

School Operational Guidance from DFE - September 2021

Mixing and 'bubbles'

We no longer recommend that it is necessary to keep children in consistent groups ('bubbles'). This means that bubbles will not need to be used for any summer provision (for example, summer schools) or in schools from the autumn term. As well as enabling flexibility in curriculum delivery, this means that assemblies can resume, and you no longer need to make alternative arrangements to avoid mixing at lunch. You should make sure your contingency plans (sometimes called outbreak management plans) cover the possibility that in some local areas it may become necessary to reintroduce 'bubbles' for a temporary period, to reduce mixing between groups. 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.

Tracing close contacts and isolation

Settings only needed to do contact tracing up to and including 18 July. Close contacts will now be identified via NHS Test and Trace and education settings will no longer be expected to undertake contact tracing. As with positive cases in any other setting, NHS Test and Trace will work with the positive case and/or their parent to identify close contacts. Contacts from a school setting will only be traced by NHS Test and Trace where the positive case and/or their parent specifically identifies the individual as being a close contact. 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. You may be contacted in exceptional cases to help with identifying close contacts, as currently happens in managing other infectious diseases.

Individuals are not required to self-isolate if they live in the same household as someone with COVID-19, or are a close contact of someone with 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

Instead, they will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace, informed they have been in close contact with a positive case and advised to take a [PCR test](#). We would encourage all individuals to take a PCR test if advised to do so.

Face coverings

Face coverings are no longer advised for pupils, staff and visitors either in classrooms or in communal areas.

Control measures

You should:

- Ensure good hygiene for everyone.
- Maintain appropriate cleaning regimes.
- Keep occupied spaces well ventilated.
- Follow public health advice on testing, self-isolation and managing confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Admitting children into school

In most cases, parents and carers will agree that a pupil with symptoms should not attend the school, given the potential risk to others. If a parent or carer insists on a pupil attending your school, you can take the decision to refuse the pupil if, in your reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect other pupils and staff from possible infection with COVID-19. Your decision would need to be carefully considered in light of all the circumstances and current public health advice.

School workforce

School leaders are best placed to determine the workforce required to meet the needs of their pupils. Clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) people are advised, as a minimum, to follow the same guidance as everyone else. Social distancing measures have now ended in the workplace. We welcome your support in encouraging vaccine take up and enabling staff who are eligible for a vaccination to attend booked vaccine appointments where possible even during term time.

Stepping measures up and down

You should have contingency plans (sometimes called outbreak management plans) outlining what you would do if children, pupils, students or staff test positive for COVID-19, or how you would operate if you were advised to take extra measures to help break chains of transmission. Given the detrimental impact that restrictions on education can have on children and young people, any measures in schools should only ever be considered as a last resort, kept to the minimum number of schools or groups possible, and for the shortest amount of time possible.

Contingency Planning

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

Testing

All settings should ensure their contingency plans reflect the possibility of increased use of testing by staff and, where they are already being offered testing, for pupils and students.

Close mixing

Identifying a group that is likely to have mixed closely will be different for each setting. For schools, this could include:

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

Face coverings

Education settings should make sure their contingency plans cover the possibility that 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. Children of primary school age and early years children should not be advised to wear face coverings.

Other measures

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

Actions to consider once a threshold is reached

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 focussing on touch points and any shared equipment
- Settings may wish to seek additional public health advice if they are concerned about transmission in the setting, either by phoning the DfE helpline (0800 046 8687, option 1) or in line with other local arrangements