>) outlines how and when children eligible for benefits-related free school meals should be supported at home.

Mental health and wellbeing

Some children and young people may be experiencing feelings of anxiety, stress or low mood as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Support for children and parents

Encourage your child to talk to you or their teacher if they are feeling anxious or stressed.

Online resources to help you support your child with mental health and wellbeing, include:

- MindEd (<https://www.minded.org.uk/>) - a free educational resource on children and young people's mental health
- Every Mind Matters (<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>) - an online tool and email journey to support everyone in taking action to look after their mental health and wellbeing
- Bereavement UK (<https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>) and the Childhood Bereavement Network (<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/covid-19.aspx>) - information and resources to support bereaved pupils, schools and staff
- the DfE blog (<https://dfemedia.blog.gov.uk/>) - includes mental health resources (<https://dfemedia.blog.gov.uk/2021/02/01/mental-health-resources-for-children-parents-carers-and-school-staff/>) for children, parents, carers and school staff

Advice and guidance for parents and professionals on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing>) includes actions you can take to support your child and emphasises the importance of taking 60 minutes of daily physical activity. Youth Sport Trust and Sport England (<https://www.sportengland.org/>) have advice and support on helping children and young people stay physically active.

NHS mental health services remain open and have digital tools to connect with people and provide ongoing support. Please use your local children and young people's mental health service when needed.

Support for children and young people

Get free, confidential support at any time by:

- texting SHOUT to 85258
- calling Childline on 0800 1111
- calling the Mix on 0808 808 4994

Find help online through:

- Young Minds (<https://youngminds.org.uk/about-us/reports/coronavirus-impact-on-young-people-with-mental-health-needs/>) - information on COVID-19 and mental health
- Think Ninja (<https://www.healios.org.uk/services/thinkninja1>) - a free app for 10 to 18 year olds to help build resilience and stay well
- Every Mind Matters (<https://campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/schools/topics/rise-above/overview>) - building resilience and supporting good mental health in young people aged 10 to 16

E-learning which can help parents and carers (<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/psychological-first-aid-for-children-and-young-people>) to support their children and young people in emergency or crisis situations.

Barnardo's See, Hear, Respond service (<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/c19>), provides support to children, young people and their families who are not currently seeing a social worker or other agency, and who are struggling to cope with the emotional impacts of COVID-19. Use the See, Hear, Respond self-referral webpage or Freephone 0800 151 7015.

Report any safeguarding concerns you have about any child. Contact the NSPCC helpline (<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/reporting-abuse/dedicated-helplines/>).

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