

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020

Summary version

Purpose of the guidance

1. The guidance is designed to support a safe return to school for all children, young people and staff taking full account of progress made in suppressing COVID-19 in Scotland, the scientific advice received and the advice of the Education Recovery Group and other key stakeholders.

Start date

2. The expectation is that all schools will reopen by 11 August, with all children and young people back in full time education by 18 August.

Risk assessments

3. Risk assessments should be undertaken and/or updated prior to return:
 - There should be consultation with all union/professional association representatives
 - Children, young people, staff and parents/carers should be informed of plans
 - Risk assessments should be kept under review as circumstances change
 - There should be risk assessments for vulnerable groups, e.g. older staff, disabled staff, pregnant women, new mothers, and BAME staff, as well as individual children and young people identified as at greater risk
 - Catering/cleaning and facilities management staff and any other contractors should be included in risk assessments

Environmental cleaning, personal hygiene and ventilation

4. A rigorous approach to environmental cleaning must be implemented to prevent the spread of the virus, in line with the arrangements set out in the guidance. Consideration should be given to limiting the extent to which pupil belongings are brought into school.
5. Enhanced personal hygiene must be practised. This includes:
 - Measures to allow pupils and staff time to clean their hands with soap and warm, running water or sanitiser, when they arrive at school, return from breaks, change rooms and before and after eating
 - Provision of adequate hand-washing or sanitising facilities throughout the school estate
 - Arrangements to support young children and those with complex needs who may need assistance
6. Good respiratory hygiene must be practised. Children, young people and staff should be encouraged to:
 - Catch coughs/sneezes with tissues or elbow

- Avoid touching their faces
- Keep windows/doors open to aid ventilation

Minimising contact between individuals and groups (grouping and distancing)

7. Schools are encouraged to maintain children and young people in consistent groups throughout the school day wherever possible.
8. 2m physical distancing should be maintained between adults and adults, and adults and children/young people who are not from the same household, wherever possible.
9. The advice from the COVID-19 Advisory Sub Group on Education and Children's Issues is that, subject to other risk mitigations being in place, there is no requirement for physical distancing between children and young people of any age in schools.
10. As a precautionary approach, secondary schools should encourage distancing where possible between young people, particularly in the senior phase. This does not have to be strict adherence to 2m physical distancing. Importantly, schools should ensure that the particular approaches adopted, of which specific examples are given, do not introduce capacity constraints and/or prevent a return to full-time learning in school.
11. It is important to emphasise that both the approaches of maintaining distance between young people (in secondary schools) and the use of consistent groups are not all-or-nothing approaches, and will bring public health benefits even if logistics mean they can be implemented only partially (e.g. with groups maintained for the majority of the day but some limited mixing into wider groups permitted for specialist subjects or transport, etc.). Schools should apply proportionate, risk-based approaches to implementation of distancing and the use of groups.

PPE

12. There are clear requirements for when PPE should be used in schools, and the types of PPE required.

Face coverings

13. The position on face coverings in schools is:
 - Face coverings should not be required for most children (other than those clinically advised to wear one)
 - Where adults cannot keep 2m distance and are interacting face-to-face for a sustained period (about 15 minutes or more), face coverings should be worn
 - Anyone wishing to wear a face covering in school should be allowed to do so
 - Should the prevalence of the virus in the population start rising, nationally or in parts of Scotland, schools may wish to encourage the wearing of face coverings, especially among adults and older young people in secondary schools

- The impact of wearing a face covering for learners with additional support needs including any level of hearing loss, or for learners who are acquiring English and rely on visual cues, should be carefully considered

Staying vigilant and responding to COVID-19 symptoms

14. The whole school community should be vigilant for the symptoms of COVID-19, and understand what actions they should take if someone develops them, either onsite or offsite. It underlines the importance of self-isolation and testing for everyone with symptoms.

Enhanced surveillance, testing and outbreak management

15. Arrangements are in place to monitor developments and allow for rapid response to any cases of COVID-19. This includes enhanced surveillance arrangements, test and protect and outbreak management.

School and public transport

16. Dedicated school transport should be treated as an extension of the school estate. Enhanced cleaning of dedicated school transport vehicles will be important, especially where vehicles are used for other purposes before and after transporting children to and from school. Personal hand and respiratory hygiene is important, including sanitisation of hands prior to boarding.
17. Distancing between children and young people on dedicated school transport is not required, although where possible some practical approaches to grouping and distancing are provided. Adults should conform with the requirements for public transport (1m distancing).
18. The position on face coverings on dedicated school transport is consistent with the position in the school estate. They are not required for children and young people (those who wish to wear a face covering should be permitted to do so). Any adults travelling by dedicated school transport should conform with the requirements for public transport and wear face coverings (and 1m distancing).
19. The creation of “dedicated zones/carriages” on certain limited types of public transport is permitted, with rules on distancing the same as for dedicated school transport. Discussions with local authorities and operators indicate this approach is likely to be suitable only for services that are classified as public transport but which primarily carry children and young people to school, with limited numbers of adult passengers. Face coverings in dedicated zones will **not** be required where the service is a local authority-contracted school bus service but **must be worn** in dedicated zones on all other forms of public transport.
20. Children and young people travelling on all other public transport, where there is no dedicated zone, must follow the requirements on face coverings and distancing for public transport.

Special considerations for certain groups

21. Specific consideration should be given to how to support children, young people and staff who are clinically vulnerable or have been shielding. Specific provision may also be required for those from a minority ethnic background and with additional support needs.

Curricular and assessment matters

22. Schools and local authorities will want to consider the most effective ways to deliver a broad curriculum for children and young people in a safe and proportionate manner, as well as the safe delivery of practical and physical activities.

Promoting attendance and reducing absence

23. Some parents and carers may be concerned about their child returning to school, and consider withholding their child until reassurance is provided. In these circumstances schools and local authorities should engage with those parents and carers to provide reassurance on any concerns, overcome any barriers to learning, and support attendance.

Workforce planning and support

24. Additional workforce capacity will be needed in schools to provide additional support to help with recovery work. The Scottish Government is making additional funding available for the recruitment of additional teachers and other staff to support COVID-19 recovery.

Supporting the health and wellbeing of children and young people

25. The wellbeing of all children, young people and staff should be the central focus when preparing for the reopening of schools at a local level. Balancing efforts to address lost learning with children and young people's social and emotional needs should be a priority.

Contingency planning

26. In the event of a national or local outbreak of the virus, schools may need to introduce their plans for blended learning or close temporarily to help control transmission. Schools and local authorities will need contingency plans for this eventuality and should ensure that parents/carers are fully informed of the contingency plans in place.

Communication

27. Dialogue with trade unions, staff, parents/carers and children and young people on the reopening of schools will be required, to ensure confidence in the revised arrangements across all school users. Clarity on what and how the revised arrangements will work in practice and what is expected of all parties will be key to ensuring a smooth return.