Part of
Education and childcare during coronavirus

Department for Education

Guidance

How schools can plan for tier 2 local restrictions

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All pupils, in all year groups, will return to school full time from the beginning of the autumn term. Returning to school is vital for children's education and for their wellbeing. Time out of school is detrimental for children's cognitive and academic development, particularly for disadvantaged children. This impact can affect both current levels of education and children's future ability to learn, and therefore we need to ensure all pupils can return to school for the autumn term.

We have, however, asked that every school plans for the possibility of local restrictions and how they will ensure continuity of education in exceptional circumstances where there is some level of restriction applied to education or childcare in a local area. The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has recently updated their Contain framework to include an overview of the tiers of intervention for educational settings when managing local outbreaks and implementing restrictions.

In local areas where restrictions have been implemented for certain sectors (from national direction), we anticipate that education and childcare will usually remain fully open to all, with the additional requirement that face coverings should be worn by staff and students in schools and colleges, from year 7 and above, outside classrooms when moving around communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained (tier 1 onwards). Being in nursery, school and college is vital for children and young people's education and wellbeing. It is also important that parents and carers are able to return to work and having access to childcare will allow that to happen.

There may be exceptional circumstances in which some level of restriction to education or childcare is required in a local area. In those situations, restrictions will be implemented in a phased manner, the key aim being to retain as much face-to-face education and access to childcare as possible. These 'tiers of restriction' will ensure that extensive limitations on education and childcare are a last resort, and that priority is given to vulnerable children and children of critical workers for face-to-face provision in all cases.

Schools should, however, base their contingency planning on the tiers. Tier 1 involves remaining fully open, as the government has been clear that ensuring schools and educational settings remain open should be prioritised over other areas when restrictions are considered. Tier 2 asks secondary schools to adopt a rota system and further education (FE) colleges to limit on-site attendance, whilst all other settings, including alternative provision (AP) and special schools, remain fully open. Tier 3 requires secondary schools and FE colleges to limit on-site attendance to just vulnerable children and young people, the children of critical workers and selected year groups, other settings remain fully open. In the event of tier 3 local restrictions being implemented the Department for Education will issue operational guidance for the affected area that will confirm which year groups should be prioritised. Tier 4 goes further to limit attendance to just vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers at all settings, excluding AP and special schools. Where there are no local restrictions in place, education provision should continue to remain fully open to all, and these tiers do not apply.

Whilst we recognise that tiers 2, 3 and 4 all require planning to operationalise and will present challenges for parents, pupils, and staff, the expectations for tiers 3 and 4 should be familiar from the summer term. Therefore, this guidance is focused on tier 2 and is intended to help school leaders plan to implement a rota system.

This guidance is based on general principles that are likely to apply where the tier 2 rota system is required, and has been developed with input from school leaders, unions and sector bodies and in consultation with Public Health England (PHE) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Where upper tier local authorities believe that there is a case for limiting attendance at education settings, this will be rapidly escalated and decisions taken by the Secretary of State for Education. In most cases, we anticipate that provision will be able to continue to allow attendance for all (tier 1) even when other restrictions are implemented in a local area. In the event of local restrictions at tiers 2, 3 or 4 being required, the Department for Education will publish further operational guidance for education settings in the affected area, in order to notify them of restrictions and support them to implement their contingency plans in their local context.

Overview

In the event an area moves to tier 2 intervention, early years providers, primary schools, AP settings and special schools should continue to allow all children to attend full-time. Mainstream secondary schools (including sixth forms), as well as secondary year groups in middle/upper schools, all-through schools and boarding schools, should operate a rota system. Full-time on-site provision should remain available for all vulnerable children and young people, who are expected to attend full-time, and for the children of critical workers who require this.

We recognise that staff, parents and pupils in these areas may be concerned about attendance at school during local restrictions. Whilst additional protective measures beyond the existing system of controls and a rota system are not required, school leaders should communicate how these protective measures are being reviewed as part of their workplace risk assessment during this period to minimise the risks for everyone. Schools should consider local guidance from the relevant director of public health and local authority leaders when reviewing their workplace risk assessments. Tier 2 will only be adopted where it is necessary and safe to do so, and is primarily a means of reducing risks for the wider community even further by limiting contacts and breaking transmission chains in secondary schools.

In circumstances where full attendance is possible, schools should not operate a rota system. It is stressed that this should only be done for secondary year groups in areas required to move to tier 2. As with all decisions relating to education settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, there is a balance to be struck between public health risks relating to the virus and the impact of time out of school on children and young people's education, wellbeing and development. We have now increased our understanding of the virus and schools have had time to put in place protective measures to reduce the risks of transmission. This is why we think it is appropriate to operate a rota system for secondary year groups only where there are local circumstances that prevent all schools remaining fully open. Whilst a rota system is preferable to long periods of full-time remote education it is of course not a substitute for full attendance, which will serve pupils best.

The reason for adopting a rota system for secondary year groups only is based on clear public health advice about the transmission risks posed by different age groups. There is evidence that primary schools and younger children play a limited role in transmission. Older children in secondary age groups are generally more likely to have a higher number of contacts outside school and pose a greater transmission risk than younger children, both within schools and to the wider community. Importantly, the risk to children themselves of becoming severely ill from coronavirus (COVID-19) is very low.

In a tier 2 scenario, limiting overall numbers on-site will help to reduce the number of contacts children and young people have during a typical school day and using a rota system is likely to enable secondary schools and other mainstream schools with secondary year groups to implement their existing protective measures even more effectively. For example, whilst we do not expect group sizes themselves to be smaller, having fewer groups within a school is likely to reduce the chance of 'bubbles' mixing during the school day. Most importantly a rota system serves to break transmission chains, by allowing enough time at home for symptoms to present and pupils to self-isolate and avoid spreading the virus to others at the school. This is an important way to reduce the risk to pupils, families and the workforce, both in these settings and in the local area.

Whilst AP settings and special schools include older children too these settings are generally smaller than mainstream secondary schools with limited pupil numbers and therefore, with protective measures in place, are lower risk. There are also educational and wellbeing benefits informing this approach, given that there may be increased risks from time out of settings for these children and young people. Time spent out of education also has a more detrimental impact on younger children in primary year groups than those in secondary year groups as they are less able to engage in remote education effectively.

Rota system

A rota system will limit the number of pupils on-site at any one time and break transmission chains within schools when scheduled time at home is long enough for the onset of symptoms to be detected before returning.

Schools should ideally operate a rota system that means pupils spend 2 weeks on-site followed by 2 weeks at home (so, 10 days on-site, with a weekend in between, followed by 16 days at home, or in their boarding house for pupils in residential settings who cannot return home). This allows more than sufficient time for symptoms to present themselves and for pupils to self-isolate and avoid transmitting the virus to others.

However, schools can choose to operate a one week rota (so, 5 days on-site, followed by 9 days at home) if this is necessary for the effective delivery of the curriculum. This should still allow time for symptoms to present in the vast majority of cases. The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies' (SAGE) modelling of rota systems from the summer term has shown only a limited difference in the effectiveness of breaking transmission chains between one and 2 week rotas.

Rota lengths should not be any shorter than one week as this does not provide sufficient time off-site for symptoms to present. Schools should plan to utilise time over the weekend effectively in order to prepare for a different rota group at the start of the week.

It is for schools to decide how best to split their pupils into 2 distinct rota groups, but they may wish to consider the following:

- rota groups should consist of 'bubbles' that avoid mixing with one another, in line with the full opening guidance
- placing pupils likely to come into contact outside of school in the same rota group to avoid mixing, where practical. For example, those from the same household or local area, or for boarding schools - those in the same boarding house. However, as with 'bubbles' and maintaining distance, different rota groups are not an 'all-or-nothing' option and will still bring benefits even if implemented partially
- different rota groups can use the same classrooms and facilities. Schools should ensure cleaning of frequently touched surfaces takes place in between use by different rota groups, in addition to enhanced cleaning arrangements already in place. This should be done using standard products such as detergent and bleach, in line with existing advice on cleaning. It is not necessary to conduct cleaning beyond this with other products or equipment between different rota groups. Shared resources should also be cleaned frequently but to note, for non-plastics 48 hours (over a weekend) is sufficient time to leave between use by different groups
- vulnerable children and young people and children of critical workers should be integrated into rota groups, even if they continue to remain on-site during weeks their rota group is scheduled to be at home (see 'Full time provision for priority groups' section)

Whilst a rota system aims to limit the total number of pupils on-site at any one time, we recognise that numbers on-site will be higher where there is a sizeable cohort of vulnerable children and young people and children of critical workers. It is important that full-time provision is available for these pupils and there is no fixed percentage of pupils on-site that schools should not exceed.

For middle schools with some primary year groups and some secondary year groups, the primary year groups should be attending full-time during a tier 2 intervention and avoid mixing with the secondary year groups operating a rota system.

System of controls

In all respects, the system of controls outlined in the full opening guidance should continue to be applied when implementing a rota system. Schools should update their risk assessment, in consultation with staff and unions, to reflect their rota system and review implementation of control measures in light of this.

With reduced numbers on-site, staff and pupils are more likely to be able to maintain distance from each other more of the time. This control remains the same as explained in the full opening guidance: ideally adults should maintain 2 metre distance from each other and from children - and where this is not possible avoiding close face to face contact and minimising time spent within 1 metre of others - older pupils should be supported to do the same. Schools should consider if it is possible to implement further measures within the classroom and elsewhere to make maintaining distance easier, for example having groups spread out across the school site or further staggering break and lunch times and start and finish times.

In addition, in all areas of national government intervention, at schools where students in year 7 and above are educated, face coverings should be worn by adults and pupils when moving around the premises, outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained - see guidance on face coverings in education.

Limiting risks at home

It is important that pupils continue to adhere to public health advice while they are scheduled to be at home. They should also not return to on-site provision if they are self-isolating, even if their rota group is scheduled to be at school that week. During time at home, parents and carers should still inform the school as soon as possible if a pupil tests positive for coronavirus (COVID-19). Local health protection teams will advise on implications for the school and if others need to self-isolate. This will in part depend on how long it has been since the pupil was on-site.

Schools should support pupils to understand and adhere to wider local restrictions and guidance issued by the relevant director of public health or local authority in order to protect themselves and others from coronavirus (COVID-19). This is particularly important given that most pupils will be spending half of their time at home.

Full-time provision for priority groups

Children of critical workers and vulnerable children and young people will be expected to be able to access full-time on-site provision at all tiers of restriction.

Critical workers include those who work in key sectors as specified in guidance on critical workers who can access schools or education settings.

Vulnerable children and young people include those who:

- are assessed as being in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, including children and young people who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child
- have an education, health and care (EHC) plan
- have been identified as otherwise vulnerable by educational providers or local authorities (including children's social care services), and who could therefore benefit from continued full-time attendance. This might include children and young people on the edge of receiving support from children's social care services, adopted children, those at risk of becoming NEET ('not in employment, education or training'), those living in temporary accommodation, those who are young carers, those who may have difficulty engaging with remote education at home (for example due to a lack of devices or quiet space to study) and others at the school's and local authority's discretion

It is our expectation that schools will take steps to ensure that all vulnerable children and young people are able to access full-time on-site provision, strongly encouraging their continued full-time attendance. All instances of non-attendance from vulnerable children and young people should be followed up by the school. 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 their concerns using supporting guidance, considering the child's circumstances and their best interests
- work together with the local authority, social worker and other relevant partners to strongly 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

Schools should make every effort to prioritise and encourage vulnerable children's full-time attendance. However if the parent of a vulnerable child wishes for their child to be absent from school during their rota group's scheduled time at home, and the above measures have been followed in conjunction with the local authority and social worker (where applicable), the parent should let the school know in advance that they are making an application for a leave of absence. Schools should grant this leave of absence. It should only be granted for the weeks their rota group is scheduled to be at home.

Where critical worker parents and carers notify a school that their child requires full-time on-site provision during the weeks that their rota group is scheduled to be at home, the school should make this available. However, as with vulnerable children, parents of critical workers should then let their school know if their child will not be attending during this period, and schools should grant a leave of absence to all critical workers' children.

Where schools are operating a rota system, pupils in both these priority groups should be integrated into rota groups and attend on-site provision in the same way as other pupils from their rota group during their scheduled time on-site. During the period the rest of their rota group is at home, children in these priority groups should avoid mixing with the other rota group on-site. They should also maintain distance where possible between one another as they are likely to be from different 'bubbles' within their own rota group. Particular attention should be given to ensuring thorough and frequent handwashing and the cleaning of frequently touched surfaces more often. In all situations, schools should carry out a risk assessment and ensure the system of controls is effectively implemented (see 'System of controls' section).

We are aware that operating a rota system, as well as full-time on-site provision for these priority groups, will have both space and staffing implications for schools. Where schools have concerns about operationalising this rota system, they should discuss these with the relevant local authority and Department for Education's regional teams to determine available solutions based on the needs of the children and young people concerned.

Attendance

All pupils must attend during their rota group's scheduled time on-site. Pupils should be recorded using the usual school attendance codes, set out in school attendance guidance. Further detail on recording attendance will be provided in operational guidance where tier 2 is to be implemented.

It is unlikely that formal shielding will be reintroduced in a local area and clinically extremely vulnerable children and young people should be able to attend school during local restrictions. However, in the event that shielding is resumed within the local area, clinically extremely vulnerable children will not be required to attend school (for how this relates to staff, see 'Workforce' section).

Schools should bear in mind the potential concerns of pupils, parents and households who may be reluctant or anxious about attendance at school during local restrictions and provide reassurance about the measures they are putting in place to reduce the risk in school. This may include:

- pupils who have themselves been shielding previously but have been advised that this is no longer necessary
- those living in households where someone is clinically vulnerable
- or those concerned about the comparatively increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19), including those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds or who have certain conditions such as obesity and diabetes

Remote education

When teaching pupils remotely as part of a rota system, we expect schools to have considered what material is most appropriate for on-site and remote education.

When considering remote education in a rota system specifically, schools should:

- set assignments so that pupils have meaningful and ambitious work each day in a number of different subjects, including new material - planning a programme that is of equivalent length to the core teaching pupils would receive in school
- teach a planned and well-sequenced curriculum so that knowledge and skills are built incrementally, with a good level of clarity about what is intended to be taught and practised in each subject
- gauge how well pupils are progressing through the curriculum using questions and other suitable tasks, and set a clear expectation on how regularly teachers will check work
- enable teachers to adjust the pace or difficulty of what is being taught in response to questions or assessments including, where necessary, revising material or simplifying explanations to ensure pupils' understanding

These expectations only apply to secondary year groups operating a rota system at tier 2. The full opening guidance sets out expectations for remote education in all other scenarios, including where pupils are self-isolating and other tiers of restrictions.

The department will continue to support the provision of remote education and a full overview of this support is available in the 'Remote education support' section of the full opening guidance. The Oak National Academy will continue to provide free online video lessons during the 2020 to 2021 academic year across a broad range of subjects, for every year group from reception through to year 11.

Pupils who will be unable to engage effectively in remote education at home due, for example, to a lack of devices or quiet space to study, might be considered vulnerable (at local discretion) and therefore able to attend full-time on-site provision.

Free school meals

Where children on benefits-related free school meals are not attending on-site during scheduled time at home, schools should continue to provide free school meals. They should work with suppliers to prepare meals or food parcels to be collected by, or delivered to, eligible children during their time at home. Any parcels should be distributed in line with guidance on social distancing and local restrictions and should meet the school food standards.

We have been working with the school food industry to explore the best arrangements where food parcels are needed and will update our advice on the provision of school meals during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak to reflect this shortly.

Workforce

Teachers and staff can operate across the different rota groups, as well as different 'bubbles'. Schools should support staff to keep their distance from pupils and other staff as much as they can, ideally 2 metres from other adults and where this is not possible avoiding close face to face contact and minimising time spent within 1 metre of others, as set out in the full opening guidance.

In line with the position for secondary pupils, in all areas of national government intervention, face coverings should be worn by staff in corridors and communal areas where social distancing is difficult to maintain. As in the general approach, it will not usually be necessary to wear face coverings in the classroom, where protective measures already mean the risks are lower, and they may inhibit teaching and education.

In most cases we expect existing guidance on the school workforce to apply in the event of most local restrictions. This includes current advice that clinically extremely vulnerable staff can continue to attend their workplace, where schools have implemented the system of controls in our school full opening guidance and have updated their workplace risk assessment, taking into account any new risks arising from local restrictions. Schools should also consider advice from the relevant director of public health and/or their local authority to local employers in relation to staff attending workplaces when updating their risk assessment. It is unlikely that shielding will be reintroduced in a local area but, if this is the case, schools should support staff to follow relevant advice which will be provided and we would not expect clinically extremely vulnerable staff to continue working on-site.

School leaders should continue to explain to staff the measures the school is putting in place to reduce risks, including how these protective measures have been reviewed as part of an updated workplace risk assessment. Schools should also consider if a rota system can offer more opportunities for staff to work at home, given reduced numbers of pupils on-site and the use of remote education for pupils scheduled to be at home.

Governing boards and school leaders should have regard to staff (including the headteacher's) work-life balance and wellbeing. This includes considering how best to balance the demands of on-site teaching and support for remote education, which should be done within the terms and conditions of teachers' employment. All schools will need to consider their staff working patterns in determining their rota schedule. For residential schools this will include consideration of staff that live on and off-site.

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