

Telford & Wrekin Health Protection Hub

COVID-19 in Schools - September 2021 onwards

This document, initially sent out 19th August 2021 has been updated to include:

- information about what schools should do when they feel they are reaching the threshold for activating an Outbreak Management Plan and
- additional information to clarify what you should do where operational issues are caused by asking staff who are identified as a close contact and have no symptoms to stay at home whilst they await their PCR test.

Please see the highlighted sections for this additional guidance.

Schools' Relationship with the Hub

- The HPH will continue to both monitor COVID-19 cases and provide help, support and guidance to schools dealing with cases/outbreaks of COVID-19.
- It is clear from the guidance that the emphasis is now on continuity of education and the importance of children attending school, and advice provided by the Hub will reflect the content and spirit of that guidance, which can be found here:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/schools-covid-19-operational-guidance>
- Schools are requested to notify the Hub of any staff or pupil positive PCR cases using the online notification form linked to here:
https://www.telford.gov.uk/info/20692/coronavirus_covid-19/4040/i_want_to_report_suspected_or_confirmed_cases
- Schools should contact the Hub if they feel that they are reaching the threshold for the activation of the Outbreak Management Plan and want further advice. For most education and childcare settings delete which ever doesn't apply, whichever of these thresholds is reached first:
 - 5 children, pupils, students or staff, who are likely to have mixed closely, test positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period;
 - or • 10% of children, pupils, students or staff who are likely to have mixed closely test positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period
- For special schools, residential settings, and settings that operate with 20 or fewer children, pupils, students and staff at any one time: Delete whichever doesn't apply
 - 2 children, pupils, students and staff, who are likely to have mixed closely, test positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period
- Two officer's from the Hub have be assigned to be the main point of contact for each school – the list of schools and lead officers with telephone numbers will be distributed prior to the start of term.
- The Hub can be also contacted for advice by email: HealthProtectionHub@telford.gov.uk (this email is monitored over the weekends) or by 'phone 81800 (the 'phone line is covered 8am to 5pm Mon-Fri)
- We will not contact you to discuss the case unless it is considered necessary, which is most likely if it's part of an outbreak rather than a single case, but we will use the information you provide to monitor case numbers in the Borough. Schools can however call the HPH to discuss any case or cases.
- As a school, you are not expected to carry-out contact tracing; this will be done by national Test & Trace.
- You **must** let the Hub know if any staff or pupils are hospitalised through COVID-19.
- You do **not** need to notify PHE or the DfE of cases if you are working with the Hub.

Mixing and Bubbles

It is no longer considered necessary to keep children in consistent groups ('bubbles'). This means that bubbles will not need to be used in schools from the autumn term. As well as enabling flexibility in curriculum delivery, this means that assemblies can resume, and you no longer need to make alternative arrangements to avoid mixing at lunch.

Self-isolation

Positive cases will self-isolate for 10 days as is currently the case. Close or direct contacts identified by national Test & Trace will also need to self-isolate, other than:

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

The Public Health advice we would give to schools in managing close contacts within the school environment is as follows:

Advice for Staff

- Inform the Head if you are contacted by NHS Test & Trace and advised you are a close contact of someone who has tested positive for Covid.
 - You will be advised to take a PCR test ASAP as per Public Health Guidance.
 - You will be asked to stay away from work or work from home where possible while you await the PCR test results.* If the results come back positive you will need to self-isolate for 10 days from the date of your test.
 - If your result is negative you will still need to take a lateral flow test prior to coming in to a school each day for the 10 days you would have been due to self-isolate.
 - As far as is reasonably practicable please continue to practice social distancing, and wear a mask with Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) individuals when you come in to work.
- We realise that asking staff to stay away from work or to work from home where possible, whilst they await a PCR test may cause some operational issues for schools and settings. Should that be the case we would ask Heads to contact the HPH and an individual risk assessment can be carried out for that staff member with the aim of keeping them in the setting.**

Advice for Pupils

Pupils who are identified as close contacts will be contacted by national test and trace. They will be advised to take a PCR. The public health advice for pupils is as follows:

- Parents should be asked to inform the school as soon as possible that the pupil has been identified as close contact. Pupils should be allowed to attend school if they do not have any symptoms.
- Secondary schools should ask the pupil to take LFT's at home on every day that they are in school.
- Pupils that travel to school on school transport or on public transport should be asked to wear a face covering on these journeys.

Asymptomatic LFD Testing

Testing remains important in reducing the risk of transmission of infection within schools.

As pupils will potentially mix with lots of other people during the summer holidays, all secondary school pupils should receive 2 on-site lateral flow device tests, 3 to 5 days apart, on their return in the autumn term.

Settings may commence testing from 3 working days before the start of term and can stagger return of pupils across the first week to manage this. Pupils should then continue to test twice weekly at home until the end of September, when this will be reviewed.

Staff should undertake twice weekly home tests whenever they are on site until the end of September, when this will also be reviewed.

Secondary schools should also retain a small asymptomatic testing site (ATS) on-site until further notice so they can offer testing to pupils who are unable to test themselves at home.

Primary age pupils (those in year 6 and below) will be offered the 2 tests at an ATS at the beginning of the autumn term when they start at their secondary school as a new year 7. Schools may choose, however, to start testing year 6 pupils earlier, including in summer schools, depending on their local circumstances.

Staff and pupils with a positive LFD test result should self-isolate in line with the [stay at home guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection](#). They will also need to [get a free PCR test to check if they have COVID-19](#).

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

If the PCR test is taken within 2 days of the positive lateral flow test, and is negative, it overrides the self-test LFD test and the pupil can return to school, as long as the individual doesn't have COVID-19 symptoms.

Additional information on [PCR test kits for schools and further education providers](#) is available.

Face Coverings

Face coverings are no longer advised for pupils, staff and visitors either in classrooms or in communal areas. 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 people may come into contact with people they don't normally meet. This includes public transport and dedicated transport to school or college. Face coverings may also be required as a response to an outbreak situation.

CEV Staff/pupils

All clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) children and young people should attend their education setting unless they are one of the very small number of children and young people under paediatric or other specialist care who have been advised by their clinician or other specialist not to attend.

Further information is available in the guidance on [supporting pupils at school with medical conditions](#).

Clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) people are advised, as a minimum, to follow the same guidance as everyone else. It is important that everyone adheres to this guidance, but CEV people may wish to think particularly carefully about the additional precautions they can continue to take. Further information can be found in the [guidance on protecting people who are CEV from COVID-19](#).

Social distancing measures have now ended in the workplace and it is no longer necessary for the government to instruct people to work from home. Employers should be able to explain the measures they have in place to keep CEV staff safe at work. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has published guidance on [protecting vulnerable workers](#), including advice for employers and employees on [how to talk about reducing risks in the workplace](#).

Outbreaks/ Increase in Transmission

You are required to have outbreak management plans outlining how you would operate if there were an outbreak in your school or local area. Templates for this have been developed to assist you and will be distributed separately. More detailed information can be found in the Contingency Framework found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1011704/20210817_Contingency_Framework_FINAL.pdf

Given the detrimental impact that restrictions on education can have on children and young people, any measures in schools should only ever be considered as a last resort, kept to the minimum number of schools or groups possible, and for the shortest amount of time possible. The triggers for implementing outbreak control measures are whichever of these thresholds is reached first (noting these only apply after the initial asymptomatic testing on return after summer is complete):

- 5 children, pupils, students or staff, who are likely to have mixed closely, test positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period; or
- 10% of children, pupils, students or staff who are likely to have mixed closely test positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period

For special schools, residential settings, and settings that operate with 20 or fewer children, pupils, students and staff at any one time:

- 2 children, pupils, students and staff, who are likely to have mixed closely, test positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period

The Annex to the Contingency Framework gives examples of 'likely to have mixed closely'. These are as follows:

For early years, this could include:

- A childminder minding children, including their own
- Childminders working together on the same site
- A nursery class
- A friendship group who often play together
- Staff and children taking part in the same activity session together

For schools, this could include:

- A form group or subject class
- A friendship group mixing at break times
- A sports team
- A group in an after-school activity

For boarding schools, this could include:

- Staff and children taking part in the same class or activity session together
- Children who share the same common space in a boarding house
- Children who have slept in the same room or dormitory together

For FE, this could include:

- Students and teachers on practical courses that require close hands-on teaching, such as hairdressing and barbering
- Students who have played on sports teams together
- Students and teachers who have mixed in the same classroom

For wraparound childcare or out-of-school settings, this could include:

- A private tutor or coach offering one-to-one tuition to a child, or to multiple children at the same time
- Staff and children taking part in the same class or activity session together
- Children who have slept in the same room or dormitory together

Although we will be monitoring cases, we would ask that if you are aware of the triggers being met you proactively contact the Hub for advice.

There is a hierarchy of controls to implement in these situations, designed to prioritise keeping children in education while balancing the need to control transmission of the virus. Broadly speaking these are:

- Review and reinforce the testing, hygiene and ventilation measures you already have in place. You should also consider whether any activities could take place outdoors (including exercise, assemblies or classes), ways to improve ventilation indoors (where this would not significantly impact thermal comfort) and one-off enhanced cleaning focussing on touch points and any shared equipment.
- Strengthened communications to encourage pupils / students to undertake twice weekly rapid asymptomatic home testing and reporting.
- Temporarily reinstating face coverings for pupils/students, staff and visitors in indoor and/or communal spaces in secondary schools, FE and HE settings, and for staff in primary, early years, out-of-school, and specialist settings. This should be for two weeks in the first instance, pending regular review.
- Reinstating on-site rapid LFD testing in secondary schools, colleges and universities for a two-week period to encourage uptake of twice weekly testing.
- Increased frequency of testing.
- In extreme cases, and as a last resort where all other risk mitigations have not broken chains of in-school transmission, a Director of Public Health may advise introducing short-term attendance restrictions in a setting, such as sending home a class or year group.

In the event of the triggers for additional measures being met we will hold an IMT to discuss the appropriate controls to implement in the circumstances, as these will vary.

Mitigation Measures

Controls such as good ventilation, handwashing and cleaning should remain in place to help control the spread of the virus (and reduce the rates of other infectious illnesses).

Symptomatic Staff/Pupils

Pupils should not attend school if they have symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, new persistent cough, anosmia)– they should isolate, get a PCR and only return if the PCR is negative and they are better (and 24 hours free of any fever and 48 hours free of any diarrhoea/vomiting). If they have what we've termed 'precautionary symptoms', which is basically any cold, flu or gastrointestinal symptoms, they

should be encouraged to take a PCR test but we would not expect them to miss school unless there were exacerbating factors such as them being the known contact of a positive case.

If a parent or carer insists on a pupil attending your school, you can take the decision to refuse the pupil if, in your reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect other pupils and staff from possible infection with COVID-19. Your decision would need to be carefully considered in light of all the circumstances and current public health advice.

Some Explanatory Scenarios

Pupil develops symptoms on Wednesday, having been in school on Monday and Tuesday, takes a PCR test on Wednesday and receives a positive result on Thursday.

- Parent notifies the school.
- School notifies the HPH using the online form linked-to above.
- The pupil self-isolates for 10 days (or longer if still unwell) as is currently the case
- National T&T contact the parents and carry-out contact tracing.
- Two children who are close friends of the case are identified by the parents as close contacts and are advised by T&T as such.
- These children do not need to self-isolate as they are under 18, but are advised to have a PCR, limit their exposure to CEV people, test daily using LFDs if they are secondary aged pupils and wear a face covering on public transport and on any school transport.
- They attend school while awaiting their PCR result.
- If their PCR is negative they continue to attend school, but would re-test if symptoms develop. If positive, they would self-isolate for 10 day as a positive case in their own right. A positive LFD would trigger self-isolation for the pupil and a PCR test.
- Other children in the class, and staff, continue to attend school as usual.
- If a member of staff, for example, who works with the group of pupils affected is CEV, a person-specific risk assessment must be carried-out for them.

Member of staff, who is fully-vaccinated, is a contact of a positive case.

- Member of staff remains off school, takes a PCR test and can return when the PCR is negative.
- During the 10-day period after contact they take the precautions outlined above (which will have been outlined to them by Test & Trace) and take daily LFD tests prior to attending school each day.

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