

Summary of changes to Contingency Framework August 2021

Decision-makers should endeavor to keep any measures in education and childcare to the minimum number of settings or groups possible, and for the shortest amount of time possible.

Multi-agency collaboration and communication is important in ensuring consistency in approach across England wherever issues occur, so that no group of children, pupils or students is unfairly disadvantaged.

Settings do not need to reformat their existing contingency plans to specific templates, but the plans should be kept robust and up to date.

The Operational Guidance sets out the measures that all education settings should have in place to manage transmission of COVID-19 day to day.

For most settings it will make sense to think about taking extra action if the number of positive cases substantially increases. This is because it could indicate transmission is happening in the setting. The thresholds, detailed below, can be used by settings as an indication for when to seek public health advice if they are concerned.

For most education and childcare settings, whichever of these thresholds is reached first:

- 5 children, pupils, students or staff, who are likely to have mixed closely, test positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period; or
- 10% of children, pupils, students or staff who are likely to have mixed closely test positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period

All settings should seek public health advice if a pupil, student, child or staff member is admitted to hospital with COVID-19. They can do this by phoning the DfE helpline (0800 046 8687, option 1), or in line with other local arrangements. Hospitalisation could indicate increased severity of illness or a new variant of concern. Settings may be offered public health support in managing risk assessments and communicating with staff and parents.

For all cases relating to staff, please also see the guidance for workplaces: NHS Test and Trace in the workplace. Employers should call the Self-Isolation Service Hub on 020 3743 6715 as soon as they are made aware that any of their workers have tested positive. If cases amongst staff mean a setting meets the threshold, described above, employers will need to provide the 8-digit NHS Test and Trace Account ID (sometimes referred to as a CTAS number) of the person who tested positive, alongside the names of co-workers identified as close contacts. This will ensure that all workplace contacts are registered with NHS Test and Trace and can receive the necessary public health advice, including the support available to help people to self-isolate.

It may be advised that face coverings should temporarily be worn in settings in their area. This may include face coverings in communal areas and/or classrooms, for pupils, students and staff.

Shielding can only be reintroduced by national government.

Settings should make sure their contingency plans cover the possibility they are advised to limit:

- residential educational visits
- open days • transition or taster days
- parental attendance in settings
- live performances in settings

Local authorities, DsPH and HPTs may recommend these precautions in individual settings or across an entire area.

High quality face-to-face education remains a government priority. Attendance restrictions should only ever be considered as a short-term measure and as a last resort.

High-quality remote learning in schools, further education and higher education settings should be provided for all pupils and students if:

- they have tested positive for COVID-19 but are well enough to learn from home; or
- attendance at their setting has been temporarily restricted

If restrictions on child, pupil and student attendance are ever needed, leaders of childcare and education settings will be best placed to determine the workforce required onsite and if it is appropriate for some staff to work remotely.

There should be no change to local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

Where vulnerable children and young people are absent, education settings should:

- follow up with the parent or carer, working with the local authority and social worker (where applicable), to explore the reason for absence and discuss their concerns
 - encourage the child or young person to attend educational provision, working with the local authority and social worker (where applicable), particularly where the social worker and the Virtual School Head (where applicable) agrees that the child or young person's attendance would be appropriate
- focus the discussions on the welfare of the child or young person and ensuring that the child or young person is able to access appropriate education and support while they are at home 16
- have in place procedures to maintain contact, ensure they are able to access remote education support, as required, and regularly check if they are doing so

If settings have to temporarily stop onsite provision on public health advice, they should discuss alternative arrangements for vulnerable children and young people with the local authority.

Schools should also continue to provide free school meals support in the form of meals or lunch parcels for pupils who are eligible for benefits related free school meals and who are not attending school because they have had symptoms or a positive test result themselves.

Any attendance restrictions should be reflected in the visits risk assessment and setting leaders should consider carefully if the educational visit is still appropriate and safe.

We need to continue to proceed with caution and find the right balance between protecting public health and living with Coronavirus (COVID-19) as more of the population is vaccinated.

There is strong evidence that children and young people are much less susceptible to severe clinical disease than older people and that there are significant disadvantages to children and young people associated with missed education.

Local spikes in COVID-19 will usually be best managed through a dynamic risk assessment approach. Attendance restrictions are unlikely to be a proportionate response to the level of risk that COVID-19 currently poses to children and young people, and public health authorities would only consider them as a last resort if all other risk mitigations proved insufficient to break chains of transmission.

Staff in 18 primary schools, should test themselves using LFD twice a week at home until the end of September, when this will be reviewed. All early years and wraparound childcare staff should also continue to test twice weekly as they have done throughout the summer.

Those who test positive should isolate, take a confirmatory polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test, and continue to isolate if the result is positive. Schools and colleges will need to be prepared to implement high-quality blended learning arrangements so that any child who is well enough to learn from home can do so.

Under-18s, irrespective of their vaccination status, and double vaccinated adults will not need to self-isolate if they are a close contact of a positive case. They will be strongly advised to take a PCR test and, if positive, will need to isolate.

All education and childcare settings should continue to ensure good hygiene for everyone, maintain appropriate cleaning regimes, keep occupied spaces well ventilated, and follow public health advice on testing and managing confirmed cases of COVID-19.

All settings should continue their strong messaging about signs and symptoms, isolation advice and testing, to support prompt isolation of suspected cases. Settings should also continue to encourage vaccination uptake for eligible students and staff.

If the number of positive cases substantially increases. This is because it could indicate transmission is happening in the setting. The thresholds, detailed below, can be used by settings as an indication for when to seek public health advice if they are concerned. For most education and childcare settings, whichever of these thresholds is reached first:

- 5 children, pupils, students or staff, who are likely to have mixed closely, test positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period; or 19
- 10% of children, pupils, students or staff who are likely to have mixed closely test positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period

Identifying a group that is likely to have mixed closely will be different for each setting.

For example:

For schools, this could include:

- a form group or subject class
- a friendship group mixing at break times
- a sports team
- a group in an after-school activity

For example:

a private tutor or coach offering one-to-one tuition to a child, or to multiple children at the same time

At the point of reaching a threshold, education and childcare settings should review and reinforce the testing, hygiene and ventilation measures they already have in place. Settings should also consider:

- whether any activities could take place outdoors, including exercise, assemblies, or classes
- ways to improve ventilation indoors, where this would not significantly impact thermal comfort
- one-off enhanced cleaning focusing on touch points and any shared equipment

Additional action that could be advised by public health experts:

Temporarily reinstating face coverings for pupils/students, staff and visitors in indoor and/or communal spaces in secondary schools, FE and HE settings, and for staff in primary, early years, out-of-school, and specialist settings. This should be for two weeks in the first instance, pending regular review

In extreme cases, and as a last resort where all other risk mitigations have not broken chains of in-school transmission, a DPH may advise introducing short-term attendance restrictions in a setting, such as sending home a class or year group. High-quality remote learning should be provided for all students well enough to learn from home. On-site provision should in all cases be retained for vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers.