

COVID-19: FAQs for schools and early learning settings

This FAQ document should be used alongside Scottish Government Coronavirus guidance, including specific guidance for schools <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-preparing-start-new-school-term-august-2020/>

This document aims to answer some of the questions that school staff, parents, young people, and partner services might ask. The above guidance is linked throughout this document, by relevant page number and sections.

Recognising its specific context, separate guidance for the [Early Learning and Childcare \(ELC\) and childcare sector](#) has been developed. There is also specific guidance for [childminders](#) and for [“Out of school care”](#). [Guidance for youth work and the Community Learning and Development Sector](#) is also available.

Practicalities of infection control within a school setting

1. Do children and young people in schools have to practice physical (social) distancing?

No, the scientific advice suggests that physical distancing is not required to support a safe return to school. However the scientific evidence is less clear for secondary pupils, therefore senior pupils should be encouraged to physically distance as a precaution. Distancing should be encouraged in a proportionate way, and should not disadvantage learning. *P9/10, sections 40-49*

2. Do teachers and other staff have to practice physical (social) distancing?

Yes, teachers and other staff should maintain, where possible, 2 metres physical distance between each other and children and young people. Where this is not possible face coverings should be worn. *P15, section 80*

Particular care should be taken to maintain physical distancing and observe good hand hygiene and cleaning regimes in staff rooms, canteens and other communal areas. Staff should also be aware that any close contact with colleagues out with the school (e.g. car sharing) should be avoided.

3. Will schools provide hand gel and suitable hand washing facilities for all children and young people?

- Schools are required to put in place suitable hand washing facilities and to encourage and support children, young people, staff and any others to maintain good hygiene throughout the day. *P6, section 25*
- Outdoor hand basins or hand sanitisers will be available at entry/exit points. Help will be given to children who struggle with this. *P7, section 28*

- Hand gel should be available for any children and young people who are required to use school transport. *P26, section 139* Hand gel should not be used where the hands are visibly dirty (as may often be the case with younger children), instead hand washing with soap and water is advised.
- Hand washing is advised (instead of hand gel) for children/staff with sensitive skin or allergies.

4. What is the difference between face coverings and a surgical mask?

Face coverings are non-medical grade coverings. Face coverings may help to limit the spread of infection from a potentially infected person wearing the face covering to other people near them. Face coverings are advised (e.g. in shops) as a public health measure to reduce the spread of COVID-19, and may be considered for pupils and staff if there is an outbreak in the school.

A fluid resistant surgical mask (also known as a medical mask) can be protective for both the wearer and people near them. Fluid resistant surgical masks are used in healthcare settings to protect healthcare workers who are working with patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. In school settings, surgical masks will be advised for school staff looking after someone suspected of having COVID-19 and unable to adequately physically distance from them.

5. Will face coverings be used in schools?

Face coverings will not be required for most children and young people (those clinically advised to wear a covering are an exception). *P15, section 79*

- Some children and young people, particularly older young people, may choose to wear a face covering. This can be their choice. Should the prevalence of the virus in the population start rising, nationally or in parts of Scotland, schools may wish to encourage the wearing of face coverings, especially among adults and older young people in secondary schools, as part of an enhanced system of approaches to reduce transmission. *P16, section 81*
- The impact of wearing a face covering for children and young people with additional support needs should be carefully considered. *P16, section 82*
- Staff in schools should use face coverings where required, e.g. where they cannot appropriately physically distance from pupils. *p13, section 64, P15, section 80*

6. Will school staff be required to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) e.g. a surgical mask, gloves and apron?

For the majority of staff in schools, PPE (which may include a fluid resistant surgical mask, gloves, gown, eye protection) will not normally be required or necessary. Schools and local authorities already have PPE risk assessments in place, and where a risk assessment identifies the need for PPE, it should be readily available and staff trained on its use. Specific guidance is available for PPE use when providing personal care for someone with suspected COVID-19 (e.g. if someone at school develops symptoms), or for providing intimate care to a child or young person. *P15, section 78*

7. Will there be additional cleaning in schools?

Yes, an enhanced cleaning programme will be in place in all schools. Schools should follow [Health Protection Guidance for Non-Healthcare Settings](#). Commonly touched surfaces (touch points) should be cleaned regularly, and at least twice a day, using a product which is active against bacteria and viruses. *P7, section 31*

Toilet blocks and other shared areas will be cleaned more frequently and signs used to remind people of good hygiene practices. *P7, section 32*

Where children, young people or staff have to move desk stations cleaning materials should be available to wipe down desks, chairs, etc. *P7, section 33*

Unnecessary sharing of resources should be avoided and where necessary additional cleaning steps put in place. *P8, section 36* Further guidance about the use/ cleaning of specialist equipment, toys, books, etc. can be found on page 8, sections 34-37, and further guidance and links to external documents about safe approaches to practical activities like science, sport and music, can be found on page 24, sections 127-129.

Following any suspected or confirmed cases, as soon as they leave the premises the immediate area occupied by the individual (e.g. desk space) will be cleaned with detergent to remove dust/ bodily fluids, and then cleaned with disinfectant. This includes any high contact areas such as door handles or grab rails. Common areas, such as corridors, not visibly contaminated by bodily fluids, do not need to be further decontaminated beyond routine cleaning processes. Further information can be found in the guidance document linked above.

8. Will children and young people have to stay in small groups, or 'bubbles'?

It is recommended that children and young people stay in the same groups, where possible, and where this is not detrimental to their learning experience. *P10, section 50*

For senior pupils in secondary schools the groups may have to be larger, to take account of the range of subjects studied. Physical distancing should still be encouraged, especially for senior pupils. *P11, section 54*

9. What about more vulnerable groups?

Some groups are more at risk of suffering serious illness as a result of COVID-19. Guidance for [people with underlying health conditions](#) has been prepared and will continue to be updated.

The support required for **children and young people with additional support needs** will vary and should be considered in individual plans and risk assessments. *P21, section 114*

PPE guidance is in place for those who are involved in providing intimate care for children and young people. *P15, section 78*

There is some evidence that children, young people and adults from a **Minority Ethnic** background who are infected with COVID-19 seem to be at higher risk of severe disease. Consequently, the concerns

within Minority Ethnic communities must be recognised and individual requests for additional protections should be supported wherever possible. *P21, sections 116-117*

10. Can other professionals visit schools, like visiting teachers, or school nurses?

The movement of staff/partner services between schools should be kept to a minimum. *P13, section 65*
Adult visitors to schools should be strictly limited only to those necessary to support children and young people or the running of the school. *P12, section 62*

Supply teachers may be required, particularly if members of staff have to self-isolate with symptoms, or because they are household or personal contacts of someone who tests positive. During the pandemic supply teachers should try to limit movement between schools and where possible try to work with the same setting. *P13, section 65* Supply teachers should make themselves aware of relevant infection control guidance and should observe appropriate physical distancing and hygiene measures.

Staff should avoid moving between settings where there has been a confirmed case within the last 14 days.

Local Authorities should ensure supply lists are as up to date as possible. *P32, section 159*

11. Drop off and pick up: can parents/carers enter schools and/or playgrounds?

Parents/carers should not enter school buildings unless required. Schools may want to introduce staggered drop-offs or pick-ups, and the normal lines/ registration plans might be changed. Markings may be introduced at the school gates, and parents/carers should take care not to congregate and try to maintain 2 metres distance. Schools can support this by putting up signs and markings to remind people that physical distancing is still very important for adults and older young people, and by working together and observing the guidance we can hope to ensure a smooth and successful re-opening of schools.

Families may be asked to have only one adult attend to drop-off or pick-up children, and it may be appropriate to ask that only those with children in lower primary classes attend. Children who are able to safely walk to and from school without a parent/carer accompanying them should do so.

Special arrangements may need to be made for drop-offs and pick-ups of children and young people with additional support needs and those using school transport, including taxis. *P14, section 73*

12. How can you protect yourself from catching COVID-19?

There are things you can do to reduce the risk of you and anyone you live with getting ill with COVID-19:

- regularly wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available

- cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your elbow (not your hands) if you cough or sneeze, and put used tissues straight in the bin and wash your hands
- avoid touching your face
- maintain physical distancing, and wear a face covering if you cannot stay at least 2 metres away from anyone who is not in your household.

It's also important to remind children and young people how they can reduce the risk of themselves or their families getting ill with COVID-19. In particular teenagers can be reminded to:

- wear a face covering when within 2 metres of anyone not in their 'bubble'/class
- regularly wash hands and remember to catch any coughs and sneezes in a tissue or their elbows
- stay off school and isolate if they have any symptoms, if they are a contact of a case (or if a household member has symptoms), and if they have travelled to any countries where there are quarantine restrictions in place
- avoid house parties and other large gatherings
- wear face coverings and maintain social distancing in shops and other public places
- avoid sharing food and drink, and other products like cigarettes
- consider how kissing and sexual activity might put themselves and any partners at risk.

Managing absence and attendance

All children, young people and staff must be made aware that they must inform a member of staff or responsible person if they feel unwell with symptoms of COVID-19. *P17, section 87*

Schools should consider how they can reinforce children and young people's understanding of the symptoms as well as good hygiene practices. This must be balanced against the need to reassure children and young people they are safe in school, and developing an open culture where it is safe and comfortable to disclose symptoms without fear of stigma or blame.

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- A new, continuous cough
- A fever/ high temperature
- A change or loss in taste and/or smell (anosmia).

It is essential that people do not attend school if symptomatic, but instead self-isolate (along with their household) and follow guidance on NHS inform and from Test and Protect.

It is also essential that anyone identified as a contact of someone who tests positive for coronavirus must not attend school and should self-isolate for 14 days.

13. How do I arrange a test for COVID-19?

To find out how someone with symptoms can organise a test, see the [How to arrange a test](#) document in the appendices. There are different testing streams for children and their families and for school staff

(as key workers). Testing is important so that contact tracers can get in touch with the contacts of positive cases and ask them to isolate.

14. Someone in the class/school is symptomatic or tests positive, what next?

All schools will have a COVID-19 risk assessment in place, and will have support from the local authority and public health via the NHS Lothian Health Protection Team. This will outline the appropriate steps and infection prevention and control measures to be taken in the event someone within the school tests positive for COVID-19. The Test and Protect process will ensure anyone who is a contact of a confirmed case will be notified and advised.

If there is an outbreak at a school, or multiple people with symptoms, the NHS Lothian Health Protection Team will risk assess the situation and if required arrange and lead an Incident Management team meeting to coordinate the response to the situation and plan appropriate actions. The school will be supported throughout this process to help ensure the infection is effectively controlled.

See the Lothian [Coronavirus toolkit](#) for schools.

15.If someone goes off sick due to symptoms of COVID-19, should anyone who was in contact with that person get tested?

No. It is important for the symptomatic person to get tested and verify if they do or do not have COVID-19. A lot of other infections have similar symptoms, e.g. seasonal Flu or the common cold. If the person is confirmed to have COVID-19, Test and Protect will be in touch with anyone who is a contact of that person to give advice on what to do. This will not usually involve getting tested (see FAQ 23 “If someone is told to isolate as a contact of a positive case, should they get tested?”). The test is only valid at the time it is taken, so it is not generally useful to get tested unless you have symptoms of COVID-19.

Whilst the symptomatic person is awaiting their test result, any contacts should continue to follow good hand and respiratory hygiene practices, and monitor for any symptoms. They do not need to isolate unless the test of the symptomatic person returns positive and the Test and Protect team advise them to self-isolate.

16. Must parents/carers inform schools if children or young people have COVID-19 symptoms?

Parents/carers should be asked to let schools know if their children are not attending and why. It is important for schools to be able to record any COVID symptoms among the school community, as this can help detect a possible cluster of cases of COVID-19 at an early stage, and involve the health protection team promptly if needed.

17. Will all parents/carers and children/young people be notified if someone in the school/class is symptomatic or tests positive for COVID-19?

Those who have been in contact with someone who tests positive for COVID-19 will be contacted by the Test and Protect service so they can isolate and protect others from further spread of the virus. If there is an outbreak at school parents/carers and children/young people will be given the necessary information as soon as appropriate steps are agreed with the school, the local authority and public health.

Confidentiality is essential: no names will be shared with parents/carers, children and young people, and staff who do not need to know. The standard Test and Protect processes will ascertain any close contacts and make any necessary phone calls, without disclosing the name of the person who has tested positive.

All parties should be discouraged from speculating and encouraged to maintain an open, safe culture where there is no fear or stigma associating with developing symptoms or testing positive.

18. If a child, young person or staff member calls in sick or is sent home with COVID symptoms, must they remain off school for at least 10 days?

Test and Protect is Scotland's approach to preventing the spread of coronavirus. Anyone experiencing a new, continuous cough, a fever/high temperature, and/or a change or loss in taste and/or smell should self-isolate (with their household) and get tested. See the [Testing for school staff/pupils](#) document in the appendix for more information.

Lots of other illnesses have some symptoms similar to COVID-19. Without a test, anyone experiencing those symptoms should self-isolate for at least 10 days (and 14 days for their household). They can only come out of isolation once the 10 days have passed, and then only if their symptoms have improved and they have been without a fever for at least 48 hours. Acting early and getting tested means that, should they **test negative**, they can come out of isolation once their symptoms improve, **they have not had a fever for 48 hours**, and they feel well enough to do so.

If a child or young person tests negative, and is well enough to return to school and has not had a fever for 48 hours, their parent/carer should show evidence of their test result to the Head Teacher/senior team. This helps monitor cases and keeps the school community safe and reassured.

If someone is experiencing other symptoms e.g. blocked/runny nose, headache, sore throat, etc., but **not** including any of the classic COVID-related symptoms, they should stay off school until their symptoms have resolved and they feel well. There is no need to self-isolate for 10 days, no need for their household to isolate, and no need to get tested for COVID-19.

19. If a child or young person's parent/carer tests positive (or has COVID symptoms) must the child stay off school for 14 days?

Yes. This guidance has not changed, and all household members must self-isolate for 14 days if anyone in their household develops symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19. Children and young people may be less likely to display symptoms of COVID-19 themselves, but we do not know how likely they are to play a part in spreading it.

20. If someone is isolating with COVID-19, do they need to get a negative test before they can return to school?

No, the test picks up traces of virus in the nose and throat, and in some cases those traces will remain once a person has recovered and is no longer infectious. So **a repeat test, following a positive result, is not helpful** and should be avoided. The important thing is to self-isolate and get tested as soon as any classic COVID symptoms develop (cough/ fever/ change or loss in smell/taste) and, if the test is positive, to stay isolated for at least 10 days (14 days for any household members) and only come out of isolation once symptoms have improved and there has been no fever for at least 48 hours.

21. If there is an outbreak in a class/school will everyone be tested? Will everyone be sent home?

If schools have two or more confirmed cases of COVID-19 within 14 days, or an increase in background rate of absence due to suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19, they may have an outbreak.

If an outbreak is confirmed the local health protection team will undertake a risk assessment and work with the school and local authority to plan next steps. This may involve the formation of an Incident Management Team to lead the response to the situation. Any plans for wider testing will be dependent on particular circumstances. The same applies to any closures or whether any groups will be sent home. Parents/carers and children/young people, and wider school staff, will be informed as required once decisions and next steps are agreed.

22. Will the school be closed in an outbreak?

Any decisions about closing a school will be taken in partnership between the school, the local authority and the health protection team, following a risk assessment based on the number and distribution of cases. Such decisions will not be taken lightly, and only where it is deemed necessary to keep people safe and help stop the spread of COVID-19. Information about individual cases will not be shared with parents/carers, children and young people, or wider staff groups. *P20, section 109*

23. If someone is told to isolate as a contact of a positive case, should they get tested?

No. The test is only valid at the time it is taken, so it is not generally useful to get tested unless you have symptoms or if advised by the health protection team to get tested as part of a public health investigation into a possible outbreak. Anyone who has had contact with a positive case should monitor for any symptoms (particularly for the 14 days after contact with the positive case), and follow the advice from Test and Protect and NHS Inform about self isolation.

24. If someone is told to isolate as a contact of a positive case, do their contacts also have to isolate?

No, it is only those assessed as being contacts of a confirmed case who have to isolate for 14 days. These contacts will be alerted directly by the Test and Protect team and given this advice. Contacts of a contact (including household members of the contact) do not have to isolate, if they themselves are not contacts of the case.

Contacts of a positive case are asked to isolate as a precaution in case they go on to develop symptoms/ become positive for COVID-19. If they go on to develop symptoms **then** their whole household should isolate at that point, and the symptomatic person should get tested.

25. Do staff or pupils have to isolate or quarantine if they have recently travelled from a foreign country that is not exempted from quarantine regulations?

Yes. If they have recently travelled from abroad from a non-exempt country, staff and pupils should self-isolate at home and should not come to school for 14 days from the date they returned. It is important to note a negative test for COVID-19 does not exempt them from having to quarantine and self-isolate for 14 days. This is because the test is only valid on the day it was taken, and it can take up to 14 days after they were exposed for a person to start showing symptoms of COVID-19 and the test to return positive. Please refer to the Scottish government coronavirus website for an update list of which countries are exempt and non-exempt from quarantine regulations (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-public-health-checks-at-borders/pages/overview/>).

26. Do staff or pupils have to isolate or quarantine if they have recently travelled to an area that is now in lockdown?

Staff and pupils (and parents/carers) should consult the NHS inform website if they have recently been in an area that is now in lockdown. Advice on quarantine is regularly updated on this website.

In addition, staff or pupils who have returned from an area within the UK that is now in lockdown should self-isolate at home and should not come to school for 14 days from the date they returned if:

- they have any symptoms of COVID-19 or
- they have been contacted by the Test and Protect team or
- they have been in contact with someone who has recently tested positive for COVID-19.

27. When does someone need to self-isolate and when does someone not need to self-isolate?

When you need to self-isolate:

- **If you have symptoms of COVID-19** (persistent cough, fever or loss of smell/taste): *Isolate until test result received. If positive, remain in isolation for 10 days from day of symptom onset. Only come out of isolation if recovered and not had a fever for 48 hours.*
- **If you have tested positive for COVID-19:** *Isolate for at least 10 days from day of symptom onset. Only come out of isolation if recovered and not had a fever for 48 hours.*
- **If someone in your household has symptoms of COVID-19:** *Isolate until they have received their test result. If positive, remain in isolation for 14 days from the day your household member's symptoms started. Only come out of isolation after 14 days if you remain free of any symptoms.*
- **If you have returned from a country that is not on the exempt list for quarantine regulations:** *Isolate for 14 days from the date you returned from abroad. Only come out of isolation after 14 days if you remain free of any symptoms.*
- **If you have been advised by the Test and Protect team to isolate as you are a contact:** *Isolate as per the advice given to you by the Test and Protect team.*

When do you not need to self-isolate:

- If you are a contact of someone who is symptomatic, but has not tested positive for COVID-19 yet (unless advised to self-isolate by the health protection team or Test and Protect team).
- If you are a contact of someone who is a contact of a person who has tested positive for COVID-19.

28. Will a test show if someone has had COVID-19 in the past?

The test for COVID-19 is a nose and throat swab test. It will only show if there is virus present at the time of testing. It will not be able to tell if someone has had the infection in the past – that would require a blood test which is not currently available.

29. Further questions?

If you are a parent/carers or a young person please get in touch with your school in the first instance.

If you are a school staff member please speak to the local authority in the first instance, who can escalate any concerns to health protection team.

How to Arrange a COVID-19 Test

Early identification of suspected cases of COVID-19 is an important component in controlling the spread of coronavirus.

The key symptoms for children and adults are:

- High temperature
- New, continuous cough
- Loss or change to taste or smell.

If anyone has these symptoms they need to follow government advice, self-isolate and get tested. In addition, all household members should stay at home until the test result is given.

Testing for COVID-19 is essential, even though in most cases the symptoms will have another cause.

Further advice can be found here:

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-general-advice>

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/test-and-protect/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-infection>

1. Arranging a test

a) Children and Young People and Their Households: General Population Testing

If you have symptoms or a member of your household is symptomatic, you can [request at Coronavirus test at the UK Government Citizens' Portal](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/) (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/>)

Tests can also be arranged by calling **0800 028 2816**.

You can choose whether to attend one of the testing sites or, subject to availability, to have a home testing kit delivered to your home (for more information on home testing, see section 3 'Self Testing Kits').

Please note: People who have symptoms but who *cannot manage a drive-through test or a self-taken home-test* should phone 0800 028 2816 (you should not book a home-test via the UK portal) and NHS 24 will redirect you into the local alternative testing pathway.

If a child or young person tests negative and is well enough to return to school, their parent/carer should show evidence of their test result to the Head Teacher/ senior team. This helps ensure everyone's health and safety at school.

b) School Staff and Their Households: Testing for Workers

If you work in a school and you have symptoms or a member of your household is symptomatic, you can be tested by visiting the [self-referral](https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test) website (<https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>).

You can choose whether to attend one of the testing sites or, subject to availability, to have a home testing kit delivered to your home.

People who have symptoms but who cannot manage a drive-through test or a self-taken home-test should phone 0800 028 2816 (you should not book a home-test via the UK portal) and NHS 24 will redirect you into the local alternative testing pathway.

Alternatively, schools can test any symptomatic employees via the employer referral portal:

Schools can register symptomatic staff (or their household) as category 3 key workers under the employer referral portal, to ensure priority access to testing. Referred essential workers will then receive a text message with a unique invitation code to [book a test for themselves](#) (if symptomatic) or their symptomatic household member(s) at a Regional Test Centre or Mobile Testing Unit (whichever is nearer). For those who cannot access an RTC/MTU (if they do not have access to a car or live too far away), they can order a home test kit.

To obtain a login for the employer referral portal employers should email portalservicedesk@dhsc.gov.uk with the following information:

- organisation name
- nature of the organisation's business
- region
- names (where possible) and email addresses of the 2 users who will load essential worker contact details.

Once employer details have been verified, two login credentials will be issued. Employers should then login at <https://coronavirus-invite-testing.service.gov.uk/DaraTestDemand/Login> to make referrals.

Any questions from employers or workers about accessing testing, the website, or results should be made by phoning 0300 303 2713

These portals can experience very high demand and there may be delays in accessing them at peak periods. Demand is being monitored very closely and technical difficulties are addressed as quickly as possible.

If school staff and their household members live in areas other than Lothian and have a positive test, Test and Protect staff will notify NHS Lothian of this, and NHS Lothian Health Protection Team will co-ordinate any actions in relation to schools with the relevant local authority education department.

2. Arranging assessment with COVID-19 symptoms where medical attention is needed

If a child, young person or staff member has one of the three main COVID-19 symptoms and needs medical attention from a GP:

- They should not attend their local GP but phone NHS 24 on 111 or on 0800 **028 2816** and may be offered an appointment, usually at the Western General Hospital, Edinburgh.
- If transport by car is not available, this can be provided.

In an emergency call 999 as usual.

3. Self Testing Kits

How Home Testing Works

The test involves taking a swab of the inside of your nose and the back of your throat, using a long cotton bud. If you complete a self-referral and order a home-test kit, the test is delivered to your home. You will self-administer the swab, packing it up as instructed. Each kit comes with comprehensive instructions to guide you through how to administer the swab yourself. Test kits come with further instructions and a short video to take you through the process step by step. A Royal Mail courier will arrive the day after to collect it and take it to the lab. The aim is that results will then be received via text within 48 hours.

When to get tested: You should get tested as soon as possible – which is as soon as symptoms first appear.

No testing should be undertaken after day 5 following the onset of symptoms, unless it's for a specific reason which will be agreed on a case by case basis by a health professional in discussion with local microbiologists.

A self help guide: access to testing for Coronavirus can be accessed at <https://www.nhsinform.scot/self-help-guides/self-help-guide-access-to-testing-for-coronavirus>