

Covid-19 update from the Education and Skills Team

Professional Advocates for Children in Education, Governor Support, NQTs, Early Years, the Virtual School for Looked after Children and In Year Fair Access

The last bulletin of the year

As we write these few words, our prime minister has not announced further restrictions today but is following the data 'hour by hour'. We learn that there could be tightening of rules in the days to come.

Our concerns about schools will subside. Although positive cases now are extremely high and rising fast, schools are starting to break up or move some provision to remote, according to staff illness and availability. We sincerely hope that all school leaders and staff manage to have a peaceful and happy Christmas. Whether we are able to celebrate the new year remains to be seen.

On the subject of the new year, leaders will be aware that our Winter Holiday and Activity Programme is planned with most provision taking place in early January. We have spent time today looking at the data for Derby and the different projections for cases over the next few days. As of this afternoon, the situation in Derby appears to be following the worst-case scenario that has been modelled locally. We have had to bear this in mind as we decide whether the HAF provision can continue face to face or convert to a remote offer. Our providers need time to make arrangements. Providers will receive a letter from Dr Dewis today and they will then make contact with families who have booked onto their provision to share their arrangements for food and activity. We are in the process of updating information on our website. We hope that two weeks away from schools and other large-scale gatherings will break transmission sufficiently for schools to resume normally (whatever that is) in 2022.

Thank you for everything you have been doing this year. As ever, we are immensely grateful, and we understand the strain you are under. We continue to be here for you when you need us.

Stay safe and have the best possible Christmas and New Year.

Pauline, Jo and the E&S team

21 Dec 2021

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One for Business Managers (if you have one) – updated last Friday

Guidance

Coronavirus (COVID-19) recovery premium funding: allocations

Allocations and terms and conditions for academies and local authorities about the recovery premium grant.

From: [Education and Skills Funding Agency](#)

Published 22 September 2021

Last updated 17 December 2021 — [See all updates](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-recovery-premium-funding-allocations>

Update on the delivery of the 12 to 15 vaccination programme in and out of school

Young people aged 12 to 15 in England will be offered a second dose of the vaccine at a minimum of 12 weeks from the first dose. NHS England have now confirmed that, as with first doses, healthy school-aged children aged 12 to 15 will be able to receive their Covid-19 vaccination in their school next term, as well as having the option to receive the vaccine out of school, such as through vaccination centres. These offers will run in parallel.

Vaccination will continue to be staffed primarily by the school age immunisation service (SAIS). In school vaccination will begin from Monday 10 January and all schools should have received at least one visit before February half-term. It is expected that most schools will require multiple visits so vaccines can be administered to all consenting pupils. SAIS teams will be in touch with schools from the start of next term to discuss what is best for their circumstances. More information for schools on the vaccination programme and how second dose delivery will work, including information on consent gathering, will be published by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) shortly.

Over the Christmas holidays, parents can already book first vaccinations for their child, if aged 12 or over, through the [NHS booking system](#). Second doses will be available for eligible children by Monday 20 December. Further information on [vaccination for 12 to 15 year olds](#) is available on the NHS website.

Contingency plans before January return

The [contingency framework](#) describes the principles for managing local outbreaks of COVID-19 in education and childcare settings. It covers types of measures that leaders should be prepared for. It also sets out thresholds for managing COVID-19 cases and when you should consider seeking public health advice.

All education and childcare settings should already have their own contingency plans (sometimes called outbreak management plans) describing 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 introduce any measures described in the contingency framework to help break chains of transmission.

COVID-19 resilience and planning is now more important than ever. As set out previously, you do not need to reformat your existing contingency plans to specific templates, but your **contingency plans should be reviewed and updated ready for the January return.**

The workforce fund – extended to 18th February

Guidance

Coronavirus (COVID-19) workforce fund to support schools with costs of staff absences from 22 November 2021 to 18 February 2022

Updated 16 December 2021

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) workforce fund to support schools with costs of staff absences from 22 November 2021 to 18 February 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)



Letter to all education leaders from the Secretary of State for Education <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2021/12/16/education-secretary-nadhim-zahawi-writes-to-school-and-college-leaders-to-thank-them-for-their-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-the-challenges-of-the-omicron-variant/>

16 December 2021

Dear colleagues,

My team of Ministers and I would like to express our heartfelt thanks for everything you are doing to respond to the challenges of COVID-19. Your resilience in the face of the many challenges during the last 21 months, together with your continued commitment to support our children and young people with their education and wellbeing through the disruption of the pandemic, is inspiring.

It has been a challenging term for all education and childcare settings, particularly as we learn more about the new Omicron variant. I am extremely grateful for your work managing health and wellbeing. I know you feel as strongly as I do about the impact on children, young people and learners' education and wellbeing over this period and I appreciate all you are doing to ensure face-to-face teaching continues in schools, colleges and universities as planned until the end of term. I hope you manage to get a well-deserved break over the Christmas period and I thank those of you who will continue to support children, young people and families across this period.

The COVID-19 situation continues to be fast changing and complex. Working with my colleagues across government, my department and I endeavour to keep our information and guidance up to date and clear. I wanted to set out the headlines of how we are asking you as education leaders to help manage the virus.

Vaccinations and LFD testing

We are grateful to you for everything you do to support eligible students and staff to take up the offer of vaccination, including boosters. Your support with the rollout of the vaccination programme has enabled over 1.25 million 12-15 year olds and over 800,000 16-17 year olds to receive their first dose. I am also extremely grateful for the significant contribution that the FE and HE sectors have made in supporting the wider vaccination roll-out, hosting community vaccination centres and enabling both staff and students to support the vaccination programme. I am delighted that so many have also offered additional support as we surge efforts to deliver the booster programme even more quickly than planned. In light of rising case rates and the new variant, vaccinating young people and education and childcare staff is more important than ever for keeping them, their friends, family members and teachers as safe as possible. As we approach the winter holidays, take up of the booster jab is also critical for you and your staff and eligible students to protect everyone from serious illness and provide the best defence possible. 12-15 year olds who have not been vaccinated can book an appointment out of school on the National Booking System, and from 20 December those eligible for second doses will be also be able to book.

You have also continued to support LFD testing for COVID-19, which is critical in helping to reduce the spread of the virus. In light of the new variant, the need to continue testing and reporting test results is more important than ever.

I ask that you continue to encourage:

- all education and childcare staff and eligible students to be aware of the latest information on the booster programme and how to book a booster and parents and students to be aware of the vaccination offer for students
- all education and childcare staff and students of secondary age and above continue to test, and importantly report those test results, twice-weekly

- schools and colleges to ask parents and other visitors to take a lateral flow device (LFD) test before attending a school or college event
- FE students and all education staff to self-test twice a week and test at home either the evening or morning before they return to their education setting in January before continuing with twice-weekly at home testing
- all higher education students to test before they travel home for the Christmas break and before they travel back to their term time accommodation in January and to take up the offer of a booster as soon as they are eligible
- all staff and students, where age appropriate, in settings remaining open over the Christmas period (such as ITPs/ACLPs, early years, wraparound childcare, out-of-school settings and settings running the Holiday Activities and Food programme) to continue to test at home twice per week over the holiday period
- all secondary schools to prepare and encourage their pupils to take one COVID-19 test on-site on return in January and all other staff and eligible students to take one self-test at home either the evening or morning before they return to their education setting in January before continuing with twice-weekly at home testing
- all students travelling to attend a boarding school in England to continue to follow the guidance in relation to quarantine and testing

Daily testing for contacts of COVID-19

From 14 December, a new national approach to daily testing for contacts of COVID-19 has been introduced. All adults who are fully vaccinated and children aged 5 to 18 years and 6 months, identified as a contact of someone with COVID-19 – whether Omicron or not – should take an LFD test every day for 7 days instead of self-isolating. Children under five years old do not need to take part in daily testing for contacts of COVID-19 and do not need to isolate.

Once notified by Test and Trace as a close contact, all eligible staff, pupils and students are strongly recommended to take a LFD each day for 7 days and report the results through the [online reporting system](#) and to their setting. If they test negative, they can continue to attend their education setting. Outside of the education setting, they should continue to follow [national guidance](#). This approach should also be adopted over the Christmas holiday and on return in January.

All staff and secondary aged pupils and students should have access to a box of 7 LFD test kits from their education setting. If your setting requires additional test kits sooner than they would be available through the standard ordering process, or will run out of test kits imminently, you can contact 119 to request an emergency replenishment. For primary aged children LFD test kits are available through the usual routes community test sites, local pharmacies or [order COVID-19 rapid lateral flow tests online](#).

Ventilation

Throughout this term, the department has been rolling out CO2 monitors to state-funded education settings. I am pleased to say that over 99% of eligible schools, further education colleges, and the majority of early years settings have now received their monitors, with over 329,000 now delivered. The remaining deliveries will take place before the end of term.

To support settings which have identified areas of poor ventilation that cannot be resolved through simple actions such as opening windows or doors, the department has now launched a marketplace which provides all state-funded education settings a route to purchasing air cleaning units directly from suppliers at a suitable specification and competitive price. Education settings can access guidance on ventilation [here](#).

Face coverings

As a temporary measure, we recommend the wearing of face coverings in communal areas of education and childcare settings, for pupils and students in year 7 and above, staff and visitors. This is also the case where provision operates from community premises.

We are not recommending that pupils and staff wear face coverings in classrooms.

Similarly, in education and childcare settings in community premises, adults and children are exempt from the mandatory requirement to wear a face covering in a private activity room or private classroom, or where the premises have been hired out for the sole use of the provision. The guidance on [face coverings: when to wear one, exemptions, and how to make your own](#), provides a list of indoor settings in England where you must wear a face covering.

Contingency plans

We continue to learn more about the impacts of the Omicron variant. To prepare for any possible changes in public health advice, I ask that you review your existing contingency plans to ensure you are well prepared to implement them in case of any future changes.

January examinations

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.

School and college staff and workforce fund

The government will continue to offer financial support and I am pleased to say that we have agreed that our workforce fund will continue until half term next year.

We know that in areas with high absence, a particular issue can be the availability of supply staff. We want to make sure that as many supply staff as possible are available to schools and colleges. That is why we are now looking at what steps and measures we can put in place to boost supply capacity.

We will work with sector leaders and supply agencies over the coming days to offer advice to ex teachers who want to provide support to schools and colleges. We will help them to register with supply agencies as the best way to boost the temporary workforce available to the sector. Senior DfE officials have already begun to discuss this with key stakeholders. From now, you can support this effort by using your own professional and personal networks to encourage others to sign up to offer temporary help.

We are also working with stakeholders to share best practice flexible curriculum delivery models for schools that are experiencing the most acute staffing challenges.

Everything you're doing helps ensure all education and childcare settings remain open and can give that crucial face-to-face education and experience for all children and young people that we know is so important.

Once again, I thank you for your support in these efforts, and I hope that you have a restful Christmas break.

The Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP
Secretary of State for Education