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[Department
for Education](#)

Guidance

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

Updated 6 January 2022

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Main messages

The government continues to manage the risk of serious illness from the spread of the virus. The Prime Minister announced on 27 November 2021 the temporary introduction of new measures as a result of the Omicron variant and on 8 December that Plan B, set out in the [autumn and winter plan 2021](#), was being enacted. These measures are precautionary, while the variant is tracked and assessed. As a result, we are reflecting these

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measures in this guidance for parents. This advice remains subject to change as the situation develops.

COVID-19 continues to be a virus that we learn to live with and the imperative to reduce the disruption to children and young people's education remains.

Our priority is for schools, colleges, childminders and nurseries to deliver face-to-face, high-quality education and care to all children and young people. The evidence is clear that being out of education causes significant harm to educational attainment, life chances, mental and physical health.

We have worked closely with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the United Kingdom Health Security Agency (UKHSA) to revise this guidance.

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](#) has made it clear that the overwhelming majority of children and young people still have no symptoms or very mild illness only
- updated advice on tracing close contacts and isolation to reflect the changes to isolation rules
- continuing to take regular rapid tests will help you to identify infections early and reduce transmission
- 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 not required to self-isolate
- your child no longer needs to remain in a consistent group ('bubble')
- 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 additional measures should be introduced
- 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
- updated information to confirm that schools, colleges, nurseries and childminders are not required to use the NHS COVID Pass, unless they are holding a specific event that meets the attendance thresholds
- in primary schools, we recommend that face coverings should be worn

by staff, adults, and those aged over 11 (including visitors) when moving around in corridors and communal areas

- where pupils in year 7 and above are educated, we recommend that face coverings should be worn by pupils and students, staff and adult visitors when moving around the premises, outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas
- updated advice on the use of face coverings to include the use of face coverings in classrooms for year 7 and above
- updated advice on confirmatory PCR tests

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.

From 13 December office workers who can work from home should do so. Anyone who cannot work from home, such as those involved in the face-to-face provision of education, should continue to go to their place of work. Schools may determine that specific staff undertaking certain roles can work from home while minimising disruption to face-to-face education.

Following expert clinical advice and the successful rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine programme, people previously considered to be particularly vulnerable, clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV), and high or higher-risk are not being advised to shield again. Children and young people who were previously identified as being in one of these groups, are advised to continue to follow the same [Coronavirus: how to stay safe and help prevent the spread](#) guidance as the rest of the population.

In some circumstances, a child or young person may have received personal advice from their specialist or clinician on additional precautions to take and they should continue to follow that advice.

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](#).

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](#) explains how to talk about online safety issues.

The guidance about [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.

CO2 monitors are being provided to state-funded education settings, so staff can quickly identify where ventilation needs to be improved.

The government is also providing air cleaning units for teaching spaces and staff rooms in SEND and alternative provision settings, including SEND units in mainstream settings, where quick fixes to improve poor ventilation are not possible. These settings are being prioritised given the higher-than-average number of vulnerable pupils attending those settings.

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](#) 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 do not recommend that it is necessary to keep children in consistent groups ('bubbles'). Assemblies and larger group activities can continue.

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

Face coverings help protect the wearer and others against the spread of infection because they cover the nose and mouth, which are the main confirmed sources of transmission of COVID-19.

From 4 January 2022, we recommend that in those schools where pupils in year 7 and above are educated, face coverings should be worn in classrooms. This does not apply in situations where wearing a face covering would impact on the ability to take part in exercise or strenuous activity, for example in PE lessons. This is a temporary measure.

Where pupils and students in year 7 (which would be children who were aged 11 on 31 August 2021) and above are educated, we also recommend that face coverings should be worn by pupils, students, staff and adult visitors when moving around the premises, outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas. This will also be a temporary measure. These pupils and students must also wear a face covering when travelling on public transport and should wear it on dedicated transport to and from school.

In primary schools, we recommend that face coverings should be worn by staff, adults, and those aged over 11 (including visitors) when moving around in corridors and communal areas. Health advice continues to be that children in primary schools should not be asked to wear face coverings.

See the section on [circumstances where people are not able to wear face coverings](#) for exceptions to this.

Face coverings do not need to be worn by pupils and students when outdoors.

Face visors or shields can be worn by those exempt from wearing a face covering but they are not an equivalent alternative in terms of source control of virus transmission. They may protect the wearer against droplet spread in specific circumstances but are unlikely to be effective in preventing the escape of smaller respiratory particles when used without an additional face covering. They should only be used after carrying out a risk assessment for the specific situation and should always be cleaned appropriately.

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](#).

Your child must comply with [guidance on working safely](#) if they work in commercial training environments such as:

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

Circumstances where people are not able to wear face coverings

There are some circumstances where people may not be able to wear a face covering. Please be mindful and respectful of such circumstances. Some people are less able to wear face coverings, and the reasons for this may not be visible to others.

In relation to education settings, this includes (but is not limited to):

- children under the age of 11 on 31 August 2021
- people who cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability
- people for whom putting on, wearing or removing a face covering will cause severe distress

- people speaking to or providing assistance to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expressions to communicate
- avoiding the risk of harm or injury to yourself or others
- removing a face covering in order to take medication

Tracing close contacts and isolation

Education settings are not 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.

From 14 December 2021, adults who are fully vaccinated and all children and young people aged between 5 and 18 years and 6 months identified as a contact of someone with COVID-19 are strongly advised to take a LFD test every day for 7 days and continue to attend their setting as normal, unless they have a positive test result.

Daily testing of close contacts applies to all contacts who are:

- fully vaccinated adults – people who have had 2 doses of an approved vaccine
- all children and young people aged 5 to 18 years and 6 months, regardless of their vaccination status
- people who are not able to get vaccinated for medical reasons
- people taking part, or have taken part, in an approved clinical trial for a COVID-19 vaccine

Children under 5 years who are identified as close contacts are exempt from self-isolation and do not need to take part in daily testing of close contacts. They are advised to take a PCR test if the positive case is in their household.

Pupils with SEND identified as close contacts should be supported by their school and their families to agree the most appropriate route for testing including, where appropriate, additional support to assist swabbing. For further information please read the [COVID guidance for SEND and specialist settings](#).

Further information is available in:

- [NHS Test and Trace: what to do if you are contacted](#)
- [stay at home: guidance for households](#) with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection

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.

Staff who do not need to isolate, and children and young people aged under 18

years 6 months who usually attend school who have been identified as a close contact of someone with COVID-19 should continue to attend school as normal. Further information is available in the [stay at home: guidance for households](#).

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.

Where children and young people who are self-isolating are within our definition of vulnerable, or have challenging circumstances at home, nurseries, schools and colleges will put systems in place to keep in contact with them, particularly if they have a social worker.

Pupils should return to school as soon as isolation rules allow.

NHS COVID Pass

Childminders, nurseries, schools and colleges are not required to use the NHS COVID Pass, unless they are holding a specific event (such as a reception, concert or party) that meets the attendance thresholds.

Education settings should not use the NHS COVID Pass as a condition of entry for education or related activities such as exams and activities that are part of education or training.

Vaccinations

We recommend all school staff and eligible pupils take up the offer of a vaccine.

You can find out more about the [in-school COVID-19 vaccination programme for children and young people](#).

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.

Further information on daily rapid testing can be found in the [tracing close contacts and isolation section](#).

There is no need for primary age pupils (those in year 6 and below) to test regularly, unless they have been identified as a contact for someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 and therefore take lateral flow tests every day for 7 days.

Parents and other visitors are strongly advised to take a lateral flow device (LFD) test before entering a childminder, nursery, school or college.

If the number of positive cases substantially increases in your nursery, school, college, or area, you might be advised to increase the use of lateral flow device (LFD) testing. This could also include advice on the reintroduction of onsite LFD testing.

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](#) 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](#) (if they test positive at school, you should arrange for them to be collected).

You should follow the [latest government guidance](#) on confirmatory PCR tests following a positive LFD test.

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](#)
- they have had a positive test result
- there are other reasons requiring them to stay at home, for example, they are

[required to quarantine](#)

You should follow public health advice on [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.

If a pupil in a boarding school shows symptoms, they should usually self-isolate in their residential setting so that their usual support can continue, others may then benefit from self-isolating in their family home.

For everyone with symptoms, they should avoid using public transport and, wherever possible, be collected by a member of their family or household.

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](#) is available.

Wraparound provision and extra-curricular activity

More information on extra-curricular provision can be found in the [guidance for parents and carers of children attending out-of-school settings](#) including community activities, holiday clubs, after-school clubs, tuition and other out-of-school provision for children.

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](#) 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](#).

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](#).

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 travelling abroad from England](#) before booking and travelling.

All pupils travelling to England must adhere to travel legislation, details of which are set out in the guidance on [travelling to England from another country](#).

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](#).

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.

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](#) 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](#). Everyone travelling to England must follow the guidance on [travelling to England from another country](#).

All children and young people travelling to England should also follow the appropriate [quarantine and testing guidance](#), based on their age and country of residency. Additional guidance is provided on [quarantine arrangements for boarding school pupils travelling to attend a boarding school in England](#).

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](#) outlines how and when children eligible for benefits-related free school meals should be supported at home.

Household Support Fund

Local authorities have local ties and knowledge, making them best placed to identify and help those children and families most in need.

A £500 million Household Support Fund is being run by local authorities. It allows local authorities to directly help the hardest-hit families and individuals with daily needs such as food, clothing and utilities.

Further information on [support for vulnerable families over winter](#) is available.

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](#) - a free educational resource on children and young people's mental health
- [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](#) and the [Childhood Bereavement Network](#) - information and resources to support bereaved pupils, schools and staff
- the [DfE blog](#) - includes [mental health resources](#) 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](#) 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](#) 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](#) - information on COVID-19 and mental health
- [Think Ninja](#) - a free app for 10 to 18 year olds to help build resilience and stay well
- [Every Mind Matters](#) - building resilience and supporting good mental health in young people aged 10 to 16

[E-learning which can help parents and carers](#) to support their children and young people in emergency or crisis situations.

Barnardo's [See, Hear, Respond service](#), 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](#).

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