Part of
Education, universities and childcare during coronavirus

DfE
Department
for Education

Guidance
Public health guidance to support schools from January 2021

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This update sets out the measures that should be followed for the 2021 summer term and beyond. It includes guidance on managing outbreaks and testing arrangements that form part of the system that is being introduced following the commencement of Step 3.

This guidance is for:

- school and college senior leaders
- heads of other types of exam centre offering vocational and technical qualification (VTQ) and other qualifications
- school officers and other staff involved in exam delivery
- local authorities and multi-academy trusts (MATs)

Alongside its scope of exam sessions, including:

- state-funded schools
- further education (FE), sixth form and specialist colleges
- independent training providers
- independent schools
- adult and community learning providers
- private exam centres

The term 'schools and colleges' in this guidance is used to refer to all types of exam centre.

This guidance:

- applies specifically to the conduct of exams from January 2021
- supplements and goes further than existing guidance

You should plan to introduce changes as a result of moving to Step 3 from the start of the autumn term rather than doing so during July or August. This will minimise disruption to exams and assessments old taking place over summer 2021.

This guidance describes the measures and actions that schools, colleges and other providers should take to minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19. You should also read:

- guidance on schools and colleges' responsibilities for the weeks from January 2021
- guidance for households with possible or confirmed COVID-19 infections
- guidance for schools during the COVID-19 pandemic
- guidance for FE colleges and providers during the COVID-19 pandemic
- guidance on managing attendance and absence in schools and colleges
- safe working in education, childcare and children's social care settings, including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE)

Summer term 2021 exam contingencies

When exams will run

Written exams are scheduled to take place from February with full or partial. These include GCSE, AS and A level, extended project qualification (EPQ), GCSEs and AS or A levels for the primary purpose of progression to FE or higher education (HE), where the primary method of assessment is written exams.

Exams or assessments that enable a student to demonstrate proficiency or competence in a vocational or technical area, or to show that a student's learning has made practical assessment of performance or written assessment of understanding, knowledge, or both. These will include those occupational and professional assessments, such as those for the hair and beauty industry, where students are required to complete an apprenticeship, as well as other qualifications, including those linked to the performing arts.

For students who are ready to take them, these can continue to proceed with protective mitigations in place, to ensure they can continue to progress into further education, employment or training.

Other assessments or exams that are available on demand such as the Functional Skills qualifications, or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) should continue to be made available to students who are ready to take them, in line with existing and with PHE measures, including testing, for students who are ready to take them.

Where examinations and assessments are cancelled, awarding organisations are putting in place arrangements to ensure that students are not disadvantaged, and set out in the response to the consultation. These arrangements can be found on the individual awarding organisations' websites.

Preparing for and running exams

COVID-19 prevention measures

We have worked closely with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and Public Health England (PHE) to develop this guidance. Based on the recent PHE data, the risks to education staff are similar to those for most other occupations.

Implementing the system of controls creates a safer environment for pupils and staff. It will reduce the transmission of COVID-19 in education settings, and it will reduce the virus in the wider, even with the current exam schedule. Working with PHE, we continue to review the measures, which are informed by the latest scientific evidence and advice from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies.

We must comply with health and safety law and put in place proportionate measures. To meet these obligations, you must:

- review your health and safety risk assessments in light of the refreshed guidance
- make any necessary changes to your control measures applying the system of controls

Following the system of controls as set out in this guidance, will effectively reduce risks in your setting and create an inherently safer environment.

These measures are continually reviewed in partnership with health experts.

Prevention

You should:

1. Ensure good hygiene for everyone.
2. Maintain appropriate cleaning regimes.
3. Keep environments well ventilated.
4. Follow public health advice on testing, self-isolation and managing confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Stepping measures up and down

You should have outlined management plans outlining how you would operate if there were a local lockdown, or if a local area in which your school or college is located was placed into enhanced or tier 2 restrictions or tier 3 restrictions. Decisions to schools and colleges should one ever be considered on a last resort, lead to the closure of schools, colleges or groups or specific year groups, or bubbles.

General government lockdowns, or local stay at home or shelter in place orders, are not expected.

Local lockdowns may affect some groups of particular concern as enhanced response packages to help limit transmission.

If you have several confirmed cases within 14 days, you may have an outbreak.

You should follow the advice of your local authority, who will work with your local health protection team where necessary and advice if any additional action is required. Local authorities will be in touch with schools and colleges in their area if there is any DfE guidance issued on GMS-CMS-BMT and subsequently, and advise the action to take in response to a positive case.

The contingency framework describes the provision of managing local outbreaks of COVID-19 in education and childcare settings.

Engagement with NHS Test and Trace

You should make sure that you understand the NHS Test and Trace process and that you lead the guidance on how schools should respond to a positive case.

For exams and assessments which are continuing to take place during the 2021 summer term, we expect you to continue to fulfill your contact tracing responsibilities.

Where a case is identified, the designated staffer/member should initiate contact tracing with others. There is no requirement that a staff member should be the one to advise the dog.

You may receive support through the dedicated advice service introduced by PHE. Contact tracing for GMS-CMS-BMT will be supported by PHE and NHS Test and Trace.

From the start of the autumn term cross contacts will be identified by NHS Test and Trace. Anti-positive cases may also after setting. NHS Test and Trace will advise on positive cases to identify close contacts. Contacts in schools and colleges will only be required to self-isolate if they are identified as a close contact of a positive individual during a colour contact. This is likely to be a small number of contacts, and would be most at risk of contracting COVID-19 due to the nature of the close contact. Contacts will be identified by NHS Test and Trace, and they will be advised to self-isolate, currently happens in regards to other infectious diseases.

Settings will continue to have a role in working with health protection teams in the case of a local lockdown, or if a local area in which your school or college is located is placed into enhanced or tier 2 restrictions or tier 3 restrictions, or if a local lockdown is put in place centre. They should stay at home and under a tier1 through the routine NHS testing programme. Tests will be provided immediately and will isolate. They should not wait to take one of the seven days.

Tests can be booked online through the NHS website or ordered by telephone via NHS 119 for those without access to the internet.

Arrival and departure of candidates

Candidates should wait their DfE-issued guidance before planning their journey to their exam, especially where the exam is being held in a location to which the candidate does not normally travel.

For exams and assessments which are continuing to take place during the 2021 summer term, the following steps are recommended:

- as candidates arrive, follow the scheduled start time of exams, you will need to keep a record of the order in which candidates arrive
- you should identify a location where candidates will wait before the exam, and support social distancing between group bubbles, as well as between and off-site exam venues
- you should also make sure that all candidates who arrive late for the exam follow social distancing measures

Where a school or college has more than a place to manage safely candidates leaving the exam room and after participating in exams may front of different times, or bubbles, this, you will need to take into account any candidates who need extra time in exams.

These considerations apply whether the exams are taking place, whether in a school or college, or in other venues, such as sports halls, or other venues, such as sports halls, taking exams. Where alternative locations are used to run exams, you will need to consider how candidates will arrive at and depart from the exam venue, and how to manage arrival and departure, so they and their parents, including from other members of the public, may be present in entry bubbles.

For exams and assessments taking place from the start of the autumn term along with further easing of measures in the wet of society from Step 4, we will relax measures to minimise contacts across the city.

We know that keeping pupils and students in distinct, separate groups ('bubbles') in schools and colleges has been a key measure to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Therefore, from Step 4 we will no longer recommend that pupils or students in distinct, separate groups ('bubbles').

Bubbles are not required in exam spaces, this means that schools and colleges no longer need to make alternative arrangements to avoid mixing of pupils or students and sowing exams.

Control government may offer local authorities an enhanced response package to areas of particular concern to help limit increases in transmission. In areas offered an enhanced response package, schools and colleges might may recommend additional measures in any education and childcare settings.

Cleaning

You should put in place and maintain an appropriate cleaning schedule. This could include regular cleaning of areas and equipment (for example twice per day), with a particular focus on frequently touched surfaces.

PHE has published guidance on the cleaning of non-healthcare settings.

Set up of the exam room

For exams and assessments which are continuing to take place during the 2021 summer term, the following steps should be taken:

Because of the pace and scale of assessments, not all external assessments will use an exam room.

Where an exam room is used, desks should not be set up face to face. All candidates should be seated 2 metres apart from each other. These candidates can be seated in exam rooms.

Each setting will offer in its layout and locals. There is, therefore, no centrally set that can be provided in this guidance on the number of candidates who can sit in a room. Schools and colleges should use their knowledge of their own exam rooms and their knowledge of the number of candidates who can be seated in a room together and adapt the layout accordingly.

The importance of adequate ventilation should be carefully considered when selecting the room for exams. Good ventilation is important and you should maximise this wherever possible. Ventilation is a key control measure for reducing the risk of airborne (aerosol) and droplet transmission of COVID-19 which is exacerbated by a lack of fresh air. Advice, read the Health and Safety Executive guidance on air conditioning and ventilation during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Masks do not need to be worn by students.

Invigilators may wear masks and clear visors between desks, but there must be no masks in the room where an invigilator is seated and 2 metres from the nearest desk and see all the candidates in the room.

For exams and assessments taking place from the start of the autumn term, these additional steps are no longer necessary but you should continue to adhere to the infection prevention measures detailed earlier in this guidance.

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Face coverings

From Step 4, the government is removing the requirement to wear face coverings in law, but exports and recommends that they are worn in enclosed and crowded spaces where individuals may come into contact with people they do not normally meet. This guidance sets out the exceptions to the face covering requirement.

From Step 4, face coverings will no longer be advised for pupils, students, staff and visitors either in classrooms or in communal areas. You can find more information on face coverings, when to wear one, exemptions and how to make one online.

If you have an outbreak in your school, a director of public health might advise you that face coverings should be worn in communal areas indoors by students, visitors, staff and visitors, unless exempt. Director of public health might advise you that face coverings should be worn in classrooms.

Candidates and invigilators do not need to wear face coverings during exams where social distancing can be maintained, but they may wear them if they wish to.

In circumstances where face coverings are recommended

In circumstances where face coverings are recommended, transparent face coverings, or face coverings with a transparent window, should be worn if a person who lip reads or finds expression to communicate, can see the mouth. Transparent face coverings are effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19. However, the evidence to support this is not as strong as for other types of face covering. Transparent face coverings are also expected flat to cover the nose and mouth and be made with a breathable material capable of filtering airborne particles.

The main benefit from a transparent face covering is that they can accommodate, for example, lip reading, and facial expressions for the 5-0 ability of the population, but this should be considered alongside the comfort and breathability of a face covering and the practicalities, and how long and how the face covering is to be worn for the team of staff.

Face visors or shields can be worn by those exempt from wearing a face covering but they are not an equivalent alternative in terms of source control or protection. They may protect the wearer against droplet spread in specific circumstances but are not a substitute for face coverings in the wider sense. Face coverings are not to be used without an additional face covering. They should only be used in addition to risk assessment for the specific situation and should always be cleaned appropriately.

The use of face coverings may have a potential impact on those who rely on visual signals for communication. Those who communicate with or provide support to these people, should be given any recommendations to wear face coverings in educational and childcare settings.

You have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils to support them to participate in education. Face coverings may pose a barrier to communication for students and parents the type of reasonable adjustment that may be required to support an individual.

No pupil or student should be denied education on the grounds of whether they are, or are not, wearing a face covering.

Recognising that TT learning environments are diverse and can include educational and childcare settings, and that some of them have to be flexible in their use, the requirement use of face coverings by students and staff, it is appropriate for their particular circumstances, to be kept under review and to be reviewed in the light of any relevant advice regarding settings where it is not effective if a workplace environment, such as a training kitchen. If your education setting operates commercial training environments, you should follow the guidance for hospitality settings, and for those in FE and HE establishments, they must comply with relevant sector guidance in working safely during COVID-19 and the current restriction guidance.

Invigilators

Your school or college will have protocols in place for visitors and temporary staff. Invigilators should follow your protocols. Invigilators should be able to maintain social contact and maintain as much distance as possible from other staff. Invigilator should also supply one pedagogic staffer in the school workforce section of the actions for schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Invigilators do not need to wear gloves when collecting exam scripts from candidates and handing them over. Hand sanitiser should be available for invigilators and candidates after handling exam papers. The usual social distancing principles should be followed, testing of other people contacted with students, for example exam invigilators.

Maintaining distance between staff and candidates

For exams and assessments which are continuing to take place during the 2021 summer term, the following steps should be taken:

You should advise invigilators and other staff to stand alongside candidates when interacting with them, rather than face to face.

For all encounters, such as when collect, readers or other individuals are supporting candidates, staff should maintain 2 metres distance where possible. For example using the exam room, or other venue, such as a sports hall, or other venue, such as a sports hall, should wear a face covering, avoid close face to face contact and minimise time spent within 1 metre of others. These arrangements may not be possible when working with candidates who require support with their access arrangements, including educational support, most of which are provided on normal during exams.

If candidates need to wear the exam room and need to be accompanied, staff should follow the guidance on social distancing. Staff should also follow the guidance on mitigating measures, such as standing alongside the candidate and not face to face.

For exams and assessments taking place from the start of the 2021 autumn term, these additional steps are no longer necessary but you should continue to adhere to the infection prevention measures detailed earlier in this guidance.

School and college action

Schools and colleges could take self-action when they become aware that an exam candidate has tested positive for COVID-19. They must follow the guidance outlined in actions for schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidance explains that schools and colleges should inform their local authority (LA) Public Health England (PHE) and delivering the NHS Business Services Authority. You can reached by calling the DfE hotline on 0800 046 8687 and selecting option 1 for advice on the action to take in response to a positive case.

Candidates with symptoms or who have tested positive

Candidate must not attend the exam centre if they have COVID-19 symptoms or have tested positive in the last 10 days. The most common symptoms of COVID19 are the recent onset of either a:

- new continuous cough
- high temperature
- loss of, or change in, their normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)

Candidates should stay at home and arrange to have a test if they have COVID-19 symptoms.

Candidates will be able to attend exams during their period of isolation, if they do so without a positive test, a candidate with COVID-19 symptoms would isolate immediately and book a test, or arrange a test, within counting from the day after the individual tested positive or first had symptoms.

Where candidates are isolating in line with public health advice

Where a member of the candidate's household or someone they have been in close contact with has tested positive for COVID-19, the candidate should self-isolate immediately for 10 days counting from the day after the individual tested positive. They should attend exams during that period. Candidates who are defined as close contacts but are not required to self-isolate, should follow the guidance given when they attend exams. The programme to determine if they are defined as close contacts.

This also applies if the candidate is asked to isolate following contact with someone with the virus. Candidates cannot attend exams during their period of isolation.

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 or notified by the NHS COVID app.

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. In most circumstances the individual should not attend exams until they have had a negative result.

Schools and colleges should contact the appropriate organisation on the candidate's behalf if they are unable to attend exams.

Candidate in quarantine following entry into Foreign travel must not attend exams during their period of quarantine. Families should follow case on arrival in England following international travel.

Where a candidate has a negative test

Candidates should follow guidance about COVID-19 test result when they receive a negative test.

A candidate must self-isolate and not attend exams if their household has a confirmed case.

These candidates who are part of a formal social bending programme and test negative should follow the guidance given within the programme to determine if they can attend exams.

Candidates who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19

Candidates who are clinically extremely vulnerable should refer to the specific guidance for the clinically extremely vulnerable.

Reasonable adjustments

Schools and colleges must, under their Equality Act obligations, continue to make reasonable adjustments for candidates with special educational needs and disabilities.

Each VTQ awarding organisation will have their own policy on reasonable adjustments, which we expect schools and colleges to be familiar with.

Schools and colleges should contact their awarding organisation to ensure that the access arrangement is still appropriate, proportionate and acceptable.

In the event of a candidate's circumstances changing, the SENCo may (where required) need to produce evidence and process an application.

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