

9 December 2021



 Department for Education

## **09 December – Coronavirus (COVID-19) – URGENT Update to all early years, children’s social care, schools, further education and higher education providers**

Today’s email includes an urgent update for all education and childcare settings on implementing Plan B of the COVID-19 Response: Autumn and Winter Plan

We have discussed this update with ASCL, NAHT and CST and agreed it would be helpful to issue this update first thing this morning.

### **Information for all education and childcare settings on implementing Plan B of the COVID-19 Response: Autumn and Winter Plan**

On Wednesday 8 December, the Prime Minister announced the implementation of [Plan B of the COVID-19 Response: Autumn and Winter Plan](#), to reduce pressure on the NHS. Plan B sets out a number of additional measures across society to control transmission of COVID-19.

The Government is clear on the critical importance of not disrupting the education of children and young people and the Government will prioritise keeping all education and childcare settings open. The measures set out below will support this.

#### **Attendance**

School attendance remains mandatory and all the usual rules continue to apply. Enabling children and young people to attend their education

setting regularly continues to be a national priority. As usual, schools are able to grant leaves of absence for pupils in exceptional circumstances.

## **Face coverings**

Face coverings should be worn by pupils and students in year 7 and above (which would be children who were aged 11 on 31 August 2021), staff and visitors in communal areas, unless exempt. This is a temporary measure. Pupils and students in year 7 and above in these settings must also wear a face covering when travelling on public transport and should wear it on dedicated transport to and from school, college, or higher education provider.

We do not recommend that pupils and staff wear face coverings in classrooms, unless their Director of Public Health advises them to temporarily do so in one of the circumstances described in the [Contingency Framework Guidance](#).

## **Wrap around provision**

Schools and early years settings should continue to offer their usual before and after-school activities, including wraparound childcare. These activities provide valuable childcare for working parents and carers and promote the wellbeing of children and young people.

## **Working from home**

Office workers who can work from home should do so from Monday 13 December. Anyone who cannot work from home should continue to go into work – for example, to access equipment necessary for their role or where their role must be completed in-person. In-person working will be necessary in some cases to continue the effective and accessible delivery of some public services and private industries.

We expect all education and childcare settings, including further and higher education providers, to continue to provide face-to-face teaching, and staff should continue to attend their place of work if

required in order to deliver this. Teaching and learning should not be moved online as a result of the work from home guidance and we continue to expect higher education students (unless distance learners) to receive an element of face-to-face tuition. Therapists and wider children's service professionals should continue to be invited into education and childcare settings.

Education and childcare leaders are best placed to determine the workforce required to meet the needs of their children, pupils and students. Education and childcare leaders will need to consider whether it is possible for specific staff undertaking certain roles to work from home, while minimising disruption to face-to-face education and care.

Following expert clinical advice and the successful rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine programme, people previously considered to be particularly vulnerable, clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV), and high or higher-risk are not being advised to shield again.

Children and young people previously considered CEV should attend their setting and should follow the same [COVID-19 guidance](#) as the rest of the population. In some circumstances, a child or young person may have received personal advice from their specialist or clinician on additional precautions to take and they should continue to follow that advice.

## **Testing**

We strongly encourage all those involved in education and childcare settings to continue regular testing (LFD not PCR) and reporting their results, and to encourage pupils and students in year 7 and above to test and report their results.

Settings are strongly encouraged to ask parents, guardians and other visitors to take a lateral flow device (LFD) test before entering the setting.

## Isolation

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 continue to be required to self-isolate and asked to book a PCR test.

The Government plans to introduce Daily Contact Testing as soon as possible as an alternative to self-isolation for contacts of positive Omicron cases who are fully vaccinated or under the age of 18 years and 6 months.

## January return

We continue to learn more about the impacts of the Omicron variant. To prepare for any possible changes in public health advice, all education and childcare settings should now revisit their existing outbreak plans to ensure they are well prepared for any future changes and ensure they are familiar with the [Contingency Framework Guidance](#).

Similarly, colleges and higher education providers should review their outbreak plans and ensure that contingency plans are up to date.

There are exams for vocational and technical qualifications timetabled for January. Students who are due to sit these exams will be prepared and it is right that they should be given every opportunity to demonstrate what they have learnt. Exams and formal assessments will go ahead. Consequently, it is essential that students continue to prepare for these assessments.

We have recently asked all secondary schools to provide an on-site test for pupils on return in January. Testing in school helps to boost participation and will help reduce transmission after a period of mixing over the holidays.

For those in settings closing over Christmas, all staff and students should test over the holidays in line with national guidance. This means that

they should test if they will be in a high-risk situation that day and before visiting people who are at higher risk of severe illness if they get COVID-19.

For settings remaining open over the Christmas period (such as private nurseries, higher education or adult education providers), staff and students should continue to test at home twice per week over the holiday period.

Further and higher education students, and staff in all educational and childcare settings, should take one self-test at home either the evening or morning before they return in January. Then they should continue to test in line with government guidelines and we recommend all staff and eligible students take up the offer of a vaccine.

## **Inspection**

Early years settings, schools and colleges will be using the final days of term to put in place these measures and consider contingency measures for January. In order to do that contingency planning, the Secretary of State for Education and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector have agreed that early years settings, schools and colleges will not be inspected next week unless there are safeguarding concerns.

Ofsted has already confirmed that secondary schools will not be inspected, unless there are urgent concerns, during the first week of schools' return in January, in light of the onsite pupil testing that secondary schools will be undertaking that week. Ofsted inspections will continue to play an important role in providing independent assurance as schools and colleges continue to respond to the pandemic.

Ofsted visits for Children's Social Care, local authority SEND services and joint targeted area inspections will continue.

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***The information below has not changed since our last update:***

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## Department for Education COVID-19 helpline

The [Department for Education COVID-19 helpline](#) and the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) Advice Service, (formally the Public Health England (PHE) Advice Service) are available to answer any questions you have about COVID-19 relating to education and childcare settings and children's social care.

## Department for Education guidance

Our guidance to support education and childcare providers, local authorities and parents during the COVID-19 pandemic can be accessed using the links below:

- [Guidance for early years and childcare providers](#)
- [Guidance for schools](#)
- [Guidance for further and higher education providers](#)
- [Guidance for local authority children's services](#)
- [Guidance for special schools and other specialist settings](#)
- [Guidance for parents and carers](#)