

Cookies on GOV.UK

We use some essential cookies to make this website work.

We'd like to set additional cookies to understand how you use GOV.UK, remember your settings and improve government services.

We also use cookies set by other sites to help us deliver content from their services.

[Accept additional cookies](#)

[Reject additional cookies](#)

[View cookies](#)

[Home](#) > [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) > [Education, universities and childcare during coronavirus](#)

> [Closures, exams and managing a school or early years setting during coronavirus](#) > [Responsibility for exams](#)



[Department
for Education](#)

Guidance

Public health guidance to support exams for 2021 to 2022

Updated 27 September 2021

Contents

[Preparing for and running exams](#)

[Prevention](#)

[Stepping measures up and down](#)

[Engagement with NHS Test and Trace](#)

[Arrival and departure of candidates](#)

[Candidate health](#)

[Reasonable adjustments](#)

This update:

- removes references to and guidance for the academic year 2020 to 2021
- adds information on the exam support service for autumn exams (including spring 2022 VTQ exams)

This guidance is for:

- school and college senior leaders
- heads of other types of exam centre offering vocational and technical qualification (VTQ) exams
- exams officers and other staff involved in exam delivery

- local authorities and multi-academy trusts (MATs)

It applies to all types of exam centre, 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 and assessments from September 2021 to August 2022 inclusive
- supplements and clarifies other existing guidance

Although restrictions have been eased in England it is still imperative that we try to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and this guidance describes the measures and actions that schools, colleges and other exam centres should take to minimise the risk of transmission. You should read this alongside:

- [guidance on schools and colleges' responsibilities for exams](#)
- [guidance for households with possible or confirmed COVID-19 infections](#)
- [actions for schools during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [actions for FE colleges and providers during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [guidance for special schools and other specialist settings](#)
- [safe working in education, childcare and children's social care settings, including the use of personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#)
- [guidance on autumn series exam support service](#)

Preparing for and running exams

COVID-19 infection 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 ONS 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 where the risk of transmission of COVID-19 is substantially reduced. The way to control the virus is the same, even with the current new variants. Working with PHE, we continually review the measures, which are informed by the latest scientific evidence and advice and update our guidance accordingly.

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

- review your health and safety risk assessments in light of this 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 occupied spaces 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 contingency plans (sometimes called outbreak management plans) outlining what you would do if children, pupils, students or staff test positive for COVID-19, or how you would operate if you were advised to take extra measures to help break chains of transmission. Given the detrimental impact that restrictions on education can have on children and young people, any measures in schools and colleges should only ever be considered as a last resort, kept to the minimum number of schools and colleges or groups possible, and for the shortest amount of time possible.

Central government may offer local areas of particular concern an enhanced response package to help limit increases in transmission.

For most settings, it will make sense to think about taking extra action if the

number of positive cases substantially increases. Information on what circumstances might lead you to consider taking additional action, and the steps you should work through, are available in the [contingency framework](#).

The [contingency framework](#) describes 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 can 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.

Engagement with NHS Test and Trace

You should make sure that you understand the NHS Test and Trace process and that you've read the guidance on how schools should respond to any infections.

Close contacts will 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. Contacts in schools and colleges will only be traced by NHS Test and Trace where the positive case specifically identifies the individual as being a close contact. 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. You may be contacted in exceptional cases to help with identifying close contacts, as currently happens in managing other infectious diseases.

Settings will continue to have a role in working with health protection teams in the case of a local outbreak. Anyone who displays symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, new and continuous cough, alteration or loss of taste or similar) should not attend the exam centre. They should stay at home and order a test through the routine NHS testing programme. They should do so immediately and self-isolate. They should not wait to take one at the exam centre.

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 read the [safer travel 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.

We know that keeping pupils and students in distinct, separate groups ('bubbles') to minimise contacts has impacted schools' and colleges' ability to teach a full curriculum. Therefore, we no longer recommend that pupils are kept in distinct,

separate groups ('bubbles').

As well as implications for curriculum delivery, this means that schools and colleges no longer need to make alternative arrangements to avoid mixing at lunch or whilst arriving and leaving exams.

Central 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, Directors of public health 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

Exam rooms should be set up in line with the [Joint Council of Qualifications \(JCQ\) guidance](#). Additional steps are no longer necessary but you should continue to adhere to the infection prevention measures detailed earlier in this guidance.

Face coverings

The government has removed the requirement to wear face coverings in law. Face coverings should be worn in crowded and enclosed spaces where individuals may come into contact with people they do not normally meet. This includes public transport and dedicated transport to school or college.

Face coverings are no longer 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 your own](#).

If you have an outbreak in your school, a director of public health might advise you that face coverings should temporarily be worn in communal areas or classrooms (by pupils, staff and visitors, unless exempt). You should make sure your outbreak management plans cover this possibility.

Candidates and invigilators do not need to wear face coverings during exams, but they may wear them if they wish to.

Circumstances where face coverings are recommended

In circumstances where face coverings are recommended, transparent face coverings, which may assist communication with someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate, can also be worn. Transparent face coverings may be effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19. However, the evidence to support this is currently very limited. Face coverings (whether transparent or cloth) should fit securely around the face 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 aid communication, for example enabling lip-reading or allowing for the full visibility of facial expressions, but this should be considered alongside the comfort and breathability of a face covering that contains plastic, which may mean that the face covering is less breathable than layers of cloth.

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 of virus transmission. They may protect the wearer against droplet spread in specific circumstances but are unlikely to be effective in preventing the escape of smaller respiratory particles when used without an additional face covering. They should only be used after carrying out a risk assessment for the specific situation and should always be cleaned appropriately.

The use of face coverings may have a particular impact on those who rely on visual signals for communication. Those who communicate with or provide support to those who do, are exempt from any recommendation to wear face coverings in education and childcare settings.

You have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils to support them to access education successfully. Where appropriate, you should discuss with pupils, students and parents the types of reasonable adjustments that are being considered 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 FE teaching environments are diverse and can include vocational and workplace training environments, FE providers have the discretion to recommend the use of face coverings by students and staff, if it is appropriate for their particular circumstances. FE providers may consider recommending the use of face coverings where teaching settings are more reflective of a workplace environment, such as a training kitchen. If your education setting operates commercial training environments, such as hairdressing, barbering and beauty salons, sports and fitness facilities or restaurants, 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 can move between different schools and colleges. They should minimise contact and maintain as much distance as possible from other staff. Further guidance about supply and peripatetic staff is 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 but should wash their hands thoroughly and more frequently than usual and particularly after handling exam papers. The [household testing programme](#) continues to support testing of other people connected with students, for example, exam invigilators.

Maintaining distance between staff and candidates

No additional distancing steps are necessary for staff and invigilators from candidates during exams and assessments, but you should continue to adhere to the infection prevention measures detailed earlier in this guidance.

Alternative sites and invigilation support for the autumn 2021 exam series

We will provide an [exam support service](#) for the autumn exam series which will allow centres to claim for essential costs associated with running exams in the autumn, including:

- additional venue space
- invigilation
- invigilator training
- exam fees charged by awarding organisations

Centres supporting condition of funding students will be able to claim for costs relating to additional venue space and invigilation. Read the [exam support service](#) guidance for more information.

VTQs, and other general qualifications at level 1/2, level 2 and level 3, where students received teacher assessed grades in summer 2021, and there is an assessment opportunity for the qualification in either the autumn 2021 or the spring 2022 exam series, are in scope of the exam support service. Other VTQs are not in scope.

Information on [how to make claims for exams](#) is available. Funding for the exam support service is only available to 31 March 2021.

Candidate health

The [guidance for households with possible or confirmed COVID-19 infections](#) applies throughout.

School and college action

Schools and colleges must take swift 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 can contact the dedicated advice service introduced by Public Health England (PHE) and delivered by the NHS Business Services Authority. This can be reached by calling the DfE helpline 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

Candidates must not attend the exam centre if they have COVID-19 symptoms or have tested positive in the last 10 days. The most important symptoms of COVID-19 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](#) to see if they have COVID-19.

Candidates will be unable to attend exams during their period of isolation. With or without a positive test, a candidate with COVID-19 symptoms must isolate immediately and continue to do so for 10 full days 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 must isolate immediately for 10 full days counting from the day after the individual tested

positive. They cannot attend exams during that period.

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.

Individuals are not required to self-isolate if they live in the same household as someone with COVID-19, or are a close contact of someone with COVID-19, and any of the following apply:

- they are fully vaccinated
- they are below the age of 18 years 6 months
- they have taken part in, or are currently part of, an approved COVID-19 vaccine trial
- they are not able to get vaccinated for medical reasons

Instead, they will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace and informed they have been in close contact with a positive case and advised to take a PCR test. We encourage all individuals to take a PCR test if advised to do so.

Individuals who do not need to isolate and children and young people aged under 18 years 6 months who usually attend school or college who have been identified as a close contact should continue to attend school or college as normal. They do not need to wear a face covering within the school or college, but it is expected and recommended that these are worn when travelling on public or dedicated transport.

Schools and colleges should contact the awarding organisation on the candidate's behalf to determine the next available assessment opportunity.

Candidates in quarantine following certain foreign travel must not attend exams during their period of quarantine. Families should follow [Travel to England from another country during coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

Where a candidate has a negative test

Candidates should follow guidance about their [COVID-19 test result](#) when they receive a negative test.

Candidates who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19

Candidates who were previously considered to be 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.

The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) will need to ensure that the access arrangement is still appropriate, practicable and reasonable.

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

Is this page useful?

Yes

No

Report a problem with this page

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance and support](#)

Services and information

[Benefits](#)

[Births, deaths, marriages and care](#)

[Business and self-employed](#)

[Childcare and parenting](#)

[Citizenship and living in the UK](#)

[Crime, justice and the law](#)

[Disabled people](#)

[Driving and transport](#)

Brexit

[Check what you need to do](#)

Departments and policy

[How government works](#)

[Departments](#)

[Worldwide](#)

[Services](#)

[Guidance and regulation](#)

[News and communications](#)

[Research and statistics](#)

[Policy papers and consultations](#)

[Education and learning](#)

[Employing people](#)

[Environment and countryside](#)

[Housing and local services](#)

[Money and tax](#)

[Passports, travel and living abroad](#)

[Visas and immigration](#)

[Working, jobs and pensions](#)

[Transparency and freedom of information releases](#)

[Help](#) [Privacy](#) [Cookies](#) [Accessibility statement](#) [Contact](#) [Terms and conditions](#)

[Rhestr o Wasanaethau Cymraeg](#) [Government Digital Service](#)



OGL All content is available under the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#), except where otherwise stated

© Crown copyright