

Guidance - What parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges, updated 2nd December 2021

Main Messages

The government continues to manage the risk of serious illness from the spread of the virus. The Prime Minister announced on 27 November the temporary introduction of new measures as a result of the Omicron variant. These measures are precautionary, while the variant is tracked and assessed. As a result, we are reflecting these measures in this guidance for parents, most directly a temporary recommendation on the wearing of face coverings in schools and changes to isolation requirements for confirmed and suspected cases of the Omicron variant and their contacts. This advice remains subject to change as the situation develops.

As COVID-19 becomes a virus that we learn to live with, there is now an imperative to reduce the disruption to children and young people's education - particularly given that every adult has been offered the opportunity for 2 doses of the vaccine, eligible adults have been offered a booster vaccine and all children aged 12 and over are now eligible for vaccination. However, as set out in the autumn and winter plan, the government will remain vigilant and take action where necessary to support and protect the NHS.

The main messages from this guidance are:

- nationally, education and childcare settings are open, and attendance is mandatory (for schools) and strongly encouraged (at childminders, nurseries and colleges)
- the [Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health](#) has made it clear that the overwhelming majority of children and young people still have no symptoms or very mild illness only
- continuing to take regular rapid tests will help you to identify infections early and reduce transmission
- there is no need for primary age pupils (those in year 6 and below) to test
- your nursery, school or college no longer trace close contacts - close contacts will be identified via NHS Test and Trace
- close contacts of suspected or confirmed Omicron cases will be contacted and required to self-isolate immediately and asked to book a PCR test

- children and young people aged under 18 years 6 months who usually attend school, and have been identified as a close contact, which is not a suspected or confirmed Omicron case, are not required to self-isolate
- your child no longer needs to remain in a consistent group ('bubble')
- if the number of positive cases substantially increases in your nursery, school, or college, or if your nursery, school, or college is in an enhanced response area, you might be advised that additional measures should be introduced
- all children aged 12 and over are now eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination
- changes to advice for clinically extremely vulnerable children and young people
- we now recommend face coverings in communal areas in all schools and colleges for adults and for pupils from year 7 and above
- in primary schools, we recommend that face coverings should be worn by staff and adults (including visitors) when moving around in corridors and communal areas
- changes to advice on travel and holidays abroad to reflect that pupils arriving from abroad will need to isolate and take a PCR test on arrival

Note: The use of the term 'college' relates to all further education providers throughout this content.

Attendance and Remote Education

Attendance is mandatory for all pupils of compulsory school age. This means it's your legal duty as a parent to send your child to school regularly if they are registered at one.

If you have concerns about your child attending, you should discuss these with your school or college.

Clinical studies have shown that children and young people, including those previously considered as clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV), are at very low risk of serious illness if they catch the virus. The UK Clinical Review Panel has recommended that all children and young people under the age of 18 should no longer be considered CEV and should be removed from the shielded patient list. The Chief Executive of the UK Health Security Agency and head of NHS Test and Trace has written to parents of these children to inform them.

If your child was previously considered to be CEV, vulnerable or high/higher risk, they are advised to continue to follow the guidance contained in [coronavirus: how to stay safe and help prevent the spread](#).

If a child or young person has been advised to isolate or reduce their social contact by their specialist, due to the nature of their medical condition or treatment rather than because of the pandemic, they should continue to follow the advice of their specialist.

Remote Education - if your child cannot attend school or college

Schools

All state-funded schools must provide remote education for school-aged children who are unable to attend school due to following government guidance or law relating to COVID-19 (for example if they need to self-isolate, or if they have tested positive but are well enough to learn from home).

Independent schools with pupils whose education is provided wholly through public funds also need to provide remote education in these circumstances.

Schools should provide remote education equivalent in length to the core teaching your child would usually get in school.

You can find out about your school's remote education offer on their website or by contacting your child's school directly.

Guidance is available to help you [support your child while they are learning from home](#).

Help to Get Online

Contact your child's school or college if your child:

- does not have access to a device
- needs support with internet access for remote education

Schools and colleges have been allocated a number of devices and are distributing these to the children who need them most.

Online Safety

Talk to your child about staying safe online and encourage them to talk to you if they come across something worrying.

Our [guidance for parents and carers to keep children safe online](#) explains how to talk about online safety issues.

The guidance about [staying safe online](#) includes information on setting up age appropriate controls, on-line fraud, privacy settings, and screen time recommendations.

Helping Make Nurseries, Childminders, Schools and Colleges as Safe as Possible

Nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges have their own health and safety risk assessments and keep them under review.

As part of this, there are certain control measures that we have asked nurseries, childminders, schools and colleges to continue to maintain to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in their setting. You can ask your nursery, childminder, school or college for more information.

CO2 monitors are being provided to state-funded education settings, so staff can quickly identify where ventilation needs to be improved.

The government is also providing 1,000 air cleaning units for teaching spaces and staff rooms in SEND and alternative provision settings, including SEND units in mainstream settings, where quick fixes to improve poor ventilation are not possible. These settings are being prioritised given the higher-than-average number of vulnerable pupils attending those settings.

Regional and Local Safety Measures

All nurseries, schools and colleges will have outbreak management plans in place outlining how they would operate if the number of positive cases substantially increases in your nursery, school, or college, or in the local area. Central government may also offer local areas of particular concern an enhanced response package to help limit increases in transmission.

The [contingency framework](#) provides more information on the principles of managing local outbreaks of COVID-19 in education and childcare settings. Local authorities, directors of public health and health protection teams may 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.

Mixing ('bubbles')

We do not recommend that it is necessary to keep children in consistent groups ('bubbles') or to keep groups apart as much as possible to manage COVID-19.

Assemblies and larger group activities can resume.

Any decision to recommend the reintroduction of 'bubbles' would not be taken lightly and would need to take account of the detrimental impact they can have on the delivery of education.

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 are recommending that children in year 7 (which would be children who were aged 11 on 31 August 2021) and above, as well as staff and adult visitors, wear face coverings when moving around their school or college and outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas. This is a temporary measure.

Pupils in year 7 and above should also wear a face covering when travelling on public transport and dedicated transport to and from school. We do not advise that pupils and staff wear face coverings in classrooms.

In primary schools, we recommend that face coverings should be worn by staff and adults (including visitors) when moving around in corridors and communal areas. Health advice continues to be that children in primary schools should not be asked to wear face coverings.

Children who were aged under 11 on 31 August 2021 should not wear face coverings. Face coverings do not need to be worn by pupils and students when outdoors.

See the section on [circumstances where people are not able to wear face coverings](#) for exceptions to this.

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.

Circumstances where people are not able to wear face coverings

There are some circumstances where people may not be able to wear a face covering. Please be mindful and respectful of such circumstances. Some people are less able to wear face coverings, and the reasons for this may not be visible to others.

In relation to education settings, this includes (but is not limited to):

- children under the age of 11 on 31 August 2021
- people who cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability
- people for whom putting on, wearing or removing a face covering will cause severe distress
- people speaking to or providing assistance to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expressions to communicate
- avoiding the risk of harm or injury to yourself or others
- removing a face covering in order to take medication

Tracing close contacts and isolation

Education settings are not undertaking contact tracing. Close contacts will now be identified via NHS Test and Trace. 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.

All individuals who have been identified as a close contact of a suspected or confirmed case of the Omicron variant of COVID-19, irrespective of vaccination status and age, will be contacted directly and required to self-isolate immediately and asked to book a PCR test. They will be informed by the local health protection team or NHS Test and Trace if they fall into this category and provided details about self-isolation.

For everyone else, isolation rules are unchanged. Individuals are not required to self-isolate if they live in the same household as someone with COVID-19 which is not a suspected or confirmed case of the Omicron variant, or are a close contact of someone with any other variant of COVID-19, and any of the following apply:

- they are fully vaccinated
- they are below the age of 18 years and 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

NHS Test and Trace will inform affected individuals, children or their parents or carers that they have been in close contact with a positive case and advise them to take a PCR test. We would encourage all individuals to take a PCR test if advised to do so.

Children and young people aged under 18 years 6 months who usually attend school who have been identified as a close contact of someone with COVID-19 that is not a suspected or confirmed case of the Omicron variant, should continue to attend school as normal. Further information is available in the [stay at home: guidance for households](#).

18 year olds will be treated in the same way as children until 6 months after their 18th birthday, to allow them the opportunity to get fully vaccinated. At which point, they will be subject to the same rules as adults and so if they choose not to get vaccinated, they will need to self-isolate if identified as a close contact.

If there is a substantial increase in the number of positive cases in your nursery, school, or college, or if your nursery, school, or college is in an enhanced response area, you might be advised that some control measures need to be temporarily reintroduced.

Vaccinations

You can find out more about the [in-school COVID-19 vaccination programme for children and young people](#).

Symptoms and Testing

Testing remains important in reducing the risk of transmission of infection within nurseries, schools and colleges. Continuing to take regular rapid tests will help you to identify infections early and reduce transmission.

Education and childcare staff, secondary school pupils and college students should continue to test twice weekly at home, with lateral flow device (LFD) test kits, 3 to 4 days apart. Testing remains voluntary but is strongly encouraged.

There is no need for primary age pupils (those in Year 6 and below) to test.

If the number of positive cases substantially increases in your nursery, school, college, or area, you might be advised to increase the use of lateral flow device (LFD) testing. This could also include advice on the reintroduction of onsite LFD testing.

We recognise that there will be a wide range of challenges in delivering effective testing to children with SEND. We have developed specific [guidance for testing in specialist settings](#) to fully consider their needs and the flexibilities which may be required.

Positive Rapid Lateral Flow Test Results

Anyone with a positive test result will need to:

- self-isolate in line with the [stay at home guidance](#) (if they test positive at school, you should arrange for them to be collected)
- [book a free further test](#) (a lab-based polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test) to confirm the result, whether the test was done at home, school or college. This still applies even if they have received one or more doses of COVID-19 vaccine

Whilst awaiting the PCR result, the individual should continue to self-isolate.

If the PCR test is taken within the 2 days following the positive LFD result, and is negative, it overrides the self-test LFD test and your child can return to nursery, childminders, school or college, as long as they don't have COVID-19 symptoms. However, you and your household must continue to self-isolate if:

- this PCR test result is positive
- you choose not to take a follow-up PCR test
- your follow-up PCR test was taken more than 2 days after the positive LFD test result
- you have been identified as a close contact of a suspected or confirmed case of the Omicron variant of COVID-19, irrespective of vaccination status and age

If you have any questions about the asymptomatic testing programme, speak to your school or college.

If you suspect your child has coronavirus or has a positive test

Do not send your child to their nursery, childminder, school, college or to an entry test for a selective school if:

- they are showing one or more [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) symptoms](#)
- they have had a positive test result
- there are other reasons requiring them to stay at home, for example, they are [required to quarantine](#), or they are awaiting their PCR result after a positive lateral flow test
- they have been identified as a close contact of a suspected or confirmed case of the Omicron variant of COVID-19, irrespective of vaccination status and age

You should follow public health advice on [when to self-isolate and what to do](#).

If you insist on your child attending nursery, school, or college when they have symptoms, they can take the decision to refuse your child if, in their reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect other pupils and staff from possible infection with COVID-19. Their decision would need to be carefully considered in light of all the circumstances and current public health advice.

Financial Support to Care for a Child who is Self-isolating

You may be eligible for a one-off Test and Trace Support Payment of £500 from your local authority if your child has been advised to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace.

Further information on [claiming financial support under the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme](#) is available.

Holidays and Travel Abroad

You should plan your holidays within school and college holidays as usual. Avoid seeking permission to take your children out of school or college during term time.

You should refer to the [guidance on travelling abroad from England](#) before booking and travelling.

All pupils travelling to England must adhere to travel legislation, details of which are set out in the guidance on [travelling to England from another country](#).

Keep in mind that you and your children may need to quarantine when you return from a trip overseas. Any quarantine should also fall within the school or college holidays.

Where your child is abroad and facing challenges to return, local authorities and schools should continue to work with you to understand your circumstances and your plans to return. They should encourage your child to return where they are able and it is safe. Your child can only lawfully be deleted from their school's admission register on the grounds prescribed in [regulation 8 of the Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2006 as amended](#).

Where able, schools should provide remote education for pupils facing challenges to return from abroad due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, for the period they are abroad.

You will need to respond to the latest rules on international travel, even if you have already left the UK, while also minimising the impact on your child's education. You can [sign up for an email alert](#) to be notified when government travel guidance is updated.

Household Support Fund

Local authorities have local ties and knowledge, making them best placed to identify and help those children and families most in need.

A £500 million Household Support Fund is being run by local authorities. It allows local authorities to directly help the hardest-hit families and individuals with daily needs such as food, clothing and utilities.

Further information on [support for vulnerable families over winter](#) is available.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Some children and young people may be experiencing feelings of anxiety, stress or low mood as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Support for Children and Parents

Encourage your child to talk to you or their teacher if they are feeling anxious or stressed.

Online resources to help you support your child with mental health and wellbeing, include:

- [MindEd](#) - a free educational resource on children and young people's mental health
- [Every Mind Matters](#) - an online tool and email journey to support everyone in taking action to look after their mental health and wellbeing
- [Bereavement UK](#) and the [Childhood Bereavement Network](#) - information and resources to support bereaved pupils, schools and staff
- the [DfE blog](#) - includes [mental health resources](#) for children, parents, carers and school staff

[Advice and guidance for parents and professionals on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing](#) includes actions you can take to support your child and emphasises the importance of taking 60 minutes of daily physical activity. Youth Sport Trust and [Sport England](#) have advice and support on helping children and young people stay physically active.

NHS mental health services remain open and have digital tools to connect with people and provide ongoing support. Please use your local children and young people's mental health service when needed.

Support for Children and Young People

Get free, confidential support at any time by:

- texting SHOUT to 85258
- calling Childline on 0800 1111
- calling the Mix on 0808 808 4994

Find help online through:

- [Young Minds](#) - information on COVID-19 and mental health
- [Think Ninja](#) - a free app for 10 to 18 year olds to help build resilience and stay well
- [Every Mind Matters](#) - building resilience and supporting good mental health in young people aged 10 to 16

[E-learning which can help parents and carers](#) to support their children and young people in emergency or crisis situations.

Barnardo's [See, Hear, Respond service](#), provides support to children, young people and their families who are not currently seeing a social worker or other agency, and who are struggling to cope with the emotional impacts of COVID-19. Use the See, Hear, Respond self-referral webpage or Freephone 0800 151 7015.

Report any safeguarding concerns you have about any child. Contact the [NSPCC helpline](#).