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Schools and childcare settings: return in January 2021

Published 17 December 2020 Contents Early years Primary schools Schools with secondaryage pupils

Since the start of the academic year, the continuing efforts of leaders, teachers and staff across education and childcare have ensured that settings remain as safe and COVID-secure as possible. **Out-of-school activities** and wraparound childcare

To support public health efforts during the return to school in January 2021, we are offering secondary schools in England access to additional coronavirus (COVID-19) testing from the first week of January. This will help deliver the national priority of keeping as many pupils and teachers as possible in school beyond the start of term, minimising the spread of the Print this page virus and disruption caused by coronavirus (COVID-19) cases arising in education settings. Secondary-age pupils are being prioritised for testing in response to the recent high rates of coronavirus (COVID-19) infection. Primary schools will return as normal and these measures do not apply to early years providers.

All schools with secondary-age pupils (including special schools and alternative provision) will be offered the opportunity to test their pupils, reaching as many pupils as possible from the week of the 4 January. The government will encourage as many as possible to take up the offer.

In these schools with secondary-age pupils, vulnerable children, the children of critical workers and pupils in exam year groups (primarily years 11 and 13) are expected to access on-site education provision from each school's advertised first day of term and should be prioritised for testing. All other pupils should not attend that week and must be provided with remote

education until 11 January when they should return to school and resume face-to-face attendance. Pupils will not need to have had a test in order to return to school on 11 January. Throughout, all children and young people should continue to comply with

the rules set out for the tier they are in, and parents are asked to help ensure their children are following these rules. That particularly includes those related to mixing with other households when they are not at school and when they are travelling to and from educational settings. Rapidly identifying and containing any asymptomatic cases through this

testing programme will contribute to public health efforts and support the effectiveness of the regular rapid testing programme that schools with secondary-age pupils are being supported to set up and deliver once this initial testing is concluded. The coronavirus (COVID-19) asymptomatic

testing in schools and colleges guidance provides more detail. This will enable school staff to be tested weekly, as well as daily testing of both staff

and pupils who are close contacts of a positive case, to avoid the need for self-isolation.

Our approach is intended to minimise the impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19) in education beyond the start of term and to support all pupils attending education. Being in education is vital for children's development and wellbeing. Time spent out of settings is detrimental to children's learning, development and wellbeing, particularly for disadvantaged children. That is why, beyond this exceptional period, it continues to be our aim that all pupils, in all year groups, attend school full-time.

The risk to children themselves of becoming severely ill from coronavirus

(COVID-19) remains very low. For the vast majority of children, the benefits of being back in the classroom far outweigh the low risk from coronavirus (COVID-19) and schools can take action to reduce risks still further.

In relation to working in schools, while it is not possible to ensure a totally risk-free environment, there is no evidence that children transmit the disease any more than adults, and no evidence that staff in education settings are at any greater risk of fatal outcomes than many other occupations. Where something is essential for public health reasons in this guidance, as advised by Public Health England (PHE), we have said 'must'.

Early years Parents and carers can continue to access early years settings as normal from January 2021. **Primary schools** Primary schools should resume on-site provision as planned from their advertised first day of term and allow all pupils to attend as they have since

> This should involve: • full-time on-site provision from the first day of term for all vulnerable children, the children of critical workers and pupils in exam year groups (primarily years 11 and 13) as many secondary-age pupils and staff as possible being offered 2 lateral flow device tests, starting in the week commencing 4 January, prioritising staff, vulnerable children, the children of critical workers and pupils in years 11 and 13 • remote education being provided for all other pupils when they are at

the start of the school year.

during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

home, and in line with local tier restrictions

• all pupils back in school for face-to-face education on 11 January

school, they should continue to adhere to local tier restrictions.

Pupils prioritised for on-site provision should be kept in consistent bubbles

in the week commencing 4 January whilst they await test results. Outside of

All specialist settings and alternative provision schools or settings should

local authorities (including children's social care services), and who could

therefore benefit from continued full-time attendance, this might include:

children's social care services or in the process of being referred to

• those at risk of becoming NEET ('not in employment, education or

workers and pupils in years 11 and 13 in the week commencing 4 January and

provide remote education for all other pupils. Full on-site provision should

All schools should continue to undertake risk assessments and implement

coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. These measures provide a framework for

Schools delivering this programme will enable as many staff and pupils as

January. This will be done with lateral flow device tests. If the pupil's first

test is positive, they should immediately self-isolate and have this positive

take more time because they are usually processed in a laboratory). If the

test is positive, they should self-isolate and confirm this with a PCR test.

pupil's first test is negative, they should be tested again 3 days later. If this

In schools taking up this offer, as many secondary pupils as possible should

be tested during this week in advance of the serial testing and staff testing

Schools and educational trusts, supported by local authorities, will need to

provide a small team to support the work. We recommend that this includes

1 to 2 members of staff with others being either volunteers (for example

workforce costs of state-funded schools will be reimbursed. Armed forces

personnel will support directly through planning with schools and colleges.

In mainstream schools, all secondary-age pupils who are not expected to be

in school during this period, and are at home receiving remote education,

Children for whom full-time on-site provision is being provided should be

Pupils who are not attending on-site in the week commencing 4 January

coronavirus (COVID-19). We would also expect remote education to be

provided for pupils who are eligible for on-site provision from the start of

term (vulnerable children, children of critical workers and pupils in year 11

Schools should have regard to the <u>remote education expectations</u> set out in

particularly when the rapid asymptomatic testing programme first rolls out.

Schools should prioritise protecting teaching staff's time so that they can

accessing laptops and tablets, the internet and digital education platforms

to provide remote education can be found on get help with technology.

Devices are currently delivered within 48 working hours of an order being

should continue to follow the rules of the tier they are in when not in school,

placed. In the event of significantly increased levels of ordering, we may

contact schools to notify them of adjusted delivery timelines. Children

Residential providers and boarding schools

Boarding schools with secondary-age pupils are similarly encouraged to

However, in some cases, the children will already have returned to their

returning from overseas. Where the children are already in their boarding

boarding houses, as if they were still at home, while arranging for testing.

The <u>transport to school and other places of education</u> guidance remains in

Those involved in the provision of home to school or college transport must

required to uniformly apply social distancing guidelines for public transport

on dedicated school or college transport. However, distancing should still

school, particularly during the first week of term, sufficient levels of capacity

should be maintained to maximise social distancing, including through the

In accordance with advice from PHE, children and young people aged 11 and

Where children are dependent on dedicated school transport, schools and

local transport authorities may wish to consider whether there is scope to

scheduled test appointment times. Where necessary, pupils may attend on-

site provision on the day of their test, until such time as dedicated transport

is available. Where those pupils test positive, schools should follow the

Where using public transport, children should plan ahead and avoid busy

Participating schools should resume sport and physical education from 11

Children engaging in remote education at home who are eligible for a

Information on providing school meals during the coronavirus (COVID-19)

Schools should also make families aware that the government have put in

allocated to local authorities to support those in need with food and other

Out-of-school settings and wraparound childcare can continue to operate for

• in the secondary school-age cohorts eligible for full-time on-site provision -

vulnerable children, children of critical workers and those in year 11 and 13

face-to-face provision between 4 and 11 January 2021 for children who are:

place a £170 million Covid Winter Grant Scheme. This funding has been

**Out-of-school activities and** 

wraparound childcare

benefits related free school meal should be offered a food parcel.

times and routes if possible. This will allow social distancing to be practised.

run additional services during the first week of term, in order to enable

children to arrive and leave for tests during the course of the day.

For some children, it will not be possible to arrive and leave around

guidance set out in the forthcoming operational testing guidance.

do all that is reasonably practicable to maximise social distancing where

possible and minimise the risk of transmission. Local authorities are not

This means that where fewer children and young people are attending

be put in place within vehicles wherever possible.

use of vacant seats where possible.

and then return home following their test.

Sport and physical education

January, once on-site provision has resumed.

houses, the school should provide remote education to them in their

boarding houses before the start of term, in particular where they have been

provide for a staggered start back to on-site provision to allow for testing.

the actions for schools during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. This

now includes the requirement to provide at least 4 hours of remote

It is recognised that the capacity within schools may be impacted,

Information for local authorities, academy trusts and schools about

non-attendance is related to the incidence or transmission rates of

and 13), but who, for whatever reason, do not attend.

meet remote education expectations for their pupils.

education per day for secondary pupils.

and parents should ensure they do so.

whilst testing is being undertaken should receive remote education as their

recorded in line with the normal school attendance requirements.

governors) or agency staff brought in for this purpose. Reasonable

announced on 15 December coming into effect.

**Testing workforce requirements** 

**Attendance expectations** 

should be recorded as 'code X'.

Remote education

test confirmed with a standard Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test (they

possible to get tested from the first week of term, the week commencing 4

the system of controls set out in the actions for schools during the

children and young people on the edge of receiving support from

• adopted children or children on a special guardianship order

They should continue to follow the advice set out in the <u>actions for schools</u>

Schools with secondary-age pupils

these pupils to be tested ahead of normal schooling resuming.

Schools with secondary-age pupils are encouraged to prepare for a phased

start back to planned on-site provision in the first week of term to allow for

plan for full-time on-site provision for all pupils from the start of term. Those with secondary-age children are encouraged to take up the offer to test their pupils. 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

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) care leavers other children and young people at the provider and local authority's discretion including pupils who need to attend to receive support or manage risks to their mental health Schools choosing not to take up this offer of asymptomatic testing should provide on-site provision for vulnerable children, the children of critical

children's services

recommence on 11 January.

school leaders to put in place proportionate protective measures for pupils and staff. If schools follow the guidance and maximise control measures, they can be confident they are managing risk effectively. How schools administer tests At all times schools should ensure that the testing programme is also managed in line with the <u>system of controls</u>. That includes maintaining social distancing where possible, good hand and respiratory hygiene and keeping occupied spaces well ventilated.

We would encourage schools to encourage testing and ensure pupils and parents are aware of the benefits. Ultimately participation is optional. Schools should use existing relationships to drive take-up wherever possible. It is important to note that testing may not be feasible for some children, particularly some vulnerable children, for reasons of feasibility or consent. Over Christmas schools' responsibilities for contact tracing end on 23 December, meaning teachers should be able to get the break that they deserve before resuming work in the new term. Schools that wish to can use an extra INSET day on 4 January to prepare to deliver the testing. More detailed operational guidance will be issued shortly.

over must wear a face covering when travelling on dedicated transport to secondary school or college. This does not apply to people who are exempt from wearing a face covering on public transport. Transporting children for a lateral flow device test in the first week of term (week commencing 4 January) Schools face different circumstances and there is a need for transport arrangements to be sufficiently flexible to reflect this. Where practical, children who are receiving remote education during the week commencing 4 January should arrive at school at a scheduled time,

**Transport** 

place.

**Extra-curricular activities** Participating schools can continue to offer before and after-school provision from the start of term for those pupils eligible to attend for on-site provision, and where it is feasible for them to do so. These pupils should be kept in their same consistent bubbles whilst awaiting test results. Extra-curricular activities for all secondary pupils should only resume from 11 January in participating schools, once on-site provision has resumed. Free school meals

outbreak is available.

essentials across the winter period.

Secondary pupils who are receiving remote education during the first week of term in January 2021 should not attend: out-of-school settings (such as extracurricular clubs or supplementary schools) wraparound childcare (before and after-school clubs) Providers of out-of-school activities that continue to operate for face-to-face provision during this period should ensure that they make parents aware that their setting should only be accessed if their child is in one of the eligible groups outlined.

home educated

• in primary school

• in early years settings

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