



Department
for Education

COVID-19 Contingency Framework:

Education and childcare

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Contents

Summary	4
Who is this publication for?	4
Introduction	7
Prioritising education	7
Collaboration	8
Roles and responsibilities	9
Measures that settings should plan for	10
Testing	10
Face coverings	10
Shielding	11
Other measures	11
Attendance restrictions	11
Decision making principles	12
Early years settings	12
Primary schools	12
Middle schools	13
Secondary schools	13
16 to 19 academies	13
FE providers (including residential providers)	13
Higher education (HE) providers	13
Apprenticeships	14
Boarding schools	14
Special schools and special post-16 institutions	15
Alternative provision (AP)	15
Hospital education	15
Out-of-school settings and wraparound childcare	16
Summer schools (delivered under DfE's summer school funding scheme)	16
Holiday activities and food programme	16
Other considerations where attendance has been restricted	17
Remote education	17
Education workforce	17

Safeguarding and designated safeguarding leads	17
Vulnerable children and young people	18
Transport	18
School and FE meals	18
Educational visits	19

Summary

The Contingency Framework describes the principles of managing local outbreaks of COVID-19 (including responding to variants of concern) in education and childcare settings, covering:

- the types of measures that settings should be prepared for
- who can recommend these measures and where
- when measures should be lifted
- how decisions are made

Local authorities, Directors of Public Health (DsPH) and PHE Health Protection Teams (HPTs) can recommend measures described here in individual education and childcare settings – or a small cluster of settings – as part of their outbreak management responsibilities. Where there is a need to address more widespread issue across an area, ministers will take decisions on an area-by-area basis.

In most cases a “cluster” will be no more than 3 or 4 settings linked in the same outbreak.

Who is this publication for?

This guidance is for:

Early years settings, including:

- all providers on the Ofsted early years register
- providers registered with an early years childminder agency
- all pre-reception early years provision in maintained, non-maintained and independent schools

Schools, including:

- primary schools (including reception classes)
- middle or upper schools
- secondary schools (including school sixth forms)
- special schools, including non-maintained special schools

Special post-16 providers

16 to 19 academies

Independent schools

Alternative provision (AP), including:

- pupil referral units
- AP academies
- AP free schools

Further education (FE) providers, including:

- sixth form colleges
- general FE colleges
- independent training providers
- designated institutions
- adult community learning providers
- special post-16 institutions

Higher education providers (HE), including:

- universities
- specialist and independent HE providers

Out-of-school settings and wraparound childcare, including:

- breakfast clubs
- after-school clubs
- holiday clubs
- other out-of-school settings (including providers of wraparound childcare for children over the age of 5)

Summer school provision, which may be arranged or hosted by a range of organisations including:

- secondary schools
- special schools
- pupil referral units
- alternative provision

Holiday activities and food programme. There are a wide variety of organisations and individuals involved in the delivery of the holiday activities and food programme and other out-of-school settings, including but not limited to:

- schools
- private providers
- charities
- youth clubs

- community groups

This guidance is also for local authorities, Directors of Public Health and Health Protection Teams.

This guidance should be read alongside the detailed guidance for education and childcare settings and providers operating during COVID-19:

- [actions for early years and childcare providers during the COVID-19 outbreak](#)
- [actions for schools during the COVID-19 outbreak](#)
- [actions for FE colleges and providers during the COVID-19 outbreak](#)
- [providing apprenticeships during the COVID-19 outbreak](#)
- [protective measures for holiday and after-school clubs, and other out-of-school settings during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [guidance for special schools and other specialist settings: COVID-19](#)
- [guidance for higher education providers: COVID-19](#)
- [guidance for children's social care services](#)
- [Holiday activities and food programme guidance for local authorities](#)
- [Summer schools programme guidance](#)

Introduction

The government has made it a national priority that education and childcare settings should continue to operate as normally as possible during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Measures affecting education and childcare may be necessary in some circumstances, for example:

- to help manage a COVID-19 outbreak within a setting
- if there is extremely high prevalence of COVID-19 in the community and other measures have failed to reduce transmission
- as part of a package of measures responding to a Variant of Concern (VoC)

All education and childcare settings should have outbreak management plans (sometimes called contingency plans) outlining how they would operate if any of the measures described in this document were recommended for their setting or area. This includes how they would ensure every child, pupil or student receives the quantity and quality of education and care to which they are normally entitled.

Prioritising education

The impacts of having missed education during the pandemic are severe for children, young people and adults. In all cases, any benefits in managing transmission should be weighed against any educational drawbacks.

Decision-makers should endeavour 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.

Decision-makers should keep all measures under regular review and lift them as soon as the evidence supports doing so.

Measures affecting education and childcare settings across an area should not be considered in isolation, but as part of a broader package of measures.

Attendance restrictions should only ever be considered as a last resort.

Where measures include attendance restrictions, the Department for Education (DfE) may advise on any groups that should be prioritised.

The government will try to give as much notice as possible of any changes to the way settings should operate.

Collaboration

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.

Local authorities, Directors of Public Health (DsPH) and DfE's Regional School Commissioners should maintain close working relationships through their [Regional Partnership Teams](#) (RPTs). These teams are made up of:

- Public Health England (PHE) Regional Directors
- Contain Regional Convenors
- Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC) Regional Leads

Where decisions about measures in education and childcare settings are made at a national level, the Department for Education (DfE) will work with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), JBC, NHS Test and Trace, the Chief Medical Officer, PHE and other government departments, as well as relevant local authorities and Directors of Public Health. The government will take into account the available evidence and the judgement of public health professionals.

Roles and responsibilities

Local authorities, Directors of Public Health (DsPH) and PHE Health Protection Teams (HPTs) are responsible for managing localised outbreaks. They play an important role in providing support and advice to education and childcare settings.

Local authorities, DsPH and HPTs can work with their Regional Partnership Teams (RPTs) to escalate issues from the local level into the central [Local Action Committee command structure](#). RPTs support local areas in managing outbreaks, and provide advice and insights from across the country to the Chief Medical Officer and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to inform decision making.

Through the Local Action Committee command structure, ministers consider and take decisions on measures on an area-by-area basis in light of all available evidence, public health advice and the local and national context.

In rare circumstances, it may be necessary to escalate issues to ministers through other central government committees (for example Incident Management Teams), but this should be by exception only.

Measures that settings should plan for

All education and childcare settings should have outbreak management plans outlining how they would operate if any of the measures described below were recommended for their setting or area.

This includes how they would ensure every child, pupil or student receives the quantity and quality of education and care to which they are normally entitled.

Testing

Secondary schools and colleges should make sure their outbreak management plans cover the possibility that the reintroduction of Asymptomatic Testing Sites (ATS) is advised in their area.

This could include advice to increase the use of home testing by staff, pupils and students in secondary schools and colleges.

These measures may be advised:

- for an individual setting or a small cluster of settings only, by Directors of Public Health as part of their responsibilities in outbreak management. In most cases a “cluster” will be no more than 3 or 4 settings linked in the same outbreak
- for settings across areas that have been offered an enhanced response package, where settings and Directors of Public Health decide it is appropriate

Reintroducing ATS would need to be agreed with schools and colleges and we encourage DsPH to consult and work with them to identify what support may be needed. Schools and colleges should consider how ATS could be implemented in a way that does not negatively impact on the education they provide to their pupils and students.

DsPH should keep DfE informed of all cases where they are considering recommending an ATS for an education setting, via their RPT and Regional Schools Commissioner.

Face coverings

Secondary schools and colleges should make sure their outbreak management plans cover the possibility that it is advised that face coverings should temporarily be worn more widely in settings in their area.

This may include face coverings in communal areas (for pupils and students) and/or classrooms (for both pupils, students and staff).

Any guidance should allow for reasonable exemptions for their use.

These measures may be advised:

- for an individual setting or a small cluster of settings only, by Directors of Public Health as part of their responsibilities in outbreak management. In most cases a “cluster” will be no more than 3 or 4 settings linked in the same outbreak; or
- for settings across areas that have been offered an enhanced response package, where settings and Directors of Public Health decide it is appropriate

In all cases any educational drawbacks in the recommended use of face coverings should be balanced with the benefits in managing transmission.

Shielding

Shielding is currently paused. In the event of a major outbreak or VoC that poses a significant risk to individuals on the Shielded Patient List (SPL), ministers can agree to reintroduce shielding. Shielding would be considered in addition to other measures to address the residual risk to people on the SPL, once the wider interventions are taken into account.

Settings should make sure their outbreak management plans cover this possibility.

Shielding can only be reintroduced by national government.

Other measures

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

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

Local authorities, Directors of Public Health (DsPH) and PHE Health Protection Teams (HPTs) may recommend these precautions in one setting, a cluster of settings, or across an entire area.

Attendance restrictions

Attendance restrictions should only ever be considered as a last resort.

Settings should make sure their outbreak management plans cover the possibility they are advised to limit attendance.

This section outlines the types of attendance restrictions that may be recommended, depending on the scientific and public health advice. If attendance restrictions are advised across an area, the government will publish detailed operational guidance for settings.

High-quality [remote education](#) should be provided for all pupils or students not attending.

In all circumstances, priority should continue to be given to [vulnerable children and young people](#) and children of critical workers to attend to their normal timetables.

Decision making principles

As part of their outbreak management responsibilities, local authorities, DsPH and HPTs may advise individual settings or a cluster of closely linked settings to limit attendance in one of the ways described in this section.

Where local authorities, DsPH or HPTs judge that wider containment action is needed and wish to limit attendance across an area, they should work with their Regional Partnership Team (RPT) to escalate a proposal to the central [Local Action Committee command structure](#).

In most cases a “cluster” will be no more than 3 or 4 settings linked in the same outbreak, but RPTs should exercise judgement based on the local context.

The cohorts described below should be used to guide decisions about restricting attendance, as well as prioritising groups to return to face-to-face education and childcare.

Early years and primary settings should be prioritised to continue to operate as normal. The DfE may advise that other groups should be prioritised.

Early years settings

If attendance restrictions are needed, vulnerable children and children of critical workers should be allowed to attend.

Primary schools

If some attendance restrictions are needed, all vulnerable children, children of critical workers, children in reception, year 1 and year 2 should still be allowed to attend.

If, by exception, attendance is restricted further, vulnerable children and children of critical workers should still be allowed to attend.

Middle schools

Middle schools (with some primary and secondary year groups) may need to adopt a combined approach depending on the restrictions in primary and secondary schools in the local area.

Secondary schools

If some attendance restrictions are needed, all vulnerable children and young people, children of critical workers, pupils in years 10, 11, 12 and 13, and other pupils who were due to take external exams this academic year should still be allowed to attend.

If, by exception, attendance is restricted further, vulnerable children and young people and children of critical workers should still be allowed to attend.

16 to 19 academies

16 to 19 academies should follow the guidance for either sixth forms or FE, according to which type of provision their own provision most closely reflects.

FE providers (including residential providers)

FE provision is varied and already includes a high degree of flexibility to reflect the different age ranges and types of programmes.

If attendance restrictions are needed, DfE's strong preference is that all vulnerable students, children of critical workers, students who need access to specialist equipment, and students who are taking practical assessments, external exams or external assessments this academic year are still allowed to attend. Where there is scope to increase attendance, FE providers should prioritise other groups within parameters advised by DfE.

If, by exception, attendance is restricted further, vulnerable students, children of critical workers and those due to take practical assessments (including apprentices) should still be allowed to attend.

These principles also apply to those who are studying higher education courses delivered by FE providers.

Higher education (HE) providers

HE providers are autonomous and are responsible for putting in place the appropriate measures, in line with guidance, based on the individual circumstances of that provider.

All HE providers should have plans in place to respond in the event that there is an increase in the number of cases, or an outbreak associated with their setting. HE

providers should agree outbreak plans with their Director of Public Health and share their plan with DfE.

Where restrictions are considered necessary, the default position is that HE providers will remain open, with non-educational facilities and activities reflecting wider restrictions in place locally. As a next step, and before advising limitations on attendance in education settings, HE providers should work with Directors of Public Health locally to identify additional measures to put in place. This could include increasing testing, quickly identifying contacts within the HE provider's setting; and providing appropriate support to those who are required to self-isolate.

If further limitations on attendance need to be made, in person teaching may be continued with the application of appropriate COVID-secure measures. HE providers should identify in their outbreak and contingency plans the alternative measures to be applied, based on a risk assessment of their facilities. This could include teaching in smaller groups and maintaining consistent groups where possible; and physical measures such as 2m+ distancing, face coverings or shields between work stations as appropriate to the facilities. If further restrictions are required, attendance should be restricted to smaller in-person sessions, and if necessary, should be prioritised for students and staff of those courses where it is most beneficial (for example, clinical or practical learning and research).

In the event that even tighter restrictions are required, most provision should be online, with facilities open only for essential workers and students who are required to attend because in-person teaching is essential. This should include the continuation of essential research. If it is appropriate to ease any of the restrictions applying to the HE sector, student cohorts (for example, practical students and certain year groups) should be prioritised for in-person teaching.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeship delivery and assessment (including the assessment of functional skills qualifications) is extremely flexible. If attendance restrictions are needed, these activities should continue to take place in person if online delivery is not possible.

This includes training and assessment in the workplace (unless the workplace is required to close under other COVID-19 measures), in education and assessment settings and in community settings where a venue is being used for training or assessment.

Boarding schools

If attendance restrictions are needed, boarding schools should follow the guidance for primary and secondary schools for determining which children should be taught in the classroom.

Pupils not in these groups who cannot return home should continue to receive their education in their boarding house.

Special schools and special post-16 institutions

If attendance restrictions are needed:

- DfE's attendance expectations in special schools will remain in line with the equivalent age groups in mainstream schools
- DfE's attendance expectations in special post-16 institutions will remain in line with the equivalent restrictions in mainstream FE
- DfE's strong preference is that all vulnerable children and young people and children of critical workers are still allowed to attend full-time where the parent or carer wishes for their child to be able to attend. Similarly, special post-16 institutions should continue to welcome and encourage students to attend as per their usual timetable where the young person wishes to attend

In exceptional circumstances, special schools and special post-16 institutions may encounter circumstances where they cannot provide their usual interventions and provision at adequate staffing ratios, or with staff with vital specialist training. In these circumstances, they should seek to resume as close as possible to the specified provision for the child or young person as soon as possible. Where attendance is mandatory, full-time provision should be provided.

Alternative provision (AP)

Alternative provision (AP) should continue to allow all children or pupils to attend full-time.

On occasion AP will encounter circumstances where they cannot provide their usual interventions and provision at adequate staffing ratios, or with staff with appropriate specialist training. In these circumstances they should seek to resume as close as possible to full-time provision, as soon as possible.

Hospital education

If attendance restrictions are needed, hospital schools should continue to provide full-time education where it is safe and feasible to do so, and in line with hospital infection prevention and control measures.

Mainstream schools should continue to support their pupils in hospital, including through remote education support, to minimise the impact of their hospital stay on their education.

Out-of-school settings and wraparound childcare

If attendance restrictions are needed, vulnerable children and young people should be allowed to attend. For all other children, parents and carers should only be allowed to access these providers for face-to-face provision for their children for a limited set of essential purposes, such as to allow them to go to or seek work, attend a medical appointment, or undertake education and training.

Restrictions on attendance may need to vary depending on whether provision will be operating during school term-time and/or school holidays, when schools are otherwise closed to ensure sufficient childcare provision remains available to those that need it most. Therefore, the advice outlined above could be subject to change. Further advice will be provided should this be the case.

In the meantime, providers should continue to refer to guidance on [protective measures for holiday, after school clubs and other out-of-school settings for children during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#).

Summer schools (delivered under DfE's summer school funding scheme)

In most circumstances, children should be allowed to attend summer schools as planned. Facilities and activities should reflect any local or national restrictions.

If attendance restrictions are needed as a last resort, the academic element of the programme may need to be delivered remotely.

Holiday activities and food programme

Local authorities are asked to offer free holiday club provision to children who are eligible for and in receipt of benefits-related free school meals.

In most circumstances, children should be allowed to attend provision as planned. Providers should reflect any local or national restrictions, including the guidance for out-of-school settings and wraparound childcare.

If the local authority decides not to hold face-to-face holiday clubs as a result of COVID-19, for example if holiday clubs are cancelled following advice from government, the local authority should operate flexibly to ensure that eligible children still receive support that meets the [aims of the programme](#). For example, this may involve children receiving food parcels that provide healthy meals and activity packs along with access to online support.

Other considerations where attendance has been restricted

Remote education

Full detail on remote education expectations and the support available to schools, colleges and further education providers is available at [Get Help with Remote Education](#).

Education workforce

If restrictions on child, pupil and student attendance are 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.

Employers should have regard to the [guidance on clinically extremely vulnerable people](#).

Employers should continue to implement the system of controls set out in the COVID-19 operational guidance for your education setting. They should explain to staff the measures they are putting in place to reduce risks to staff, including how these protective measures have been reviewed as part of an updated workplace risk assessment.

Safeguarding and designated safeguarding leads

There should be no change to local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, which remain the responsibility of the 3 safeguarding partners:

- local authorities
- clinical commissioning groups
- chief officers of police

If attendance restrictions are needed in any education or childcare setting, we would expect all local safeguarding partners to be vigilant and responsive to all safeguarding threats with the aim of keeping vulnerable children and young people safe, particularly as more children and young people will be learning remotely.

All settings must continue to have regard to any statutory safeguarding guidance that applies to them, including:

- [Keeping children safe in education](#)
- [Working together to safeguard children](#)
- [Early Years Foundation Stage \(EYFS\) framework](#) (read alongside [early years foundation stage: coronavirus disapplications](#))

Schools and FE providers (ideally led by the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) or a deputy) should review their child protection policy so that it reflects the local restrictions and remains effective.

It is expected that schools and FE providers will have a trained DSL (or deputy) available on site. However, it is recognised that for some schools and FE providers there may be operational challenges to this. In such cases, there are two options to consider:

- a trained DSL (or deputy) from the early years setting, school or FE provider can be available to be contacted via phone or online video, for example working from home;
- sharing trained DSLs (or deputies) with other schools or FE providers (who should be available to be contacted via phone or online video)

Where a trained DSL (or deputy) is not on site, in addition to one of the above options, a senior leader should take responsibility for co-ordinating safeguarding on site.

Vulnerable children and young people

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
- 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.

Transport

Transport services to education settings should continue to be provided as normal where children are attending education settings. The [transport to school and other places of education: 2020 to 2021 academic year guidance](#) remains in place.

School and FE meals

Schools should provide meal options for all pupils who are in school. Meals should be available free of charge to all infant pupils and pupils who meet the benefits-related free school meals eligibility criteria.

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:

- are self-isolating
- have had symptoms or a positive test result themselves
- are a close contact of someone who has COVID-19

Further information is available in the [guidance on providing school meals during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

FE providers should continue to support students who are eligible for, and usually receive, free meals even if students are studying remotely due to COVID-19. This includes students in further education, who are newly eligible.

There's further [guidance on free meals in further education-funded institutions](#).

Educational visits

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. Only children who are attending the setting should go on an educational visit. Education settings should consult the [health and safety guidance on educational visits](#) when considering visits.



Department
for Education

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