

Key points from updated [schools coronavirus \(Covid-19\) operational guidance](#) (applies from 8 March)

General

Much of the content in this guidance replicates what was in place for the autumn term.

Specific changes include:

- use of face coverings in classrooms for secondary age pupils and staff
- mandatory attendance expectations in different school phases
- current expectations for clinically extremely vulnerable pupils and staff
- curriculum expectations
- elective home education

This summary highlights the major changes to the guidance.

System of controls

There is a new 'must': "Promote and engage in asymptomatic testing, where available".

Self-isolation is now triggered by testing positive with a lateral flow device (LFD) as well as with a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test.

There are no changes to ventilation requirements.

Face coverings

In settings where pupils in Year 7 and above are educated, face coverings should now be worn in classrooms unless social distancing can be maintained, as well as when moving around the premises. This does not apply in situations where wearing a face covering would impact on the ability to take part in exercise or strenuous activity, for example in PE lessons. This will be reviewed again at Easter.

Those who rely on visual signals for communication, or communicate with or provide support to such individuals, are currently exempt from any requirement to wear face coverings in schools or in public places. 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, though the guidance cautions that "There is currently very limited evidence regarding the effectiveness or safety of transparent face coverings, but they may be effective in reducing the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) than not wearing a face covering at all."

In primary schools and early years settings, face coverings should be worn by staff and adult visitors where social distancing between adults is not possible. Children in primary schools do not need to wear a face covering.

Bubbles and close contacts

There is no change to the approach to bubbles. However, the guidance now include a suggestion that, to help the DfE helpline or (or PHE local health protection team if escalated) to provide advice on who must be sent home as a result of a positive case, schools should "keep a record of pupils and staff in each group, and any close contact that takes place between pupils and staff in different groups. This should be a proportionate recording process. You do not need to ask pupils to record everyone they have spent time with each day or ask staff to keep definitive records in a way that is overly burdensome."

Mass testing

Secondary staff will be able to test from home from 8 March.

Secondary pupils will also be able to test from home, but first needed to be tested three times on-site, 3-5 days apart. The first test should be offered as they return in w/b 8 March. Schools can phase return over this week to help with this. Testing is voluntary, and requires consent. Pupils who don't consent to testing should return at the same time as their peers. Separate, more detailed, guidance will be provided on this process, but is not yet available.

Once these three tests are completed, schools are asked to retain a small on-site testing site, so they can offer testing to pupils who are unable or unwilling to test themselves at home. The DfE will provide further information about funding available to support this.

Primary pupils will not be tested. Primary staff will continue to be able to test at home.

Attendance

School attendance will be mandatory for all pupils from 8 March. The usual rules on school attendance apply.

Pupils who have been confirmed as clinically extremely vulnerable should shield and stay at home as much as possible until further notice. They are advised not to attend school while shielding advice applies nationally.

Vulnerable staff

CEV staff are advised not to attend the workplace, even if they have been vaccinated. CEV staff should continue to be paid on their usual terms.

Those living with someone who is CEV can still attend work where home-working is not possible.

CV staff, and staff who live with those who are CV, can continue to attend.

Schools will need to follow the [specific guidance](#) for pregnant employees because pregnant women are considered CV.

Visits and trips

The government advises against all educational visits at this time.

Wraparound care and after-school activities

From 8 March, schools are asked to work to resume all your before and after-school educational activities and wraparound childcare for your pupils, where this provision is necessary to support parents to work, attend education and access medical care, and to support pupil's wider education and training.

Curriculum

Some restrictions around music, dance, drama and sport still apply.

Assessment and exams

Formal primary assessments remain cancelled. Schools should continue to use assessment during the summer term, using past test papers if they wish. This will inform teaching, enable information to be given to parents on their child's attainment in their annual report, and support transition to secondary school.

Further details on GCSEs, AS levels and A levels will be provided shortly.

Inspection

Routine, graded Ofsted inspections remain suspended for the spring term. During this term, Ofsted is conducting non-graded monitoring inspections of:

- inadequate schools
- schools judged as requires improvement at their last two (or more) consecutive inspections
- some other schools that require improvement

Contingency framework

In the event that restrictions in schools are needed to help contain the spread of the virus, you may be asked to revise your delivery models for a short period of time. To help with this, the government has published an updated [contingency framework](#), which outlines how schools should operate in the event of any restrictions. Any decision that there should be local restrictions in any childcare or education settings will be made by central government on a case-by-case basis.