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**Education, universities and childcare during coronavirus**  
Department  
for Education**Guidance**  
**Coronavirus (COVID-19) asymptomatic testing in schools and colleges**

Updated 24 March 2021

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This guidance is for secondary schools, further education (FE) colleges, independent training providers, adult community learning providers, students and parents.

## Approach

### Testing for secondary schools and FE colleges

It is crucial that action continues to be taken to break the chains of transmission of the virus, and help safeguard the health of the staff of education settings, and their pupils and students, wherever face-to-face education occurs. Up to one-third of people who have coronavirus are asymptomatic. By rapidly identifying and containing any asymptomatic cases, we can reduce the spread of transmission, alongside other protective measures such as such as handwashing and social distancing.

Therefore we have made rapid lateral flow devices (LFDs) available to secondary schools and colleges to test for coronavirus (COVID-19). LFDs produce a result in 30 minutes and do not require a laboratory to process the result.

Rapid asymptomatic testing was introduced on site in secondary schools and colleges on 4 January. As pupils and students returned to secondary schools and colleges from 8 March all eligible staff, pupils and students were expected to test twice weekly.

The testing of **pupils and students** took place in two phases:

1. Pupils and students conducted their first 3 tests on-site, through the secondary school or college Asymptomatic Testing Site (ATS). Pupils and students could start to attend face-to-face learning following their first negative LFD test.
2. The fourth test and all subsequent tests carried out by pupils and students of secondary school and FE college age were to be conducted using home test kits collected from the secondary school or college.

From 8 March, twice weekly testing of staff took place using home testing kits, following the primary schools staff testing model.

Settings should not make it a requirement to have been tested in order to attend their setting. Testing is voluntary and no child or young person will be tested unless informed consent has been given by the appropriate person and the child and young person is willing to be tested. Further guidance is available in the [informed consent to testing](#) section.

However, we strongly encourage all children and young people who are receiving face-to-face education to have the test, wherever it is possible to do so, to help identify asymptomatic positive cases and support appropriate self-isolation to break the chain of transmission.

Testing is similarly voluntary for members of staff and they are encouraged to participate.

### Testing on-site through an Asymptomatic Testing Sites (ATS)

Secondary schools and colleges aimed to offer pupils and students 3 tests at ATS, 3-5 days apart, during the first two weeks upon their return, commencing 8 March.

Pupils and students were asked to self-swab at the ATS and assistance was to be provided where required. The results should have been provided within 30 minutes and pupils and students could return to their classrooms while they waited for the results.

Staff, pupils or students with a positive LFD test result needed to self-isolate in line with the [stay-at-home guidance](#). Those with a negative LFD test result could continue to attend secondary school or college in line with the routine system of controls already in place in educational settings.

Further guidance can be found on the document sharing platform we've shared with early years providers/schools and colleges, if you don't think you've got access then contact the DfE helpline.

Secondary schools and colleges should retain a small ATS on site so they can offer testing to pupils and students who are unable or unwilling to test themselves at home, where full consent is provided.

### Home testing

Secondary schools and colleges should distribute home testing kits to **staff, pupils and students who have completed testing at an ATS as above, to carry out testing at home**. Home testing, distributed through ILPs and ACLPs, will also apply from 31 March.

Pupils, students and staff will be supplied with LFD test kits to self-swab. They will be asked to take their test kits home and carry out the test twice a week. The LFD test will give a result in around 30 minutes. Staff, pupils and students must report their result to NHS Test and Trace as soon as the test is completed either online or by telephone as per the instructions in the home test kit. Staff, pupils and students should also share their result, whether void, positive or negative, with their secondary school or college to help with contact tracing.

Students aged 18 and over should self-test and report the result, with assistance if needed. Adolescents aged 12-17 should self-test and report with adult supervision. The adult may conduct the test if necessary. Children aged 11 attending a secondary school should be tested by an adult.

Further guidance can be found on the document sharing platform we've shared with early years providers/schools and colleges, if you don't think you've got access then contact the DfE helpline.

Staff, pupils or students with a positive LFD test result will need to self-isolate in line with the stay-at-home guidance. They will also need to arrange a lab-based polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test to confirm the result if the test was done at home. Those with a negative LFD test result can continue to attend secondary school or college and in line with the routine system of controls already in place in educational settings.

### Symptomatic testing

The asymptomatic testing programme does not replace the current testing policy for those with symptoms. Anyone with symptoms (even if they recently had a negative LFD test result), should still self-isolate immediately according to [government guidelines](#).

Those with symptoms are also expected to order a test online or visit a test site to take a lab-based polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test to check if they have the virus.

It remains imperative that the [system of controls](#) continues to be rigorously applied to enable the safest possible environment. The testing programme is an important addition to supporting leaders to maintain the continuity of education through the pandemic.

## Conducting testing in secondary schools and colleges

Secondary schools and colleges have been provided with testing kits including personal protective equipment (PPE) where appropriate. There is also guidance available on the document sharing platform we've shared with early years providers/schools and colleges, if you don't think you've got access then contact the DfE helpline.

Secondary schools and colleges should make it clear that a negative test result does not remove the risk of transmission completely. In some cases, someone who has tested negative may still be infected with virus and infectious to others. It is therefore essential that everyone continues to follow good hygiene and observe social distancing measures regardless of whether they have been tested.

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