



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

GUIDANCE

# Operational guidance for schools and settings to support limited attendance from 22 February

How schools and other providers can make their sites safe for staff and learners during limited attendance.

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## Overview

This guidance applies to schools and settings from 22 February. It sets out how schools and settings can continue to make their sites as safe as possible for staff and learners during periods of limited attendance such as under national lockdown restrictions.

This guidance includes new information on:

- wearing of face coverings by staff in all areas of the school or setting where social distancing cannot be maintained
- risk assessments – recognising the importance of reviewing risk assessments to suit the current circumstances and supporting checklist
- availability of twice weekly testing for staff in schools and settings

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- workforce – including advice for those who are extremely clinically vulnerable
- free school meals – the continuation of £19.50 per learner

## From 22 February

Primary schools and special schools will provide onsite education provision for:

- learners in the foundation phase
- vulnerable learners
- critical worker's children

Secondary schools and PRUs will provide access to onsite education provision for:

- vulnerable learners
- critical worker's children
- learners undertaking essential exams or assessments

## Introduction

Opportunities to learn and develop are vital for children and young people's education and well-being, and time spent in school learning face to face with their peers is central to supporting our children to reach their potential. Time spent out of education settings can be detrimental for children and young people's cognitive and academic development, particularly for vulnerable children and our most disadvantaged. We also know younger learners find it particularly challenging to access remote learning.

We have been clear that in response to the pandemic schools would be the last to close and the first to open, when the evidence shows it is safe to do so. On 29 January, the First Minister announced if the number of coronavirus cases continued to fall over the following weeks our intention would be for the youngest learners in our primary schools to return to face to face learning from 22 February 2021.

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On 5 February, the Minister for Education confirmed that our youngest learners in the Foundation Phase would return to school on 22 February. There will be some flexibility over this first week, with all Foundation Learners (including those in non-maintained settings, special schools and PRUS returning by the end of that week. The children of critical workers, vulnerable children and those undertaking essential exams or assessments would also continue to be able to access onsite provision; this applies to all schools and settings. The decision to allow our youngest learners to return to school has been informed by the latest published **Technical Advisory Group briefing** and supported by a statement by the **Chief Medical Officer**. The Minister for Education has also published an **open letter** to headteachers which summarises the basis for the decision to allow foundation learners to return from 22 February.

Although we are now in a position where we can support our youngest children to return to face to face learning, continuing with limited attendance and remote learning for all other learners does not suggest that schools and colleges are no longer safe places; education settings do not pose an increased risk to teachers or children. Instead, this is about continuing to limit the amount of community transmission. The intention is to proceed cautiously to ensure rates of COVID-19 do not start growing exponentially again, as set out in the TAG briefing note.

During this time the other current Welsh Government Restrictions for alert level 4 will continue to remain in place. Outside of school it will be important that all staff, children and their families continue to stay at home as much as possible and limit their contact with others. We recognise the vital role education plays and that is why education is being prioritised in any headroom that is available.

In all cases, education provision must continue to be made on-site for vulnerable children to safeguard their welfare and for the children of critical workers to ensure essential services can continue to function. Special schools and PRUs will also continue to operate during this time where possible. This also applies in independent schools where learners have already travelled to their boarding or residential accommodation.

Other learners who have already arrived at the independent boarding school will receive remote education in their boarding house. They should not enter the education building unnecessarily. Learners who have not yet returned to their

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boarding school should receive remote education from home. They should not travel back to school during the level 4 lockdown.

TAC and PHW advise that the existing control measures remain essential in responding to the new variant and helping to reduce transmission of the virus. However, a more consistent and robust application is likely to be required given the increased transmission risk associated with the new variant. Schools and settings will have become familiar with these control measures. Reviewing the risk assessment and reinforcing the importance of these control measures with all staff, learners and parents, and visitors on the school estate will remain key.

It is of course vital that learning continues. Alongside this guidance, we have also published updated [learning guidance](#) and set out [expectations and priorities](#) for learning. These provide a common set of priorities for learning throughout the response to COVID-19 and as we move to recovery.

Independent schools must continue to comply with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

## Public health advice to minimise COVID-19 risks

The system of controls set out in this section continue to provide a set of principles for infection control; if schools and settings follow this advice and maximise the use of these control measures, they will effectively minimise risks of viral transmission. All elements of the system of controls are essential. All schools must cover all key elements, but the way schools implement some of the requirements will differ based on their individual circumstances.

These measures remain just as important during the period where attendance is limited.

Local authorities (LAs), schools and settings must comply with health and safety law, which requires them to assess risks and put in place proportionate control measures. Maintained schools, with their LA, should thoroughly review their health and safety risk assessments to ensure they continue to address the risks identified in the system of controls, with which schools and settings will now be

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familiar. Essential measures include:

- a requirement that people stay at home and self-isolate if they:
  - have symptoms of COVID-19, whether they feel unwell or not
  - have tested positive, even if asymptomatic
  - have been advised by NHS Wales Test Trace Protect (TTP) to do so
  - are household members of a positive case, even if that case is asymptomatic
  - are required to self-isolate for travel-related reasons
- instilling robust hand and respiratory hygiene in learners and staff members
- ensuring appropriate ventilation measures on school premises and continuing increased thorough cleaning arrangements
- active engagement with **TTP strategy**
- formal consideration of how to reduce contacts and maximise social and physical distancing between those in school wherever possible and putting in place appropriate mitigating measures to minimise the potential for contamination so far as is reasonably practicable

During these times when attendance is limited on site, how contact between learners, learners and staff, and between staff is reduced will still be important. The additional **assets** provide further information on level 1 and level 2 contact groups that may be helpful; however, during these times of reduced attendance contact should include:

- grouping learners together in as small a group as possible. For example, for those learners in the foundation phase this is likely to be the size of the class
- avoiding mixing between separate contact groups, including during arrival at school, break/lunch times and leaving school
- where children undertake desk based learning, arranging classrooms with forward-facing desks, one metre apart, recognising this may not be possible or appropriate in all schools and settings and particularly for younger learners
- **staff** maintaining social distance from other staff
- staff maintaining social distancing from learners as much as possible, recognising this may not be possible with younger learners
- making the most of the space available, including outdoor space

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Annex A includes a checklist tool that has been developed to support schools and settings when responding during these circumstances.

## Risk assessment

Local authorities, employers and schools must protect people from harm. This includes taking reasonable steps to protect staff, learners and others from COVID-19 within the setting.

It is a legal requirement that schools should revisit and update their risk assessments by building on the learning to date and the practices they have already developed. This will enable them to consider the additional risks and control measures to put in place. Schools and settings, working with their local authority health and safety adviser and trade unions, should also review and update their wider risk assessments and consider the need for relevant revised controls considering the implications of COVID-19. A local authority working with their schools and settings should ensure that schools and settings implement sensible and proportionate control measures that follow the health and safety hierarchy of controls in Annex A to reduce the risk to the lowest reasonably practicable level without negatively impacting on the well-being of learners and staff.

Schools and settings should have already considered the additional risks and control measures that need to be in place, they will want to review these with the phased return of more learners.

Local authorities working with their schools and settings and health and safety advice, should have active arrangements in place to monitor that the controls are:

- as effective as possible
- working as planned
- updated appropriately, considering any issues identified and changes in public health advice

Local authorities, working with their schools and settings, should continue to

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ensure schools and settings are complying with their security plans and that any changes as a result of COVID-19 compliance do not impact negatively on their security plans. Further guidance is available in the Welsh Government and WECTU booklet entitled **Protecting schools: An integrated security approach – Toolbox for headteachers (2017)**.

## The system of controls: protective measures

Having assessed their risk, schools and settings must work through the below system of controls, adopting measures to the fullest extent possible in a way that addresses the risk identified in their assessment, works for their school or setting and allows them to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum for the learners attending during this period where possible.

During this time if schools and settings follow the guidance set out here they will effectively reduce risks in their school or setting and create an inherently safer environment.

### System of controls

This is the set of actions that schools and settings must take. They are grouped into 'prevention' and 'response to any infection' and are outlined in more detail in the following sections.

#### Prevention

- Ensure staff, learners and parents and carers fully understand that any staff member or learner who has possible symptoms of COVID-19 must not attend the school setting but must remain home and **self-isolate, arrange a COVID-19 test** and notify the school of this. Supporting the **Health Protection Regulations**, employers should allow or enable a person to self-isolate if they have tested positive for COVID-19, live in a household where another household member has COVID-19 symptoms or has tested positive, or have been notified by the TTP service that they are a close contact of

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someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.

- Where a staff member or learner becomes unwell at the school or setting with possible symptoms of COVID-19 they should be sent home immediately to **self-isolate** and arrange a COVID-19 test. Until they leave the school or setting (in the case of a learner, when they are collected by a parent or carer) their contact with all other individuals at the setting should be minimised. If possible, ensure they remain in a separate room until they are able to leave the setting.
- Clean hands thoroughly more often than usual with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use a hand sanitiser if soap and water are unavailable.
- Ensure good respiratory hygiene by promoting the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach.
- Ensure enhanced cleaning takes place, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces often, using standard products such as detergents and disinfectants.
- Where necessary, in specific circumstances (set out later in the guidance), wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Where possible ensure appropriate ventilation.
- Minimise contact between all individuals. For all learners the emphasis will be on forming contact groups and ensuring there is no mixing of those groups. In addition for older learners it will also be on maintaining **social/physical distancing where possible**.
- Staff responsible for younger learners should ideally remain with set groups rather than interchange between different/a number of groups. All staff should adhere to the **social/physical distancing** measures as far as possible; however, we recognise that when working with younger learners this may not always be possible. In these circumstances high quality 3 layer face coverings may be worn by staff members, however, having regard to the needs of the learning will be important and a specific risk assessment may be required.

## Response to any infection

- Engage with the **TTP strategy**.
- Manage confirmed cases of COVID-19 among the school community and contain any outbreak by following local health protection team advice.

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The [guidance for independent boarding and residential schools](#) sets out the action to be taken if anyone within the boarding school has any symptoms. They should **self-isolate** for the appropriate period of time and apply for a **test** as soon as possible. Whether they remain at school or not, schools will need to identify other individuals in the 'boarding household' and possible known contacts who will need to self-isolate for the period of time set out in the self-isolation guidance. This may include, for example, fellow boarders and residential learners who share a dormitory, bathroom or kitchen, and members of staff. Many children will benefit from self-isolating in their boarding house so that their usual support can continue. Others will benefit more from self-isolating in their home.

## Prevention

### **1. Minimise contact with individuals who have symptoms of COVID-19 (whether they are unwell or not) or who have someone in their household who does, and ensure they do not attend school**

LAs, working with their schools and settings, should ensure they are communicating clearly that:

- learners, staff and other adults with COVID-19 symptoms or who have tested positive in the last 10 days must not come into a school or setting
- anyone developing COVID-19 symptoms during the school day must be sent home immediately

Both of these actions are essential to reduce the risk in schools and further drive down transmission of COVID-19.

All schools must follow this process and ensure all staff are aware of it.

If anyone in the school or setting becomes unwell with a new and persistent cough or a high temperature, or has a loss of or change in their normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia), the school should continue to follow the arrangements

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they have in place and the individual must be sent home immediately and advised to follow guidance for households with possible or confirmed COVID-19 infection, i.e. the individual should begin to self-isolate and should arrange to have a COVID-19 test.

Other members of the individual's household (including any siblings) should also begin to self-isolate and await the result of the test to see if their household member has tested positive.

If a child with COVID-19 symptoms is awaiting collection, they should be moved, if possible, to a room where they can be isolated behind a closed door, depending on their age and needs, with appropriate adult supervision if required. Ideally, a window should be opened for ventilation. If it is not possible to isolate them, move them to an area which is at least two metres away from other people.

If they need to go to the bathroom while waiting to be collected, they should use a separate bathroom if possible. The bathroom must be cleaned and disinfected using standard cleaning products before being used by anyone else.

As is usual practice, in an emergency, call 999 if someone is seriously ill or injured or if their life is at risk. Anyone with COVID-19 symptoms should not otherwise visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

Any member of staff who has provided close contact care to someone with symptoms, even while wearing a face covering, and all other members of staff or learners who have been in close contact with that person with symptoms, even if wearing a face covering, do not need to go home to self-isolate unless:

- the symptomatic person subsequently tests positive
- they develop symptoms themselves (in which case, they should commence self-isolation immediately and arrange to have a test)
- they are requested to do so by TTP

Everyone must wash their hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds with soap and running water or use hand sanitiser after any contact with someone who is unwell with COVID-19 symptoms. The area around the person with symptoms

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must be cleaned after they have left to reduce the risk of passing the infection on to other people. See the GOV.UK [COVID-19 cleaning of non-healthcare settings outside the home guidance](#).

The present advice continues to be that it is not necessary to screen temperatures. Learners' parents and carers can check for signs of a high temperature. In any case, screening will not identify all cases of COVID-19 and the means of checking temperature may put staff at greater risk of transmission, as well as cause worry or concern for learners.

## 2. Clean hands thoroughly more often than usual

COVID-19 is an easy virus to remove when it is on skin. This remains true for the new variant. This can be done with soap and running water or hand sanitiser. Schools must ensure that learners clean their hands regularly, including when they arrive at school, when they return from breaks, when they change rooms and before and after eating. Regular and thorough hand cleaning is going to be needed for the foreseeable future. Points to consider and implement include:

- whether the school has enough hand washing or hand sanitiser 'stations' available so that all learners and staff can clean their hands regularly
- supervision of hand sanitiser use, given risks around ingestion. Small children and learners with complex needs should continue to be helped to clean their hands properly. Skin-friendly cleaning wipes can be used as an alternative
- building these routines into school culture, supported by behaviour expectations, and helping ensure younger children, and those with complex needs, understand the need to follow them
- automated soap dispensers being used where possible and hands being thoroughly dried, preferably using paper towels. Hand dryers should be avoided where possible. Paper towels should be disposed of in a lidded bin and not allowed to overflow. Bins should be emptied often and daily

### **3. Ensure good respiratory hygiene by promoting the ‘catch it, bin it, kill it’ approach**

The ‘catch it, bin it, kill it’ approach continues to be very important, so schools must ensure that they have enough tissues and bins available in the school to support learners and staff to follow this routine. As with hand cleaning, schools must ensure younger children and those with complex needs are helped to get this right and all learners understand that this is now part of how the school operates. The [e-Bug COVID-19 website contains free resources for schools](#), including materials to encourage good hand and respiratory hygiene.

Some learners with complex needs will struggle to maintain as good a respiratory hygiene as their peers, such as those who spit uncontrollably or use saliva as a sensory stimulant. This should be considered in risk assessments in order to support these learners and the staff working with them, and is not a reason to deny these learners face-to-face education.

### **4. Enhanced cleaning, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces often using standard products, such as detergents**

Schools and settings should follow the [latest advice on cleaning](#) in non-healthcare settings. Points to consider and implement include:

- putting in place a cleaning schedule that ensures cleaning is generally enhanced and involves:
  - more frequent cleaning of rooms/shared areas after they have been used by a different group
  - frequently touched surfaces being cleaned more often than normal
- where possible, providing separate toilets for different contact groups. Where this is not possible, ensure hand sanitiser is used before entering the toilet and that toilets are cleaned regularly. Learners must be encouraged to clean their hands thoroughly after using the toilet

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## 5. Minimise contact between individuals and maintain social distancing

Minimising contacts and mixing between people reduces transmission of COVID-19. This continues to be important in all contexts and schools and settings must continue to consider how to implement this and do everything possible to minimise contacts and mixing.

The overarching principle to apply in any school and setting is reducing the number of contacts between children and staff, as well as between staff and keeping contact groups separate. During these times of limited attendance schools and settings should maintain and not mix contact groups. For older children, they should also be supported to maintain distance and not touch staff where possible. Any additional space available where there are lower numbers of learners attending should be used, wherever possible, to maximise the distance between learners and between staff and other people. We recognise that younger children will not be able to maintain social distancing and it is acceptable for them not to distance within their group, the important measure here is to maintain and not mix the contact group.

### How to group children

Consistent groups reduce the risk of transmission by limiting the number of learners and staff in contact with each other to only those within the group. They have been used to date in recognition that children, especially the youngest children, cannot socially distance from staff or from each other, maintaining and not mixing contact groups provides an additional protective measure.

Maintaining distinct contact groups that do not mix also makes it quicker and easier in the event of a positive case to identify those who may need to self-isolate and keep that number as small as possible.

Each group should be kept apart from other groups and older children should be encouraged to keep their distance within contact groups. Schools with the capability to do it should take steps to limit interaction and the sharing of rooms and social spaces between contact groups as much as possible.

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Both the approaches of separating groups and maintaining distance are not 'all-or nothing' options and will still bring benefits even if implemented partially. Siblings may also be in different groups. Endeavouring to keep these groups at least partially separate and minimising contacts between children will still offer public health benefits as it reduces the network of possible direct transmission.

If circumstances allow, staff responsible for younger learners should remain with set groups rather than interchange between different/a number of groups. Where staff need to move between groups, they should try and keep their distance from learners and other staff as much as they can, ideally two metres from other adults. Again, we recognise this is not likely to be possible with younger children, in such circumstances we recommend the wearing of a face covering.

## **Measures within the classroom**

Maintaining a distance between people while inside and reducing the amount of time they are in face-to-face contact lowers the risk of transmission. There is strong public health advice that staff in secondary schools should maintain distance from their learners, staying at the front of the class, and away from their colleagues where possible. Ideally, adults should maintain a two-metre distance from each other and from children, any additional space available where there are lower numbers of learners attending should be used, wherever possible, to maximise the distance between learners and between staff and others. We know that this is not always possible, particularly when working with younger children, but if adults can do this when circumstances allow that will help. In particular, they should avoid close face-to-face contact and minimise time spent within one metre of anyone.

Similarly, it will not be possible when working with many learners who have complex needs or who need close contact care. These learners' educational and care support should be provided as normal. Staff working with learners who have complex needs or who need close contact care, are on the priority list for the vaccination and should by the middle of February have received their first dose, which will help to protect our most vulnerable learners. It will also be important to undertake a risk assessment to ensure any additional mitigating measures are necessary, such as the use of well-ventilated space, and high

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quality 3 layer face coverings.

When staff or children cannot maintain distancing, particularly with younger children in primary schools, the risk can also be reduced by keeping learners in smaller groups, such as their class size, ensuring these contact groups do not mix and by staff wearing face coverings.

Schools should make small adaptations to the classroom to support distancing where possible. That should include seating learners side by side and facing forwards, rather than face-to-face or side on, and might include moving unnecessary furniture out of classrooms to make more space.

## Measures elsewhere

Groups should be kept apart, meaning that schools should avoid gatherings such as assemblies, lunch and break times or collective worship with more than one group.

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).

Schools should also plan how shared staff spaces are set up and used to ensure staff distance from each other. Use of staff rooms should be minimised, although staff must still have a break of a reasonable length during the day.

## Early years

We recognise some arrangements for our early years learners can present unique challenges for local authorities and providers. Additional thought and planning is required, especially where these arrangements support parents and need to blend seamlessly with childcare provision.

The evidence shows our youngest learners are in the least at risk group. We

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also know our early years' educational practitioners are experienced in caring for the needs of young children and will apply professional judgement doing the right thing for children, parents and staff. Continuing with a child centred approach means we will have a high-quality delivery of the foundation phase with personal and social development and well-being at the centre of our foundation phase philosophy for our youngest learners.

## Nursery education

Early years learners are at a critical stage of cognitive development and it is essential their start in education is a positive one and provides a strong foundation for their future development. There is a need to ensure schools and funded non-maintained settings are provided with the right framework so that our youngest children get the very best start to their educational life, and one that they can build on for the future.

Non-maintained settings are advised to follow [operational guidance for childcare](#) settings.

## Transition

Schools and non-maintained childcare settings should follow their normal transition processes, where possible, to ensure a positive and safe experience for our youngest learners within the overall aim of all children accessing education as soon as is practical.

We know for some families, such as our critical workers, the use of out of school or wrap around childcare will be key to supporting children to return to school and parents to work. Wherever possible this should be kept to a minimum, but in some cases it will be unavoidable, and that is particularly so for early education depending on the delivery model in your area.

If the child is accessing both education and childcare, and this is taking place across two settings or sites, it will be important to ensure schools and childcare settings all understand the transition arrangements and are clear on when the child will be in each setting and what collection and transport arrangements are

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in place. Attendance at more than one setting will require close partnership working between schools, childcare settings and parents. Ideally children should remain in the same contact group across settings, and if there is a suspected case of COVID-19 in either setting that impacts that child and their contact group, both settings must be informed and work together to identify contacts.

Schools and funded non-maintained settings will have the added responsibility of transition for new learners. In addition, existing learners will need to re-transition due to the length of time they have been away, and some learners will also transition from settings to schools.

## **Parental involvement**

Within nursery provision there is often a greater level of parental involvement than at any time in a child's educational journey. In addition to drop-off and collection of children, parents sometimes help their children to settle in and staff may well undertake home visits before children start. Schools and settings will need to balance this engagement with the need to minimise overall levels of contacts. Consideration should be given to how this is done when undertaking risk assessments. If a home visit is required it should be undertaken outside, for example in the garden of the premises where the child resides, to ensure 2 metre physical/social distancing can be maintained from the school staff member and the child and their family.

## **Resources**

In addition to the guidance in this document about stringent cleaning, having different sets of equipment and resources for different groups of children in nursery, if possible, will also help minimise transmission, particularly where more than one group of learners needs to access the same space during a single day – for example, in schools with morning and afternoon nursery provision. This would reduce the amount of cleaning needed to be undertaken during the change-over period with the focus then being on fixed furniture, larger equipment and high touch points.

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## Optimising space

The time learners spend outdoors should be maximised. This has important physical, mental and educational benefits and helps combat transmission of COVID-19.

When inside practitioners should utilise all available space including areas usually set aside for older learners. We recognise some of this space will already be in use for children of critical workers and vulnerable learners.

## Social distancing

In addition to the guidance earlier in this document about minimising contact, the level of social (physical) distancing within indoor childcare settings with young children will be harder to maintain than in other settings. Settings should therefore implement the social distancing and mixing in childcare settings measures set out in the revised **Protective measures in childcare settings: Keep Childcare Safe** guidance to minimise the number of contacts that children and adults have when inside, while ensuring children are kept safe and well cared for.

Further information about self-isolation and booking tests for those showing symptoms and the process for contact tracing are outlined earlier in this guidance.

## Use of face coverings for health purposes

A **rapid review by Public Health England** in January 2021 concluded that consistent evidence from observational studies indicates that community-wide use of face coverings may reduce the spread of COVID-19. However, **face coverings** are not a replacement for far more effective measures such as social distancing and hand hygiene.

Where a decision is made to use a face covering we would encourage that

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individuals use recyclable high quality three layered multi-use face coverings and use them correctly, covering the mouth and nose, ensuring hand hygiene before putting on and following removal. Schools and settings should also ensure adequate waste bins on premises for those who choose to use single-use face coverings.

**Face coverings** should be high quality three layered as set out by the World Health Organisation, but do not need to be medical-grade face masks. Face coverings or visors are not PPE and would not prevent an individual being identified as a close contact by TTP.

If during this time of limited attendance social distancing cannot be maintained, particularly with the youngest learners, face coverings should be worn anywhere on the school estate, including in the classroom by staff at primary and secondary schools and secondary school learners. The exception is at mealtimes and when they are outside, unless the school risk assessment indicates that additional measures are needed, e.g. on a school yard where there are a large number of learners in a relatively small space without separation of contact groups (such as when waiting to enter school). Frequent putting on and taking off of face coverings is not recommended as this can risk contaminating hands and face; if learners are outside for a short period it may be easier to keep face coverings on. Learners should not wear face coverings when running round, playing football or other active games.

Face coverings should continue to be worn by learners in secondary schools and settings when travelling on dedicated school transport. This does not apply to younger children in primary schools and in early years settings.

If however during this time anyone wishes to wear a face covering for personal reasons anywhere in the school/setting they should be permitted to do so. This may help support their wider well-being, reduce anxiety and provide additional reassurance for some individuals alongside other mitigating measures.

Visitors to the school setting should use a face covering, including parents and carers when dropping off and picking up learners.

Schools will need to communicate quickly and clearly to staff, parents, carers

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and learners that the new arrangements require the use of face coverings in certain circumstances. In addition, schools should ensure there is appropriate on-site signage to make visitors and parents/carers aware of the requirement for them to wear face coverings when entering school premises.

There are some risks and harms of **face coverings** to be considered, including:

- the potential for inadvertent virus spread when putting on or taking off face coverings
- the need for supply, safe wearing, storage and disposal of face coverings
- the risk of stigmatisation or bullying of those with medical exemptions (especially neurodiverse learners)
- problems for those who lip-read
- the adverse effects on learning, emotional engagement and communication of the masking of facial features

The overall interests of the young person must be given priority in these circumstances and there must be no risk of exclusion from transport to or from the school or setting, or from attending the school or setting, if face coverings are recommended. **Face coverings** may need to be provided to certain groups of learners who may be unable to obtain them through other means, if they are recommended locally.

Considering the wellbeing of learners is critical in any considerations around whether staff or older learners wear face coverings. Anyone who may be unable to handle face coverings as directed should not wear them as it may inadvertently increase the risk of transmission e.g. young learners or those with special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities. How a learner is likely to respond to the use of face coverings by others should also be considered, as should any potential impact on the development of speech, language and communication.

There are some circumstances where people may not be able to wear a face covering. Please be mindful and respectful of such circumstances, noting that some people may be less able to wear face coverings and the reasons for this may not be visible to others. Staff and learners may have a reasonable excuse not to wear a face covering if (for example):

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- they are not able to put on or to wear a face covering because of a physical or mental illness, or because of a condition or impairment
- they are accompanying somebody who relies on lip reading where they need to communicate and you cannot access a clear face covering
- they are escaping from a threat or danger and don't have a face covering

## Face coverings and implications for deaf learners or learners with any level of hearing loss

The impact of wearing a face covering for a deaf learner or learners with any level of hearing loss should be carefully considered, as communication for many deaf people relies in part on being able to see someone's face clearly. **The National Deaf Children's Society** has provided the following **communication tips** that staff may find useful in this regard.

Advice on face coverings will be kept under constant review and will always follow the latest scientific advice.

## Other considerations

Depending on the numbers attending during this time, schools should consider staggered starts or adjusting start and finish times to keep groups apart as they arrive and leave school. Staggered start and finish times should not reduce the amount of overall teaching time. A staggered start may, for example, include condensing/staggering free periods or break time but retaining the same amount of teaching time or keeping the length of the day the same but starting and finishing later to avoid rush hour. Schools should consider how to communicate this to parents/carers and remind them about the process that has been agreed for drop-off and collection, including that gathering at the school gates and otherwise coming onto the site without an appointment is not allowed.

Some learners with SEN will need specific help and preparation for the changes to routine that this will involve, so teachers and SEN coordinators should plan to meet these needs, e.g. by using social stories.

Supply teachers, peripatetic teachers and other temporary staff can move

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between schools. They should ensure they minimise contact and maintain as much distance as possible from other staff and learners. Specialists, therapists, clinicians and other support staff for learners with SEN should provide interventions as usual and in accordance with the setting's risk assessment. Schools should:

- consider how to manage other visitors to the site, such as contractors
- ensure that site guidance on social and physical distancing and hygiene is explained to visitors on or before arrival
- ensure that signage is used and prominently displayed on the premises

Where possible, visits should happen outside of school hours. A record should be kept of all visitors as this may be needed at a future point to assist the Welsh Government's **TTP strategy**.

Local authorities, as education otherwise than at school (EOTAS) commissioners, will need to be assured that EOTAS providers have complied with health and safety law requiring them to assess risks and put in place proportionate control measures. Where a learner routinely attends more than one setting on a part-time basis, e.g because they are dual-registered at a mainstream school and either a PRU setting, a EOTAS setting or a special school, the settings should work through the system of controls collaboratively, enabling them to address any risks identified and allowing them to jointly deliver a broad and balanced curriculum for the learner. During this time the settings should consider whether providing learning on one site may be feasible.

Schools and settings should ensure that outdoor playground equipment is more frequently cleaned. This would also apply to resources used inside and outside by wrap-around care providers. It is still recommended that learners limit the amount of equipment they bring into school each day, to essentials such as lunch boxes, bags, hats, coats, books, stationery and mobile phones. Learners and staff can take books and other shared resources home, although unnecessary sharing should be avoided, especially where this does not contribute to learners' education and development. Similar rules on hand washing, cleaning of the resources and rotation should apply to these resources.

For individual and very frequently used equipment, such as pencils and pens, it

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is recommended that staff and learners have their own items that are not shared. Classroom-based resources, such as books and games, can be used and shared within the contact group; these should be cleaned regularly, along with all frequently touched surfaces. Resources that are shared between contact groups, such as sports, art and science equipment, should be cleaned frequently and meticulously and always between contact groups, 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 contact groups.

If non-symptomatic children present behaviours that may increase the risk of droplet transmission (such as biting, licking, kissing or spitting) or require care that cannot be provided without close contact, they should continue to receive care in the same way.

In these circumstances, to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, no additional PPE is necessary as these are non-symptomatic children in a non-healthcare setting and so the risk of viral transmission is very low. However, additional space and frequent cleaning of surfaces, objects and toys will be required. Cleaning arrangements should be increased in all schools and settings, with a specific focus on surfaces that are frequently touched.

## **Where necessary, wear appropriate PPE**

PPE is different to a face covering and will meet the required standards to protect the individual. The PPE required will depend on the exact tasks being undertaken and will vary between different work environments.

It is important to remember that **social/physical distancing**, hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene (catching a cough or sneeze in a tissue or covering the mouth and nose with an elbow or sleeve) remain strongly evidenced as the most effective ways to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

There is therefore no need to use PPE when undertaking routine educational activities in classroom/school settings.

The list below covers when PPE may be required.

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## Routine activities

- No PPE is required when undertaking routine educational activities in classroom or school settings.

## Suspected COVID-19

- Gloves, aprons and a fluid-resistant surgical mask should be worn if a child or young person becomes unwell with symptoms of COVID-19 and needs direct personal care.
- Eye protection should also be worn if a risk assessment determines that there is a risk of splashing to the eyes such as from coughing, spitting, or vomiting.
- Gloves and aprons should be used when cleaning the areas where a person suspected of having COVID-19 has been.

## Personal care

- Gloves and aprons should continue to be used when providing personal care to a child or young person. This can include personal, hands-on care such as washing, toileting, or first aid and certain clinical procedures such as assisted feeding.
- Fluid-resistant surgical masks should be worn and eye protection (if a risk assessment determines that there is a risk of splashing to the eyes such as from coughing, spitting, or vomiting).
- Gloves, fluid repellent gowns, FFP3 masks and eye protection are indicated when undertaking aerosol-generating procedures such as suction.
- Gloves and aprons should be used when cleaning equipment or surfaces that might be contaminated with body fluids such as saliva or respiratory secretions. Gov.UK **guidance** also sets out that gloves and an apron should be used when cleaning areas where a person suspected of having COVID-19 has been.

The use of PPE by staff within settings should be based on a clear assessment of risk, taking into account each individual setting and the needs of the individual

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learner. Schools, settings and local authorities already have risk assessments processes in place which should be used to identify the need for the use of PPE. Following any risk assessment, where the need for PPE has been identified, it should be readily available and provided by the employer. Further information has been provided by the [Health and Safety Executive](#) (HSE).

All staff should have a clear understanding of how to put on or remove PPE in the right order, safely dispose of the waste and use correct hand hygiene steps to reduce the risk of onward transmission of infection.

In any case, hand washing should always be practiced before putting on and after removing PPE. Schools and settings should contact their local authority to obtain PPE to cover the above, and to discuss any relevant training requirements.

## **Keeping occupied spaces well ventilated**

During this time it is important to ensure schools and settings continue to be well ventilated and a comfortable teaching environment is maintained.

Advice on this can be found in HSE [guidance on air conditioning and ventilation during the coronavirus](#) outbreak and in the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers (CIBSE) [COVID-19 advice](#).

In addition ventilation can be achieved by a variety of measures including:

- mechanical ventilation systems – these should be adjusted to increase the ventilation rate wherever possible, and checked to confirm that normal operation meets current guidance (if possible, systems should be adjusted to full fresh air or, if not, then systems should be operated as normal as long as they are within a single room and supplemented by an outdoor air supply)
- natural ventilation – opening windows (in cooler weather windows should be opened just enough to provide constant background ventilation, and opened more fully during breaks to purge the air in the space). Windows can also be opened more fully before learners and teaching staff come in and at the end of the school day. Opening internal doors can also assist with increasing the

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throughput of air (as long as they are not fire doors and where safe to do so)

- natural ventilation – if necessary external opening doors may also be used (as long as they are not fire doors, and where safe to do so).

To increase the fresh air ventilation rate to ensure dilution, solutions schools could use would include seeking to undertake the following.

- Check if ventilation is functioning well – windows, grids, airbricks – and not obstructed; check for function and identify areas that are poorly ventilated.
- Take advice from competent heating and ventilation professionals.
- Start ventilation of rooms ahead of school day and allow it to continue throughout the day and after classes have finished.
- Set air handling units to maximise fresh outdoor air over recirculation.
- Ensure open windows and doors provide adequate ventilation while maintaining a comfortable workplace temperature (noise and fire restrictions dependent).
- Instruct teaching staff on how to achieve the most effective ventilation – e.g. opening top windows – moving obstructions such as curtains/blinds.
- Use ceiling fans or desk fans to prevent pockets of stagnant air only where the area is well ventilated.
- Ventilate classrooms and other areas between classes and uses, e.g. by opening all doors (not fire doors) and windows wide.
- Consider a target maximum capacity for smaller rooms to ensure greater dilution.
- Consider the use of CO<sub>2</sub> monitors to identify areas where there may be challenges in ensuring adequate ventilation.

Heating should be used as necessary to ensure comfort levels are maintained particularly in occupied spaces.

## Response to any infection

### Engage with the TTP strategy

The **TTP strategy** published on 13 May 2020 was implemented across Wales

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from 1 June 2020.

This strategy set out the next phase of our approach to tackling coronavirus: testing people with symptoms in the community, tracing those who have come into close contact with people who have tested positive for coronavirus, and protecting family, friends and our community by self-isolating. Since September 2020 the TTP strategy has been supported by the [NHS COVID-19 app](#).

TTP works by:

- testing those people who have coronavirus symptoms, and asking them to isolate from family, friends and their community while taking a test and waiting for a result. People can apply for a test for themselves or someone in their household with symptoms. This includes adults and children, including the under-fives. TTP [guidance](#) for staff and [how to apply for a test](#) can be found on [the Welsh Government website](#).
- ensuring that if the symptoms are not due to coronavirus, individuals and their contacts can cease their period of self-isolation and get back to their normal routines immediately once the negative test result is known
- tracing those people who have been in close contact with people that have tested positive for the virus and requiring them to [self-isolate](#). Further information on contact tracing and how it operates can be found [on the Welsh Government website](#)
- providing advice and [guidance](#), particularly if the person who has symptoms or their contacts were previously in the '[shielding group](#)' or are in the [increased risk](#) group.

Through reducing transmission in our communities, and quickly identifying and isolating those at risk of developing COVID-19 following their close contact with a positive individual (e.g. a known contact or family member) we will support the wider opening of schools, colleges and early years' settings.

Asymptomatic testing offer for schools and settings.

In order to quickly detect asymptomatic adults, ask them to self-isolate as soon as possible, reduce the likelihood of clusters and outbreaks in settings and the disruption that brings to education we will be making rapid-result coronavirus

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(COVID-19) tests available to all staff working in schools/settings primary, from February 2021.

Test at home kits will be offered to all schools and settings in order for staff to take twice weekly tests. Testing is voluntary, but those who are eligible for tests are strongly encouraged to participate to further reduce the risk of asymptomatic transmission within the workplace.

- Anyone who tests positive using a Lateral Flow Test (LFT):
  - must not attend setting or school
  - must then book a follow up PCR test through the online booking portal
  - must notify their setting of the result
  - must notify other organisations as per the guidance for your sector (LAs or CIW)
  - will be contacted by the local contact tracing team
  - must self-isolate in accordance with the advice given by the local contact tracing team

A negative test result does not remove the risk of transmission.

Schools and settings should reinforce these messages and in particular, remind all those who test negative that this does not mean they can relax their infection prevention measures and/or if they show any of the COVID-19 symptoms to **self-isolate** immediately and **book a test**. Those living with someone showing symptoms or who has tested positive for COVID-19 must also self-isolate. Where possible it would be helpful for schools and settings to keep a record of anyone who comes in to a contact group (e.g. intervention teams). This can be a simple book in every classroom recording anyone coming in from 'outside'.

## **Manage confirmed cases of COVID-19 among the school community**

In the event of a positive test, a contact tracer will contact the person tested to help identify potential contacts. A second contact tracer will then get in touch with those contacts and notify them to **self-isolate** from their last contact with the person who tested positive. These people will only be required to take a test if they develop symptoms. If a cluster should occur in the school and setting, the

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cluster's members will be provided with a dedicated TTP contact person managing the cluster, to whom they can report new cases or raise any other concerns such as increasing numbers of possible cases. Further [guidance on contact tracing](#) is available.

A positive test on site therefore does not require closure of that site. The process of testing and contact tracing is part of the 'new normal' and where schools and settings follow these guidelines carefully, there is no cause for alarm. The latest information can be found on the [Welsh Government website](#).

Where vulnerable learners are self-isolating it is important that schools put systems in place to keep in contact with them, offer pastoral support, and check they are able to access education support.

A template [letter](#) has been developed for schools, on the advice of the health protection team, to send to parents, carers and staff if needed.

Schools and settings should not request evidence of negative test results or other medical evidence before accepting learners or welcoming them back after a period of self-isolation.

## Identifying clusters and incidents of COVID-19

Building upon the Disease Outbreak Plan for Wales (2020) Public Health Wales (PHW) has provided specific [advice regarding the investigation and management of clusters and incidents of COVID-19](#). Full details can be found in that document.

## The NHS COVID-19 app

Staff and learners aged 16 and over are eligible to use the [NHS COVID-19 app](#). Schools should tell learners who use the app to tell a member of staff if they get an alert that they have had close contact with a person with symptoms.

If notified by the app, the learner should inform a trusted adult, usually a school staff member. The school should then follow its COVID-19 procedures as if that

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learner had been present in class with another learner who had shown symptoms.

Schools do not need to update policies on use of mobile phones.

## Vaccination

In Wales, we are working to the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) priority schedule. The JCVI is the expert body which advises all four UK governments, and the priority schedule of vaccination we are working to is the same as the schedule for England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The JCVI has set out that the first priorities for the vaccination programme should be the prevention of deaths relating COVID-19, and the protection of health and social care staff and systems. Welsh Government has also agreed that staff whose role is to provide intimate personal care for some of our most vulnerable children with complex medical needs will be included as part of the priority list for vaccination see Appendix 3, in line with social care workers.

The **first four groups include the clinically extremely vulnerable and over 70s**. It is expected that by mid February all four priority groups for vaccination will have received their vaccination.

## School operations

### Attendance during this time

Schools and settings should continue to record attendance in the register and should follow up on absences of the learners who are expected to be in school, but where a parent or carer wishes for their child to be absent, we expect schools to authorise the absence during this time. Absence will not be penalised.

If a learner is unable to attend the physical setting of the school due to self-isolation it is vital the school continues to engage regularly with the learner

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remotely. [Learning guidance](#) is available to support schools and settings in doing so. Following consultation, the Welsh Government has revoked the School Performance and Absence Targets (Wales) Regulations 2011 (in force from 7 August 2020). As a result, schools are not required to set targets for future years or report on those previously set for 2019 to 2020 onwards. However, the annual attendance data collections will continue.

Schools should record attendance and absence in keeping with the following codes.

## What code should be used?

Code	Meaning	Statistical category
/	Attending school in the a.m.	Present
\	Attending school in the p.m.	Present
[	Remote learning due to COVID-19	Not required to attend
;	Illness due to COVID-19	Authorised absence
Y	School-directed absence due to COVID-19 (to include remote learning)	Not required to attend

All other codes apply as per the [guidance on school attendance](#).

### ∧ (code for learners who attend school)

All children in the expected intake for that day or in a priority group (children of critical workers and vulnerable children) should be recorded as present / \ upon arrival at their school or setting.

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## **[ (temporary code for remote learning due to COVID-19)**

This includes individual learners who are unable to physically attend school for reasons understood and agreed by the school. They should be recorded as code [.

This code will apply to learners who are self-isolating for COVID-19-related reasons as set out in the preventative section of this guidance. This includes learners with symptoms of COVID-19; someone in the household with symptoms/who is a positive case; or as a contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 as notified through the TTP service. This code should not be used for groups of learners directed not to attend by the school; in those circumstances, code Y should be used.

This code could be used for learners who have medical or health reasons preventing them from physically attending or who may have exceptional circumstances such as caring responsibilities. This would also apply if shielding has been recommended for clinically extremely vulnerable learners through a letter from the Chief Medical Officer for Wales.

This code should not be used if the learner is unwell and has a confirmed case of COVID-19. In such a case the code ; should be used.

Schools must engage with parents/carers to understand why learners are not attending and ensure there are not any concerns about learners' well-being or alternative support options that could be arranged to enable them to attend. Any concerns should be followed up by the school or setting, and where relevant by the local authority. The school should review the situation with the learner and parents and carers on a regular basis to avoid any prolonged absence.

The temporary code will be used for analysis of our informal weekly data collection but [ will be mapped to the X code for the statutory primary and secondary attendance collections and statistical purposes.

## **; (code for a confirmed case of COVID-19)**

Code ; should be used if the learner has been notified they have a confirmed

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case of COVID-19. This would only apply when they have a positive test result and the school has been notified accordingly.

The temporary code ; is for school use only and schools should remind all SIMS users of their duty of confidentiality. The code will not be used for analysis of the Welsh Government's informal weekly data collection but ; will be mapped to the I code.

### **Y (code for school-directed absence)**

Code Y should be used for school-directed absence, rather than for individuals under code [, and will also involve remote learning. This would happen when the school identifies the need for learners to self-isolate due to a confirmed case in school. Code Y should also be used in event of partial or full closure due to COVID-19; this includes when the school does not have sufficient staff capacity, or a school is closed due to a lockdown. This code should also be used for staggered starts when learners are not required to be physically present in school. This code should not be used for inset days which should be recorded as code #.

## **Using other authorised absence and attendance codes**

In line with our guidance on school attendance codes an agreed family holiday authorised by the headteacher will be coded as H, and an agreed extended holiday will be coded as F. A family holiday not agreed by the head teacher, or in excess of what was agreed, will be coded as G. On return from the holiday some families will be **required to self-isolate if they have travelled from a non-exempt country**. This period of self-isolation should be recorded in accordance with the code used for the family holiday.

Where other specific authorised absence and attendance codes are more appropriate schools should use those as usual.

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# Welsh Government advice on staff and learner attendance

Under no circumstances should learners or staff attend schools or settings if they:

- feel unwell with or, have any of the identified COVID-19 **symptoms**
- have tested positive for COVID-19
- live in a household with someone who has symptoms of, or has tested positive for **COVID-19**

## Critical workers

A list of those **parents/carers identified as critical workers** has been published.

We have strengthened the duties for local authorities providing for the children of critical workers and vulnerable learners with the **Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 5) (Wales) Regulations 2020**. Local authorities and proprietors of independent schools must have regard to the list when deciding who is a critical worker. These arrangements extend to 3-year-olds who would have taken up an education place in January 2021.

In deciding who are critical workers, local authorities and proprietors of independent schools should consider the types of employment and associated impacts in their area. Schools and settings should speak to parents/carers to identify whether their work is critical to the COVID-19 response and to determine whether their children need to go to school. Parents/carers who are critical workers should, however, keep their children at home if they can. We know that every school will have a different number of children of critical workers who need to attend. It is important that on-site education is provided for these learners.

The law only requires one parent to be a critical worker for the obligation to make arrangements to apply. However, the guidance is clear that although children can have a place, it is not guaranteed.

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## Vulnerable learners

Schools and settings are expected to allow vulnerable children and young people to attend. Parents and carers of vulnerable children and young people are strongly encouraged to take up the place. If vulnerable learners do not attend, schools should:

- work together with the local authority and social worker (where applicable) to follow up with the parent or carer to explore the reason for absence, discussing the school's concerns using supporting guidance considering the child's circumstances and best interests
- work together with the local authority and social worker (where applicable) and other relevant partners to encourage the child or young person to attend educational provision, particularly where the social worker agrees that the child or young person's attendance would be appropriate

## School workforce

During these circumstances, the expectation is that everybody should work from home where possible. School leaders are best placed to determine the workforce that is required in school, taking into account the updated guidance for those staff who are clinically extremely vulnerable or 28 plus weeks pregnant.

School leaders should explain to staff the measures the school has put in place to reduce risks. Schools and settings may wish to use the action card in appendix 2 to promote these measures. We anticipate adherence to the measures in this guidance will provide the necessary reassurance for staff to attend school.

If staff are concerned, including those who may be clinically vulnerable or who believe they may be at possible increased risk from coronavirus, we recommend school leaders discuss any concerns individuals may have around their particular circumstances and reassure staff about the protective measures in place.

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## Staff who are clinically extremely vulnerable

Following the reintroduction of shielding, clinically extremely vulnerable staff are advised that they should not attend the workplace. Staff who are identified as clinically extremely vulnerable should follow the published **guidance**. Staff should talk to their employers about how they will be supported, including to work from home. Schools should continue to pay clinically extremely vulnerable staff on their usual terms.

Those living with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable can still attend work where home-working is not possible.

## Staff who are clinically vulnerable

Clinically vulnerable staff can continue to attend school where it is not possible to work from home. While in school they should follow the mitigating measures to minimise the risks of transmission.

This includes taking particular care to observe good hand and respiratory hygiene, minimising contact and maintaining social distancing in line with the provisions set out in the 'Prevention' section of this guidance. This provides that ideally, adults should maintain a two-metre distance from others, and where this is not possible avoid close face-to-face contact and minimise time spent within one metre of others. While the risk of transmission between young children and adults is likely to be low, adults should continue to take care to socially distance from other adults, including older children and adolescents.

People who live with those who are **at increased risk** or **clinically extremely vulnerable** can attend the workplace but should ensure they maintain good prevention practice in the workplace and home settings.

## Staff who are pregnant

Staff should work at home where possible. If home-working is not possible, pregnant staff and their employers should follow the advice in the **COVID-19:**

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## advice for pregnant employees.

Pregnant women are in the people at increased risk category and are generally advised to follow the above advice, which applies to all staff in schools and the advice to general public but in doing so be aware that they are at increased risk. All pregnant women should take particular care to practice frequent thorough hand washing, and cleaning of frequently touched areas in their home or workspace, and follow the measures set out in the system of controls section of this guidance to minimise the risks of transmission. Pregnant women are not advised to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

An employer's workplace risk assessment should already consider any risks to female employees of childbearing age and, in particular, risks to new and expectant mothers (e.g. from working conditions or the use of physical, chemical or biological agents). Any risks identified must be included and managed as part of the general workplace risk assessment. As part of their risk assessment, employers should consider whether adapting duties and/or facilitating home-working may be appropriate to mitigate risks.

If a school is notified that an employee is pregnant, breastfeeding, or has given birth within the last six months, the employer should check the workplace risk assessment to see if any new risks have arisen. If risks are identified during the pregnancy, in the first six months after birth, or while the employee is still breastfeeding, the employer must take appropriate sensible action to reduce, remove or control them.

While it is a legal obligation for employers to regularly review general workplace risks, there is not necessarily a requirement to conduct a specific, separate risk assessment for new and expectant mothers. However, an assessment may help identify any additional action that needs to be taken to mitigate risks.

Employers should be aware that pregnant women from 28 weeks' gestation, or with underlying health conditions at any gestation, may be at greater risk of severe illness from COVID-19. This is because, although pregnant women of any gestation are at no more risk of contracting the virus than any other non-pregnant person who is in similar health, for those women who are 28 weeks pregnant and beyond there is an increased risk of becoming severely ill, and of

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pre-term birth, should they contract COVID-19.

This is also the case for pregnant women with underlying health conditions that place them at greater risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (see the latest GOV.UK guidance [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): advice for pregnant employees](#)).

## **Staff who may otherwise be at increased risk from COVID-19**

Some people with particular characteristics may be at comparatively increased risk from COVID-19. Where possible these staff should work from home; however, in circumstances where this is not possible, these staff can attend schools as long as the system of controls set out in this guidance is in place. The reasons for the disparities are complex and there is ongoing research to understand and translate these findings for individuals in the future. [Further information is available](#).

People who live with those who may have comparatively increased risk from COVID-19 can attend the workplace where it is not possible to work from home, but should continue to adhere to the prevention and mitigating measures.

### **The all Wales COVID-19 workforce risk assessment tool**

The [all wales COVID-19 workforce risk assessment tool](#) was developed for use in health and social care workplaces and has been adapted for use in education, youth work, childcare and playwork settings. It is intended to be used to assess if staff are at higher risk of developing more serious symptoms. The local authority and/or school/setting as the employer and/or voluntary organisation if you are a volunteer, has a duty of care to protect the health and safety at work of employees and this includes understanding if they are in a higher risk category for COVID-19.

The approach of the toolkit is a self-assessment in the first instance. This supports and empowers staff to consider their health and well-being, and

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understand their personal risk of developing more serious symptoms if they come into contact with the COVID-19 virus as either low, high or very high.

Following their self-assessment staff should have confidence to discuss their safety at work and any concerns they may have with their line manager and consider the right actions to mitigate and manage that risk and ensure staff are as protected as much as possible.

Schools and settings will want to consider seeking advice from the local authorities health and safety adviser(s) regarding its stress risk assessment process. Staff may also wish to consider the need for an individual stress risk assessment, as a number of factors are important considerations in relation to staff well-being. The Health and Safety Executive provides a generic [stress risk assessment](#).

## Supporting staff

Governing bodies and school leaders should have regard to staff (including the headteacher) work–life balance and well-being. Schools and settings should ensure they have explained to all staff the measures they are proposing putting in place and involve all staff in that process.

All employers have a duty of care to their employees, and this extends to their mental health. Schools and settings already have mechanisms to support staff well-being and these will be particularly important, as some staff may be particularly anxious about attending school. Welsh Government is providing additional support for both learner and staff well-being in the current situation.

## Staff deployment

Schools and settings may need to alter the way in which they deploy their staff, and use existing staff more flexibly. Managers should discuss and agree any changes to staff roles with individuals. However, flexibility in deployment should not lead to individuals operating outside of the scope of their role. Managers should discuss and agree any changes to staff roles with individuals. It is

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important that planning builds in the need to avoid increases in unnecessary and unmanageable workload burdens. Every effort must be made to ensure classes and roles within classrooms are operating at their usual staff baseline despite absences.

If, having pursued all the immediate options available, you still have concerns about your staffing capacity, then a discussion with the LA is recommended.

It is important that planning builds in the need to avoid increases in unnecessary and unmanageable workload burdens. This could include a review of existing practices in this respect.

Supply staff and other temporary workers can move between schools. Supply staff, and visitors such as peripatetic teachers, will be expected to comply with the school's arrangements for managing and minimising risk; schools should ensure that all temporary staff are given access to the information on the safety arrangements in place as soon as possible after the booking is confirmed.

To minimise the numbers of temporary staff entering the school premises, and secure best value, schools may wish to use longer assignments with supply staff and agree a minimum number of hours across the academic year.

## Safeguarding

Schools must continue to have regard to the statutory safeguarding guidance, **keeping learners safe** in school.

Schools should review their child protection policy (led by their designated safeguarding lead) to reflect the move to remote education for most learners.

There should be no change to local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, which remain the responsibility of the three safeguarding partners. We expect all local safeguarding partners to be vigilant and responsive to all safeguarding threats and ensure vulnerable children and young people are safe – particularly as more children and young people will be learning remotely.

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## Catering and free school meals

During this time, the Welsh Government will continue to make available an additional £19.50 per learner per week in order that local authorities can continue to make provision for learners who are eligible for free school meals but who are unable to attend because of COVID-19 (this applies regardless of whether their school is closed or because they are shielding or self-isolating). Local authorities can choose which method of provision best suits the needs of their communities (options include food parcels, supermarket vouchers or direct payments to parents'/carers' bank accounts) and we encourage local authorities to consider operating a number of systems in parallel in order to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable families can be met.

Local authorities will be able to claim from Welsh Government's COVID-19 hardship fund for additional costs incurred in respect of learners who are in receipt of free school meals and who are shielding or self-isolating. The additional funding available is based on a weekly allowance of £3.90 per learner per day or £19.50 per week.

The funding made available is based on the assumption that local authorities will, where possible, meet the first £2.50 per learner per day (£12.50 per week) of any costs incurred, with the Welsh Government paying costs in excess of this amount up to a maximum of £1.40 per learner per day or £7.00 per week. LAs are reminded to guard against double funding.

However, the Welsh Government is aware that local authorities will have fixed costs associated with the provision of free school meals. On this basis the Welsh Government accepts that the majority of the budgets for free school meals are likely to be committed. In these instances the LA may experience difficulties in meeting our expectation that they will meet the first £2.50 per learner per day cost. In these cases we would expect LAs to investigate if savings have been made in school catering budgets. If this is not possible, and where LAs can demonstrate that no further budgetary offset is possible, then we will make reasonable exceptions and will pay in excess of £1.40 per learner per day. LAs are reminded that they will need to demonstrate that the arrangements they have put in place for the provision in lieu of free school meals represent the best

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possible value for money, taking account of any health and safety restrictions.

## **Catering provision for children of key workers and vulnerable children attending school**

Where the children of key workers and vulnerable children are attending school during this period, the position regarding catering provision for these learners will depend on whether catering facilities are still available within the school in question. Where catering facilities are open, learners who are eligible for free school meals who are or transitionally protected should be provided with a free meal on each day they attend. Other learners will still be expected to pay for their meals.

Where catering facilities are not operational and learners eligible for free school meals are being provided with alternative provision (vouchers, food parcels or payments), all learners can be requested to bring in a packed lunch.

In cases where children who have received vouchers or direct payments turn up at school with no food, no money and are hungry, the Welsh Government expects schools to use their discretion to make provision for these children. Schools and LA's should follow their normal procedures when this occurs. Where double funding is unavoidable and procedures have been followed, then claims will be processed by the Welsh Government.

Where children from families who have already been provided with FSM provision are repeatedly sent to school without lunch, when parents and carers have been requested to provide a lunch because catering facilities are not operational, schools will need to consider whether this is because of underlying child welfare issues, and take appropriate action.

## **Provision of free school meals during school holidays**

The Welsh Government has also made available funding at the rate of £19.50 per week per learner to make free school meal provision available during school holidays, up to and including Easter 2021. As LA budgets will not include any provision for free school meals during school holidays, it is anticipated that LAs

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will claim the full amount of £19.50 per week.

## Estates

Fire safety management plans should be reviewed and checked in line with operational changes.

Schools should check:

- all fire doors are operational at all times
- that the fire alarm system and emergency lights have been tested and are fully operational

Carry out emergency drills as normal (following social distancing and other safety measures as appropriate).

You should make adjustments to your fire drill to allow for social distancing as appropriate. Refer to advice on fire safety in new and existing school buildings.

Where buildings have been limiting attendance to just vulnerable children and children of critical workers, or have had reduced occupancy, water system stagnation can occur due to lack of use, increasing the risks of Legionnaires' disease. Advice on this can be found in the [HSE guidance on legionella risks during the coronavirus outbreak](#).

## School transport

Local authorities are responsible for the implementation of this section of the guidance, working with the operators with whom they contract to ensure necessary measures are put in place in line with risk assessments (which should involve appropriate consultation with trade unions and staff). Parents, carers and school staff should all play a role in educating children and young people on acceptable behaviour on school and public transport.

This guidance has been informed by the [scientific advice](#) of the Technical Advisory Cell Children and Education Sub Group, and with advice from Public

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Health Wales (PHW).

Local authorities are required to assess the travel needs of learners who are aged under 19 in their area. This includes those who they are legally required to provide transport for and those for whom they may wish to provide discretionary transport when assessing travel needs. An authority is also required to have regard to:

- the needs of disabled learners and learners with learning difficulties
- any particular needs of learners who are 'looked after' or formerly looked after by a local authority
- the age of learners
- the nature of the route that learners could reasonably be expected to take between home and the places where they receive education or training
- the likely distance the learner is to travel between home and the place where they receive education and training

In assessing the travel needs of learners, local authorities must take into account the fact that travel arrangements they make in light of the assessment must not cause unreasonable levels of stress, take an unreasonable amount of time or be unsafe.

This section provides guidance on putting in place proportionate safeguards to minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19 on dedicated home to school transport to ensure learners can attend schools and settings.

This guidance applies to all dedicated home to school transport. By this, we mean services which exclusively carry learners travelling to and from schools and settings. This includes:

- services commissioned or provided by local authorities, whether or not the service is provided free of charge
- services commissioned or provided by schools and settings
- services provided by transport operators (commercial travel routes) which cannot be boarded by members of the public at the same time as they are carrying learners to school or settings

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Vehicles that provide transport to members of the public at other times are considered dedicated home to school transport when they are exclusively carrying children and young people travelling to and from school and settings; this includes taxis and minibuses.

During this time as far as it is safe to do so, the use of active travel routes by parents, carers, staff and learners should be encouraged. Walking and cycling, scooting, wheeling, etc. should be strongly encouraged. In view of the potential for capacity constraints on public transport to impact learner's ability to attend school, all sustainable and active travel modes should be considered.

## Key messages

- Local authorities remain under a statutory duty to provide free home to school transport for all eligible learners of compulsory school age over certain distances from their education centres (2 miles primary/3 miles secondary) as specified in the learner travel Wales measure) and to publish a **transport statement** detailing what travel assistance they will provide for young people over 16 which is discretionary.
- Local authorities, working with schools, settings and transport operators, and following consultation with their health and safety advisers and trade unions, should undertake a risk assessment for dedicated school transport journeys in their local area that takes account of the routes travelled and the users of the services; the nature of the transport used and the opportunity for adaption and local transport capacity, i.e. the opportunity to scale up provision. The risk assessment must be signed off by the appropriate local authority officer (e.g. Head of Service), advised by health and safety officers, passenger transport officers and other relevant officers and notified to contractors and operators in accordance with usual practice. They must then work through the system of controls set out in this section and adopt measures in a way that addresses the identified risk, works in the local circumstances, and allows learners to attend their school or setting.
- There is no requirement to wear a face covering on dedicated home to school transport (Regulation 12A of Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 2) (Wales) Regulations 2020).
- Face coverings should be worn by pupils in year 7 and above when travelling on dedicated school transport to secondary schools and settings.

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- Wherever capacity allows social distancing should be implemented between learners, or groups of learners, and between drivers/passenger assistants. Where it is not possible, other measures from the system of controls set out below, should be put in place.
- There is no requirement to maintain contact groups on school transport providing a consistent group of learners travel on the same bus each day they attend. The use of dedicated school transport to serve several schools should be avoided where possible, particularly between school clusters.
- Local authorities should ensure that operators are aware of the safe use of face coverings, such as hand washing before and after putting on and removing face coverings, safe disposal or storage and that these are not a substitute for other control measures advocated in this.
- **Assets** are available in relation to dedicated home to school transport which local authorities, schools and settings may find helpful.

## Specific considerations

A range of specific considerations and control measures may be adopted for specific groups or in response to particular circumstances. These will be for local consideration and adoption following a risk assessment.

## Taxis and private hire vehicles

Some learners, including those with additional support needs, rely on taxi or private hire vehicle transfers to get to and from their school or setting. Where taxis are used solely for the purpose of transporting children and young people to and from school, as with dedicated school bus and coach services, physical distancing requirements are not necessary. It is recommended that in taxis and private hire vehicles learners' travel in the back seat only.

There should be careful consideration of how learners with additional needs can be provided with safe, bespoke transport arrangements. This could include the introduction of cleaning protocols, driving with the windows open (when possible) or finding larger vehicles for transportation. Local authorities and schools should liaise with their local private hire providers on the measures they

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are putting in place to protect learners, including for the arrangements for carrying multiple learners.

When travel by taxi or private hire vehicle is necessary, learners should be advised to follow the advice of the driver. Appropriate cleaning and sanitising measures will also be necessary. Face to face seating where available should not be used.

Taxi and private hire vehicle drivers in Wales will be able to **claim a free pack of high quality PPE and vehicle cleaning materials**, funded by Welsh Government. The move is intended to increase confidence in travelling safely for drivers and passengers.

## Educational visits

There will be no educational visits during this time. This advice will be kept under review. The Association of British Insurers (ABI) has produced information on travel insurance implications following the COVID-19 outbreak. If schools and settings have any further questions about their cover or would like further reassurance, they should contact their travel insurance provider.

## School uniform

Some schools and settings may feel it is appropriate to relax their uniform policy while only certain categories of learners are attending and while school uniform and general clothing shops are required to close under alert level 4. This is a decision for school leaders.

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# Annex A: approach to risk estimation and management

## Annex A: Approach to risk estimation and management<sup>10</sup>



This hierarchy of controls is a way to prioritise risk control measures based on how effective different types of control are in reducing risks. Risk reduction measures should be assessed in order of the priority given in the hierarchy; it is not a case of simply jumping to the easiest control measure to implement. Types of control higher up the hierarchy are more effective at reducing risks than those lower down.

Controls should be practical to be implemented and, ideally, should be able to be maintained easily over time.

It is critical to remember that it will only rarely be feasible to eliminate the risk completely. The combination of controls introduced should aim to reduce the risk to as low as reasonably practicable, prioritising structural and environmental interventions over individual level ones.

This of course does not simply mean considering risks of transmission, but also balancing these against risks to wider health and well-being and learning.

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Ultimately schools need the flexibility to respond to these risks as they are able to.

When considering contact between contact groups, we would advise schools to consider the following:

1. Elimination: redesign the activity such that the risk is removed or eliminated.
2. Substitution: replace the activity with an activity that reduces the risk. Care is required to avoid introducing new hazards from the substitution.
3. Engineering controls: design measures that help control or mitigate risk.
4. Administrative controls: identify and implement the procedures to improve safety.
5. Having gone through this process, PPE should be used where the guidance recommends this.

## About this document

This document is a copy of the web page [Operational guidance for schools and settings to support limited attendance from 22 February](#) downloaded.

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