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> [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 2 January 2022

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](#)

Updates since 16 December 2021 include:

- updated advice on [face coverings](#)
- updated advice on [self-isolation arrangements](#)

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 and assessments from September 2021 to August 2022 inclusive
- supplements and clarifies other existing guidance

It remains 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 United Kingdom Health Security Agency (UKHSA) 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 UKHSA, 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 UKHSA 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 education settings 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.

We do, however, recommend that face coverings should be worn whilst arriving for and leaving exams (see the [face coverings](#) section for more information including where to find information on exceptions to this).

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.

UKHSA 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

Face coverings help protect the wearer and others against the spread of infection because they cover the nose and mouth, which are the main confirmed sources of transmission of COVID-19.

We recommend that face coverings should be worn by pupils in year 7 and upwards, students, staff and adult visitors when moving around the education settings or exam centres, outside of classrooms and exam rooms, such as in corridors and communal areas. This is a temporary measure.

Pupils and students must also wear a face covering when travelling on public transport and should do so on dedicated transport to and from education settings and exam centres.

For exceptions to this see full details in the face covering guidance - [face](#)

[coverings, when to wear one, exemptions and how to make your own.](#)

We would not ordinarily expect candidates and invigilators to wear face coverings during exams but they may wear them if they wish to and settings should be sensitive to the needs of individuals.

Transparent face coverings

You can wear transparent face coverings to assist communication with someone who relies on any of the following to communicate:

- lip reading
- clear sound
- facial expression

Transparent face coverings may be effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19. However, the evidence to support this is currently very limited.

The benefits of transparent face coverings should be considered alongside the comfort and breathability of the face covering that contains plastic, which may mean that the face covering is less breathable than layers of cloth.

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.

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.

Educational establishments, as employers, have a duty to comply with the Equality Act 2010 which includes making reasonable adjustments for disabled staff. They also have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils and students, to support them to access education successfully.

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

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 2022.

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 UKHSA 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

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 with symptoms should stay at home and [arrange to have a test](#) to see if they have COVID-19.

Candidates who test positive or who have symptoms must follow public health advice on [when to self-isolate and what to do](#). Candidates will be unable to attend exams during their period of isolation.

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

Where candidates are isolating in line with public health advice

From 14 December 2021, adults who are fully vaccinated and all children and young people aged between 5 and 18 years and 6 months identified as a contact of someone with COVID-19 are strongly advised to take a LFD test every day for 7 days and continue to attend their setting as normal, unless they have a positive

test result.

Daily testing of close contacts applies to all contacts who are:

- fully vaccinated adults – people who have had 2 doses of an approved vaccine
- all children and young people aged 5 to 18 years and 6 months, regardless of their vaccination status
- people who are not able to get vaccinated for medical reasons
- people taking part, or have taken part, in an approved clinical trial for a COVID-19 vaccine

Children under 5 years are exempt from self-isolation and do not need to take part in daily testing of close contacts.

Pupils with SEND identified as close contacts should be supported by their school and their families to agree the most appropriate route for testing including, where appropriate, additional support to assist swabbing. For further information please see [SEND guidance](#).

Further information is available in [NHS Test and Trace: what to do if you are contacted](#) and in the [stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection](#).

Where a candidate is not covered in the above list and 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.

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

Candidates in quarantine following 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 are advised to continue to follow the guidance contained in [coronavirus: how to stay safe and help prevent the spread](#).

Reasonable adjustments

Schools and colleges must, under their Equality Act 2010 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, with which we expect schools and colleges to be familiar.

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.

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