

Covid-19 – Staying Safe in School

Introduction

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered coronavirus causes COVID-19.

Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness.

Children are less often reported as cases when compared with adults, and the illness they experience is usually mild. From data reported to World Health Organisation (WHO), children and adolescents up to 18 years of age represent 1 - 3% of reported infections, even though this age group makes up 29% of the global population.

While children may be less affected, they may also have a greater number of contacts in school and community settings. Further studies are underway to assess the risk of infection in children and to better understand transmission in this age group.

At this time, there are no specific vaccines or treatments for COVID-19. However, there are many ongoing clinical trials evaluating potential treatments. The World Health Organisation will continue to provide updated information as soon as clinical findings become available.

What does Keeping Children Safe in Education 2020 say about Covid-19?

The way schools and colleges are operating in response to coronavirus continues to be different to business as usual. However, as more children return, a number of important safeguarding principles remain the same:

- the best interests of children must always continue to come first
- if anyone in a school or college has a safeguarding concern about any child they should continue to act and act immediately
- a Designated Safeguarding Lead or deputy should be available
- it is essential that unsuitable people are not allowed to enter the children’s workforce and/or gain access to children
- children should continue to be protected when they are online

Creating a space where children feel safe to learn and adults are safe to work

When schools return to full capacity in September 2020, this will be the number one priority and responsibility for all staff. Each school has a risk assessment focused on reopening and the day to day operation. Staff (including union representatives) should be consulted on the risk assessment, but it must be understood that this is a fluid and evolving document, that must react to changes in both national and local circumstances.

There are a number of ways in which schools and other organisations can help to reduce the spread of Covid-19. It is important to bear in mind that all of the preventative measures are helpful, and where it is difficult to enforce one strategy (for example, social distancing) then other measures should be stepped up to help mitigate the spread of the virus. There cannot be a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach where the system of controls describes every scenario. School leaders are best placed to understand the needs of their schools and communities and should explain these to staff and pupils.

Control measures

When implemented, the control measures create an inherently safer system, where the risk of transmission of infection is substantially reduced.

This is the set of actions schools **must** take. They are grouped into ‘prevention’ and ‘response to any infection’ and are outlined in more detail in the DFE guidance

Prevention:

- 1) **minimise contact with individuals who are unwell by ensuring that those who have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms, or who have someone in their household who does, do not attend school**
- 2) clean hands thoroughly, more often than usual
- 3) ensure good respiratory hygiene by promoting the ‘catch it, bin it, kill it’ approach
- 4) introduce enhanced cleaning, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces often, using standard products such as detergents and bleach
- 5) minimise contact between individuals and maintain social distancing wherever possible
- 6) where necessary, wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

Numbers 1 to 4 must be in place in all schools, all the time.

Number 5 must be properly considered and schools must put in place measures that suit their particular circumstances.

Number 6 applies in specific circumstances.

Response to any infection

- 7) engage with the NHS Test and Trace process
- 8) manage confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) amongst the school community
- 9) contain any outbreak by following local health protection team advice

Numbers 7 to 9 must be followed in every case where they are relevant.

Test and Trace

The [Test and Trace service](#) will help to manage the risk of the virus re-emerging as restrictions on everyday life are eased. Leaders will play their part by making schools COVID-secure and encourage staff to follow any notifications to self-isolate.

Social distancing

Ideally adults should maintain 2 metres distance from each other and pupils. In particular, they should avoid close face to face contact and minimise time spent within 1 metre of anyone.

It will not be possible when working with many pupils who have complex needs or who need close contact care to maintain social distancing. These pupils’ educational and care support should be provided as normal with protective measures.

For younger children who cannot distance, then keeping the bubble to a class size is recommended. The adults teaching Reception and Early Years children do not need to socially distance from the children; safe distancing is advised.

Whilst the guidance recommends that children should be seated at forward facing desks, sat side by side, with distancing, exceptions exist to allow a different approach for Early Years and Reception.

Schools should avoid large gatherings such as assemblies or collective worship with more than one group. When timetabling, groups should be kept apart and movement around the school site kept to a minimum. While passing briefly in the corridor or playground is low risk, schools should avoid creating busy corridors, entrances and exits. Schools should also consider staggered break times and lunch times (and time for cleaning surfaces in the dining hall between groups).

Groups or bubbles

From September, a “bubble” can be increased to up to a full class or year group size, though the smaller the group, the lower the risk of cross-infection.

Schools **must** do everything possible to minimise contacts and mixing while delivering a broad and balanced curriculum.

The principles for bubbles/groups are:

- grouping the same children together
- avoiding contact between groups
- arranging classrooms with forward facing desks
- staff maintaining distance from pupils and other staff as much as possible, and particularly face to face contact
- minimizing contacts and mixing between people reduces transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). This is important in all contexts, and schools **must** consider how to implement this.

Maintaining distinct bubbles/groups which do not mix will make it easier to isolate/lockdown in the event of a positive case.

Hygiene and cleaning

Like the common cold, coronavirus infection usually occurs through close contact with a person with Covid-19 via cough and sneezes or hand contact. The virus spreads by respiratory droplets released when someone with the virus coughs, sneezes or talks. These droplets can be inhaled or land in the mouth or nose of a person nearby. It can also spread if a person touches a surface with the virus on it and then touches his or her mouth, nose or eyes, although this isn't considered to be a main way it spreads.

Hand and respiratory hygiene are essential:

- wash your hands with soap and water often – do this for at least 20 seconds
- use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- wash your hands as soon as you get home
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- put used tissues in the bin immediately and wash your hands afterwards

In general, clean surfaces that children and adults are touching, such as toys, books, desks, chairs, doors, sinks, toilets, light switches, bannisters, more regularly than normal.

Resources and equipment

Equipment and resources are integral to education in schools. During the summer term, their use was minimised, many were moved out of classrooms, and there was significant extra cleaning. That position has now changed for the autumn term (DfE guidance), because prevalence of coronavirus (COVID-19) has decreased and because they are so important for the delivery of education. For individual and very frequently used equipment, such as pencils and pens, it is recommended that staff and pupils have their own items that are not shared. Classroom based resources, such as books and games, can be used and shared within the bubble; these should be cleaned regularly, along with all frequently touched surfaces. Resources that are shared between classes or bubbles, such as sports, art and science equipment should be cleaned frequently and meticulously and always between bubbles, or rotated to allow them to be left unused and out of reach for a period of 48 hours (72 hours for plastics) between use by different bubbles.

Outdoor playground equipment should be more frequently cleaned. This would also apply to resources used inside and outside by wraparound care providers.

It is still recommended that pupils limit the amount of equipment they bring into school each day, to essentials such as lunch boxes, hats, coats, books, stationery and mobile phones. Bags are allowed.

Pupils and teachers can take books and other shared resources home, although unnecessary sharing should be avoided, especially where this does not contribute to pupil education and development. Similar rules on hand cleaning, cleaning of the resources and rotation should apply to these resources.

Avoid using colleagues' phones or other work tools and equipment. If it is necessary, always clean the equipment before and afterwards.

Physical activity in schools

Schools have the flexibility to decide how physical education, sport and physical activity will be provided whilst following the measures in their system of controls. Pupils should be kept in consistent groups, sports equipment thoroughly cleaned between each use by different individual groups, and contact sports avoided.

Outdoor sports should be prioritised where possible, and large indoor spaces used where it is not, maximising distancing between pupils and paying scrupulous attention to cleaning and hygiene. This is particularly important in a sports setting because of the way in which people breathe during exercise.

Music

Schools should note that there may be an additional risk of infection in environments where you or others are singing, chanting, playing wind or brass instruments or shouting. This applies even if individuals are at a distance. Schools should consider how to reduce the risk, particularly when pupils are playing instruments or singing in small groups such as in music lessons by, for example, physical distancing and playing outside wherever possible, limiting group sizes to no more than 15, positioning pupils back-to-back or side-to-side, avoiding sharing of instruments, and ensuring good ventilation. Singing, wind and brass playing should not take place in larger groups such as school choirs and ensembles, or school assemblies.

Transport

Pupils who travel to schools on dedicated school services do not mix with the general public on those journeys and tend to be consistent. This means that the advice for passengers on public transport to adopt a social distance of two metres from people outside their household or support bubble, or a 'one metre plus' approach where this is not possible, will not apply from the autumn term on dedicated transport.

It is important to consider or check:

- how pupils could be grouped together on transport, where possible this should reflect the bubbles that are adopted within school eg year groups/classes sitting together in a dedicated area of the bus
- use of hand sanitizer upon boarding and/or disembarking
- additional cleaning of vehicles will be carried out by the provider
- organised and supervised queuing and boarding, where possible
- distancing within vehicles when parked, wherever possible

Schools should have regular conversations with transport providers to ensure that safe practices are being monitored and observed.

Staff meetings

Schools should take a pragmatic view, bearing in mind the general advice that interactions between adults in school (between bubbles) should be kept to a minimum.

Where meetings are necessary, these should be in smallest possible groups, ensuring social distancing of 2 metres is maintained between adults and the duration of any such gatherings should be as short as possible. Many schools will continue to hold online staff meetings.

What to do if there is a suspected or confirmed case – updated guidance from DfE

Suspected case

If a pupil or adult is ill and they display [symptoms](#) similar to Covid-19

Schools must:

- wear PPE when dealing with the pupil/staff
- isolate the pupil/staff – a dedicated space that you have identified in your risk assessment
- contact home for staff/ pupil to be collected. Staff and pupils must not come into the school if they have symptoms, and must be sent home to self-isolate if they develop them in school
- school leaders contacts the local [Health Protection team](#) who carry out a rapid risk assessment
- provide a list of those who have been in close contact with the individual – pupils in bubble and staff who have been in contact with the bubble
- the Health Protection team will guide and advise the school of the next steps to take

By the autumn term, all schools will be provided with a small number of home testing kits that they can give directly to parents/carers collecting a child who has developed symptoms at school, or staff who have developed symptoms at school. Advice will be provided alongside these kits.

Test returns as negative: If an individual pupil/member of staff

- inform the school immediately
- if the test is negative and if pupil/staff member feels well and no longer have symptoms similar to coronavirus (COVID-19) then they can stop self-isolating.
- they could still have another virus, such as a cold or flu – in which case it is still best to avoid contact with other people until they are better.
- other members of their household can stop self-isolating
- schools should not request evidence of negative test results or other medical evidence before admitting children or welcoming them back after a period of self-isolation

Test returns as positive – If an individual pupil/member of staff

- inform their school immediately
- individual must isolate for at least 7 days from the onset of their symptoms

They can return to school only if they do not have symptoms other than cough or loss of sense of smell/taste. These symptoms can last for several weeks after the infection has gone

The 7-day period starts from the day when they first became ill. If they still have a high temperature, they should keep self-isolating until their temperature returns to normal.

Their household should self-isolate for the full 14 days from when the symptomatic person first had symptoms, following [‘stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection’](#)

If an individual tests positive – what is the impact on the school?

If school is notified that the test was positive:

- School leaders contact **the local [Health Protection team](#)** who carry out a rapid risk assessment
- Provide the list of those who have been in close contact with the individual – pupils in bubble and staff who have been in contact with the bubble
- **The Health Protection team will guide and advise the school in the next steps to take. They help with making the decision on what needs to happen next**
- A template letter will be provided to schools, on the advice of the **Health Protection Team**, to send to parents and staff if needed. Schools must not share the names or details of people with coronavirus (COVID-19) unless essential to protect others

In the event of a local outbreak

If a local area sees a spike in infection rates that is resulting in localised community spread, appropriate authorities will decide which measures to implement to help contain the spread. The DfE will be involved in decisions at a local and national level affecting a geographical area, and will support appropriate authorities and individual settings to follow the health advice.

In the event of a local outbreak, the PHE health protection team or local authority may advise a school or number of schools to close temporarily to help control transmission. Schools will also need a contingency plan for this eventuality. This may involve a return to remaining open only for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers, and providing remote education for all other pupils.

Additional guidance and further reading

- **Your school’s risk assessment and Behaviour Policy**
- **Corona Virus (Covid-19): safeguarding in schools, colleges and other providers**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers/coronavirus-covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers>
- **Essex Schools Infolink – Covid-19**
<https://schools.essex.gov.uk/admin/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx>
- **NSPCC Corona Virus support**
<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/coronavirus-advice-support-children-families-parents/>
- **Keeping children safe in education –statutory guidance for schools and colleges (September 2020)**
- **Essex Safeguarding Children Board – Corona Virus advice**
<https://www.escb.co.uk/2265>
- **World Health Organisation (WHO) advice for preparing the workplace**
<https://essexprimaryheads.co.uk/files/who-advice-for-preparing-the-workplace-covid-19.pdf>
- **EPHA Coronacast with Dr Matt Butler**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXsWp4Qib3k>