Department for Education

Guidance

Step 4 update - what parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges

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Main messages

As the country moves to Step 4 of the Roadmap, the government will continue to manage the risk of serious illness from the spread of the virus. This marks a new phase in the government's response to the pandemic, moving away from stringent restrictions on everyone's day-to-day lives, towards advising people on how to protect themselves and others, alongside targeted interventions to reduce risk.

As COVID-19 becomes a virus that we learn to live with, there is now an imperative to reduce the disruption to children and young people's education - particularly given that the direct clinical risks to children are extremely low, and every adult has been offered a first vaccine and the opportunity for two doses by mid-September

The key messages from this guidance are:

- nationally, education and childcare settings are open, and attendance is mandatory (for schools) and strongly encouraged (at childminders, nurseries and colleges
- the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health has made it clear that the overwhelming majority of children and young people still have no symptoms or very mild illness only
- over the summer, staff, secondary pupils and college students should continue to test regularly if they are attending settings that remain open
- there is no need for primary age pupils (those in year 6 and below) to test over the summer period
- secondary schools and colleges have been asked to prepare for on-site testing at the beginning of the autumn term
- from Step 4 your nursery, school or college will no longer trace close contacts - close contacts will still be identified via NHS Test and Trace
- from Step 4, your child does not need to remain in a consistent group ('bubble')
- from Step 4, face coverings will no longer be advised for pupils, staff and visitors either in classrooms or in communal areas

Note: The use of the term 'college' relates to all further education providers throughout this content.

Attendance and remote education

Attendance is mandatory for all pupils of compulsory school age. This means it's your legal duty as a parent to send your child to school regularly if they are registered at one.

If you have concerns about your child attending, you should discuss these with your school or college.

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

Further information is available in the guidance on supporting pupils at school with medical conditions.

Remote education if your child cannot attend school or college

Schools

From the end of the summer term, all state-funded schools should provide remote education for school-aged children who are unable to attend school due to following government guidance or law relating to COVID-19 (for example if they need to self-isolate, or if they have tested positive but are well enough to learn from home).

Independent schools with pupils whose education is provided wholly through public funds also need to provide remote education in these circumstances.

Schools should provide remote education equivalent in length to the core teaching your child would usually get in school.

You can find out about your school's remote education offer on their website or by contacting your child's school directly.

Guidance is available to help you support your child while they are learning from home.

You should talk to your child's teacher or headteacher if you have concerns about the amount or quality of the remote education they are receiving. If you have exhausted the school's complaints process and you still have concerns, you can raise them with Ofsted. Ofsted will consider the complaint and act where appropriate.

Schools should work collaboratively with you to put in place reasonable adjustments so that pupils with SEND can successfully access remote education.

Colleges

FE providers are expected to provide remote education for students aged 16 to 19 who cannot attend on-site for COVID-related reasons (for example - because they need to self-isolate).

Colleges will use their best endeavours to deliver as much of students' planned hours as possible, recognising this may not be possible if your child's course involves practical teaching and training which involves:

- specialist equipment and supervision
- work experience and placements

You can find out more about your college's remote education offer on their website.

Help to get online

Contact your child's school or college if your child:

- does not have access to a device
- needs support with internet access for remote education

Schools and colleges have been allocated a number of devices and are distributing these to the children who need them most.

Online safety

Talk to your child about staying safe online and encourage them to talk to you if they come across something worrying.

Our guidance for parents and carers to keep children safe online explains how to talk about online safety issues.

The guidance about staying safe online includes information on setting up age appropriate controls, on-line fraud, privacy settings, and screen time recommendations.

Helping make nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges as safe as possible

Nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges have their own health and safety risk assessments and keep them under review.

As part of this, there are certain control measures that we have asked nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges to continue to maintain to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in their setting. You can ask your nursery, childminder, school or college for more information.

Regional and local safety measures

All nurseries, schools and colleges will have outbreak management plans in place outlining how they would operate if there was an outbreak in the setting or local area. Central government may also offer local areas of particular concern an enhanced response package to help limit increases in transmission.

The contingency framework provides more information on the principles of managing local outbreaks of COVID-19 in education and childcare settings. Local authorities, directors of public health and PHE health protection teams may recommend measures described in the contingency framework in individual education and childcare settings – or a small cluster of settings – as part of their outbreak management responsibilities.

Mixing and 'bubbles'

From Step 4, we will no longer recommend that it is necessary to keep children in consistent groups ('bubbles') or to keep groups apart as much as possible. This means that bubbles will not need to be used for any summer provision (for example, summer schools) or in settings from the autumn term.

If your nursery, school, or college is still finishing their summer term from Step 4, they may wish to continue with these measures until the end of the term.

This means that assemblies and larger group activities can resume.

If there is an outbreak in your nursery, school, or college, or if your nursery, school, or college is in an enhanced response area, you might be advised that it is necessary to reintroduce bubbles or to keep groups apart for a temporary period to reduce mixing between groups.

We would encourage you to follow any requests from your individual nursery, school or college.

Face coverings

From Step 4, face coverings will no longer be advised for pupils, staff and visitors either in classrooms or in communal areas.

From Step 4, face coverings are also no longer recommended to be worn on dedicated transport to school or college and are no longer legally required on public transport.

If there is an outbreak in your nursery, school, or college, or if your nursery, school, or college is in an enhanced response area, you might be advised that face coverings should temporarily be worn in communal areas or classrooms (by pupils, staff and visitors, unless exempt).

Some FE courses, such as vocational training, healthcare-related courses and the performing arts may pose particular risks of aerosol, droplet and surface transmission and may therefore warrant increased consideration, for example, face coverings, ventilation or cleaning in accordance with guidance issued for the relevant professional working arrangements.

Your child must comply with guidance on working safely if they work in commercial training environments such as:

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

Tracing and self-isolation

From Step 4, nurseries, schools and colleges will no longer be expected to trace close contacts. As with positive cases in any other setting, NHS Test and Trace will work with the positive case to identify close contacts. This is likely to be a small number of individuals who would be most at risk of contracting COVID-19 due to the nature of the close contact. As parents or carers, you may be contacted to help with identifying close contacts.

From 16 August 2021, children under the age of 18 years old will no longer be required to self-isolate if they are contacted by NHS Test and Trace as a close contact of a positive COVID-19 case. Instead, children will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace, informed they have been in close contact with a positive case and advised to take a PCR test. We would encourage all individuals to take a PCR test if advised to do so.

18-year-olds will be treated in the same way as children until 4 months after their 18th birthday, to allow them the opportunity to get fully vaccinated. At which point, they will be subject to the same rules as adults and so if they choose not to get vaccinated, they will need to self-isolate if identified as a close contact.

If there is an outbreak in your nursery, school, or college, or if your nursery, school, or college is in an enhanced response area, you might be advised that some control measures need to be temporarily reintroduced.

Symptoms and testing

Testing remains important in reducing the risk of transmission of infection within nurseries, schools and colleges.

Over the summer, staff, secondary pupils and college students should continue to test regularly if they are attending settings that remain open, such as summer schools and out of school activities based in school settings. Schools and colleges will only provide tests for twice weekly asymptomatic testing for pupils and staff over the summer period if they are attending school or college.

However, testing will still be widely available over the summer and kits can be collected either from your local pharmacy or ordered online.

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

Your school or college may commence testing from 3 working days before the start of term and can stagger your child's return across the first week to manage this. Your child should then continue to test twice weekly at home until the end of September, when this will be reviewed.

Secondary schools and colleges should also retain a small on-site testing facility until further notice in case your child is unable to test themselves at home.

There is no need for primary age pupils (those in year 6 and below) to test over the summer period. They will be offered the 2 tests at the beginning of the autumn term when they start at their secondary school as a new year 7. Schools may choose, however, to start testing year 6 pupils earlier, including in summer schools, depending on their local circumstances.

We recognise that there will be a wide range of challenges in delivering effective testing to children with SEND. We have developed specific guidance for testing in specialist settings to fully consider their needs and the flexibilities which may be required.

Positive rapid lateral flow test results

Anyone with a positive test result will need to:

- self-isolate in line with the stay at home guidance (if they test positive at school, you should arrange for them to be collected)
- book a further test (a lab-based polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test) to confirm the result, whether the test was done at home, school or college

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

If the PCR test is taken within the 2 days following the positive LFD result, and is negative, it overrides the self-test LFD test and your child can return to nursery, childminders, school or college, as long as they don't have COVID-19 symptoms.

If you have any questions about the asymptomatic testing programme, please speak to your school or college.

From Step 4 your nursery, school or college will no longer trace close contacts. Close contacts will still be identified via NHS Test and Trace. As with positive cases in any other setting, NHS Test and Trace will work with the positive case to identify close contacts. This is likely to be a small number of individuals who would be most at risk of contracting COVID-19 due to the nature of the close contact.

Until Step 4, you may still be contacted by your nursery, school or college for contact tracing.

If you suspect your child has coronavirus or has a positive test

Do not send your child to their nursery, childminder, school, college or to an entry test for a selective school if:

- they are showing one or more coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms
- they have had a positive test result
- there are other reasons requiring them to stay at home, for example, they are required to quarantine

You should follow public health advice on when to self-isolate and what to do.

If you insist on your child attending nursery, school, or college when they have symptoms, they can take the decision to refuse your child if, in their reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect other pupils and staff from possible infection with COVID-19. Their decision would need to be carefully considered in light of all the circumstances and current public health advice.

Financial support to care for a child who is self-isolating

You may be eligible for a one-off Test and Trace Support Payment of £500 from your local authority if your child has been advised to self-isolate by their education or childcare setting (even where they have not been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace).

To be eligible, you must be either:

- the parent or carer of a child that is aged 15 and under
- the parent or carer of a young person aged 16 to 25 with an education health and care plan

You also need to:

- be on a low income
- be unable to work from home
- be taking time off work to care for a child who is self-isolating
- be living in England
- meet the eligibility criteria

You do not require an NHS Test and Trace Account ID number in order to claim.

Further information on claiming financial support under the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme is available.

Ask your nursery, childminder or school to provide you with a letter, detailing your child's name and the dates of their isolation period. You will need to use this letter as supporting evidence as part of your application. You will not be able to apply for financial support without this letter.

When you apply to the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme your local authority will contact your child's nursery, childminder or school to verify the information you've supplied. This includes your child's:

- name
- age
- dates of self-isolation

This is a standard check against fraudulent claims, and may take place before or after a payment is made.

Assessments, awards and results

Assessments in primary schools

We are planning for a full programme of primary assessments to take place in the 2021 to 2022 academic year. This will include the introduction of the statutory Reception Baseline Assessment and Multiplication Tables Check.

We will confirm full details for 2021 to 2022 primary assessments in due course.

GCSEs and A levels

Students will receive their AS and A level results on 10 August, and GCSE results on 12 August. Results for relevant VTQs that are linked to progression to Further or Higher Education will also be issued to students on or before these dates.

If a student believes there has been an error with their grade, an appeals system will be in place as a safety net for exceptional circumstances. Read the appeals guidance for students to find out more about the process for appealing a grade this summer, and to help decide whether appealing is the right approach for your child.

Vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs)

From April onwards, different approaches have been taken for awarding VTQs in 2021.

VTQs most similar to GCSE, AS and A levels that are used for progression to further or higher education

Results will be awarded using similar arrangements to GCSEs and AS or A levels. This will apply to many VTQs approved for performance tables including:

- many BTECs
- Cambridge Nationals and Technicals
- T Level core assessments

VTQs used to enter directly into employment

Exams or assessments will continue where they are critical to demonstrate occupational or professional competence and can be delivered in line with public health measures.

Where the assessment cannot take place safely, it will be delayed.

Other qualifications that are used to progress to FE or employment such as Functional Skills qualifications and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)

Exams and assessment for these will continue in line with public health measures, alternative arrangements will be available for those who cannot access the assessments.

Ofqual published its summer 2021 qualification explainer tool on 24 March, which shows what approach will be taken for individual qualifications. Students can search for their specific qualification to see how it will be assessed.

Exams and assessments for the next academic year

It is the government's intention that exams will go ahead in summer 2022. Exams and assessments for vocational and technical qualifications will take place, in line with the latest PHE guidelines, throughout the next academic year.

Education Recovery

We have announced a number of programmes and activities to support children and young people to make up their learning as a result of the pandemic.

Contact your child's school or college to find out more about the support that is available.

Elective home education

If you are considering home education due to concerns around safety, you can discuss your concerns with your school, to see what safety measures have been put in place. If you would like to send your child back to school again, find out how to apply for a school place.

Schools are not required to provide any support to parents who have withdrawn their child for elective home education. Local authorities can provide support and guidance to families who elect to home educate but this is discretionary.

For further information please refer to the guidance on elective home education.

Holidays and travel abroad

You should plan your holidays within school and college holidays as usual. Avoid seeking permission to take your children out of school or college during term time. You should make sure any travel is in line with national travel guidance.

Keep in mind that you and your children may need to self-isolate when you return from a trip overseas. Any self-isolation should also fall within the school or college holidays.

Where your child is abroad and unable to return, local authorities and schools should continue to work with you to understand your circumstances and your plans to return. They should encourage you to return where you are able and it is safe. A pupil's name can only lawfully be deleted from the admission register on the grounds prescribed in regulation 8 of the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 as amended.

Where able, schools should provide remote education for pupils unable to return from abroad due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, for the period they are abroad.

All pupils travelling to England should adhere to government travel advice. You should plan for any required quarantine of self-isolation to avoid any impact on your child's education.
The red / amber / green classification of countries can be changed at any time and at short notice and you will need to respond to the latest rules on international travel, even if you have already left the UK, while also minimising the impact on your child's education.

Boarding and residential schools and colleges

You will need to confirm if you or your child can travel to the UK under the current rules if they need to travel from abroad to return to boarding school. Your school or college will explain the rules to you.

Your child should not travel if the school has not confirmed that it has arrangements in place that allow for transport, quarantine accommodation and testing that meet the requirements in the guidance for boarding schools.

School and college food

Schools and colleges, and some nurseries, will continue to provide free meals for eligible students, including those who are at home during term time due to COVID-19.

The guidance on providing school meals during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak outlines how and when children eligible for benefits-related free school meals should be supported at home.

Mental health and wellbeing

Some children and young people may be experiencing feelings of anxiety, stress or low mood as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Support for children and parents

Encourage your child to talk to you or their teacher if they are feeling anxious or stressed.

Online resources to help you support your child with mental health and wellbeing, include:

- MindEd - a free educational resource on children and young people's mental health
- Every Mind Matters - an online tool and email journey to support everyone in taking action to look after their mental health and wellbeing
- Bereavement UK and the Childhood Bereavement Network - information and resources to support bereaved pupils, schools and staff
- the DfE blog - includes mental health resources for children, parents, carers and school staff

Public Health England's (PHE) advice and guidance for parents and professionals on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing includes actions you can take to support your child and emphasises the importance of taking 60 minutes

of daily physical activity. Youth Sport Trust and Sport England have advice and support on helping children and young people stay physically active.

NHS mental health services remain open and have digital tools to connect with people and provide ongoing support. Please use your local children and young people's mental health service when needed.

Support for children and young people

Get free, confidential support at any time by:

- texting SHOUT to 85258
- calling Childline on 0800 1111
- calling the Mix on 0808 808 4994

Find help online through:

- Young Minds - information on coronavirus (COVID-19) and mental health
- Think Ninja - a free app for 10 to 18 year olds to help build resilience and stay well
- Every Mind Matters - building resilience and supporting good mental health in young people aged 10 to 16

PHE has also launched new e-learning which can help parents and carers to support their children and young people in emergency or crisis situations.

Barnardo's See, Hear, Respond service, provides support to children, young people and their families who are not currently seeing a social worker or other agency, and who are struggling to cope with the emotional impacts of COVID-19. Use the See, Hear, Respond self-referral webpage or Freephone 0800 151 7015.

Report any safeguarding concerns you have about any child. Contact the NSPCC helpline.

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