COVID-19 and school: FAQs for parents and carers

These **Frequently Asked Questions** bring together some of the questions parents and carers have asked since schools started back following the summer break.

If you have other questions please look at the NHS Inform website or ask your child's school. The school will contact NHS Lothian Health Protection Team if they need help giving you an answer.

COVID-19 symptoms and testing

COVID-19 symptoms are:

- **A new, continuous cough and/or**
- **A fever/ high temperature and/or**
- **A change or loss in taste and/or smell (anosmia).**

Note: A new, continuous cough means coughing for longer than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours. If you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual.

If you or your child have developed one or more of these symptoms (however mild) stay at home for 10 days from the start of your symptoms and arrange a test. (More information about testing is at the end of these FAQs.) Do not go to your GP, pharmacy or hospital.

Everyone in your household should remain at home until you get the result of the test, then follow the advice you will be given with the result. (See more on NHS Inform.)

It is important that anyone with one or more of the COVID-19 symptoms gets tested, so that anyone who tests positive knows to stay at home and self-isolate. The rest of their household should also stay at home and self-isolate, even if they do not have any COVID-19 symptoms themselves.

1. What happens if a child develops symptoms of COVID-19 while in school?

All schools have information from NHS Lothian Health Protection Team, and plans in place for how to respond to any potential cases in school.

Children and young people should know to inform an adult in school if they develop any symptoms.

If your child develops COVID-19 symptoms while in school, they will be looked after safely and appropriately until they can be collected. As with any child who feels unwell at school, staff will do their best to comfort and reassure your child.

Other siblings in the school, or in other schools, should also return home as soon as possible and self-isolate with their household (see question 2, below). **All members of the household should remain at**

home until the person with symptoms gets tested. They should then follow the advice given with the test result. (See more on NHS Inform.)

2. Does the household need to isolate if a child develops symptoms?

Yes. If your child develops one or more of the COVID-19 symptoms they should self-isolate and the **rest of the household should self-isolate (stay at home) too.** You should arrange a test for your child. You should all remain at home until you get the result of the test, then follow the advice you will be given with the result. (See more on NHS Inform.)

The rest of the household **should not** get tested unless they develop one or more of the COVID-19 symptoms.

3. What happens if someone in school tests positive?

Test and Protect is Scotland's public health response to stopping the spread of coronavirus. When someone tests positive for COVID-19 they will get a phone call from Test and Protect. For children under the age of 16, the parent or carer will be contacted. Test and Protect give advice and take details of any recent **close contacts**. They will talk through what a close contact is. Those contacts will be called by Test and Protect and asked to self-isolate and stay at home for 14 days.

If someone at your child's school tests positive, or there are multiple people with symptoms, the NHS Lothian Health Protection Team will carry out a risk assessment and will support the school to ensure necessary steps are taken and all close contacts are identified and contacted. They will only know what further steps need to be taken once the risk assessment has taken place. The circumstances and the next steps may be different in different schools.

Parents and carers will be informed that there is a positive case in school. Unless you are contacted and advised otherwise, your child should attend school as normal, provided they are well and have no symptoms of COVID-19.

4. What is close contact?

Somebody who has been near someone with coronavirus and could have been infected. Close contacts may have been near the infected person at some point in the 48 hours before their symptoms appeared, or at any time since their symptoms appeared. Being near someone means:
- Face to face contact with the person within 1 metre for any length of time
- Within 1 metre of them for one minute or longer without face to face contact
- Within 1-2 metres of them for 15 minutes or more.

The closer the contact, the higher the risk.

If you have been identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive, they will pass your details on to Test and Protect and you will be contacted. Test and Protect will not tell you who the

person who tested positive is, unless the person has given NHS Scotland clear permission to share this information.

If you are identified as a close contact you will be asked to self-isolate for 14 days, whether or not you have symptoms. This is because symptoms can take that long to develop and you can pass the virus on even if you don't have symptoms. **If you develop one or more of the COVID-19 symptoms, you should request a test.**

5. If your child is a close contact should others in the household isolate too?

No. If no one in the household has **COVID-19 symptoms**, only the person who has been told by Test and Protect that they are a close contact has to self-isolate. Close contacts need to self-isolate and stay at home for 14 days from their contact with the infected person. The rest of the household can go to work and school as usual.

6. Should you get tested if you have been in contact with someone who has symptoms of COVID-19?

No. You should only get tested if you have symptoms of COVID-19, or if you have been advised to get a test by NHS Lothian Health Protection Team.

If you have been identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, Test and Protect will call you to give you advice.

7. Should parents/carers tell the school if children or young people have COVID-19 symptoms?

Yes, it is important to let the school know if children are not attending and why. It is important for schools to record any COVID-19 symptoms among pupils and staff, as this can give early warning of any possible clusters of COVID-19 cases. See page 1 for a reminder of the COVID-19 symptoms.

8. Will everyone be told if someone in the school or class has symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19?

Personal information is confidential and will not be shared. But those who need to take action – any close contacts – will be contacted promptly, and the wider school community will be given information as soon as possible (see below).

Anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 will be contacted by Test and Protect. They will be asked to pass on details of any close contacts. Test and Protect will phone their close contacts and advise them to self-isolate for 14 days. Test and Protect do not share the name of the person who has tested positive.

If there is a positive case at the school all families will be given the necessary information as soon as appropriate steps are agreed with the school, the local authority and public health. This will not include details of who has tested positive. Information will usually be in the form of a text message to parents/carers asking them to click through to a secure link on their school's website, or an email providing information, depending on the method most commonly used in that school. The message will usually explain that someone in that school has tested positive and that robust contact tracing by trained professionals is underway. If they are not contacted they should continue to send their child to school the next day providing they are well and have no COVID-19 symptoms.

If you know of any children or families who have symptoms, or test positive, we would encourage you not to share this information. Anyone can be affected by COVID-19 and there is no shame or stigma associated with catching it. It is for each individual to decide if information about their health is shared.

9. If someone has COVID-19 symptoms, should they stay off school for at least 10 days?

A test is the only way for someone who has one or more of the COVID-19 symptoms to know if they have COVID-19. Testing is important in preventing the spread of coronavirus.

If you, or your child, have one or more of these symptoms you should self-isolate and arrange a test:

- **A new, continuous cough and/or**
- **A fever/ high temperature and/or**
- **A change or loss in taste and/or smell (anosmia).**

The whole household should self-isolate until the person with symptoms gets their test result.

If a child or young person tests **negative** they can return to school if they are well enough to do so (as per standard school illness policy), and **if they have not had a fever for 48 hours**.

If a child or young person tests **positive** they should self-isolate for 10 days from the day their symptoms started. They should only come out of isolation after 10 days if they feel better and **if they have not had a fever for 48 hours**. The rest of the household should self-isolate for 14 days from the start of the symptoms, even if they don't have symptoms themselves. If they develop symptoms of COVID-19 they need to continue to stay at home and arrange to get tested.

If a child or young person is experiencing **other types of symptoms** e.g. a blocked/runny nose, headache, sore throat, etc., but **does not** have any of the COVID-19 symptoms, the **standard school illness policy should be followed.** What this means is:

- Children who have mild symptoms, such as a blocked/runny nose or a mild sore throat, but not presenting with any of the COVID-19 symptoms, can still go to school if they are well enough to do so. However, they should of course stay at home if they are too ill to be at school.

Children who do not have one or more of the COVID-19 symptoms **should not** get tested.

If your child is unwell with other symptoms and is too ill to go to school, you should inform the school in the usual way, telling the school your child is absent and what their symptoms are.

10. If a parent/carer tests positive (or has COVID-19 symptoms) should their child stay off school for 14 days?

Yes. All household members must self-isolate for 14 days if anyone in their household develops symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19.

The person who has tested positive must self-isolate for at least 10 days, and can only come out of isolation once their symptoms have improved and if they have not had a fever for 48 hours.

11.If there is an outbreak in a class/school will everyone be tested? Will everyone be sent home?

If an outbreak is confirmed the local Health Protection Team will carry out a risk assessment and work with the school and local authority to plan next steps. This will include who should get tested and who does not need to get tested. It is unlikely that everyone will need to be tested. The test is most reliable if you have coronavirus symptoms. However the Health Protection Team will sometimes test wider groups of people when there is an outbreak. This is an extra public health measures to control the spread of the virus, and only when the risk assessment suggests this might be helpful.

The risk assessment will also decide if anyone else needs to be sent home. A school should not usually need to be closed. Any plans to send pupils home will be shared with parents/carers and children/young people as soon as possible. The school will be able to organise learning at home for any pupils who cannot attend school.

Schools will close only when a public health risk assessment deems this the only safe option.

12. If someone is told to isolate as a contact of a positive case, should they get tested?

No, unless you have symptoms of COVID-19, or unless you have been advised to get tested by the NHS Lothian Health Protection Team. This is because:

- A test won't confirm if a person has been exposed to the virus. A person who has been exposed to the virus may go on to develop symptoms. People who have had close contact with a positive case may have been exposed to the virus. As a precaution they should self-isolate for 14 days.

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Anyone who has had contact with a positive case should monitor for any symptoms (particularly for the 14 days after contact with the positive case), and follow the advice from the Test and Protect team and NHS Inform.

13. Do children have to isolate or quarantine if they have recently travelled from a foreign country that has quarantine restrictions?

Yes. If your family and/or your child return from an area with quarantine restrictions keep them off school and stay at home for 14 days. **A negative COVID test will not shorten quarantine** as it doesn't show if you or your child will develop the virus. Updated travel information is on gov.scot

If your family and/or your child have recently travelled to an area that is now in lockdown, visit NHS Inform for up to date information about quarantine advice.

14. Will a test show if someone has had COVID-19 in the past?

No. The test for COVID-19 is a nose and throat swab test. It will only show if there is virus present at the time of testing. It will not be able to tell if someone has had the infection in the past – that would require a blood test which is not currently available.

15. Will we be able to access testing if we have symptoms?

Everyone is working hard to ensure access to testing is available to those who need it. We can all help by only requesting a test when we have one or more of the COVID-19 symptoms:

- **A new, continuous cough and/or**
- **A fever/ high temperature and/or**
- **A change or loss in taste and/or smell (anosmia).**

See more information about testing at the end of these FAQs and on NHS Inform.

Infection control in schools

16. Do children and young people in schools have to physically distance?

The scientific evidence suggests physical distancing between children is not essential in primary school.

- Children in primary school **do not** have to stay 2 metres apart from each other in school.
- Children in primary school should stay 2 metres apart from teachers and other adults not in their households (where possible).

All schools should try to keep children and young people in the same groups. Groups should be as small as is practical.

Smaller groups will help reduce the spread of infection if a child or young person tests positive for COVID-19.

The scientific evidence about physical distancing is less clear for secondary school pupils, so they should be encouraged to physically distance in school where possible.

- Young people in secondary school should stay 2 metres apart from teachers and school staff/adults (where possible).
- Young people of secondary school age should be encouraged to continue to physically distance when not in school, including at shops and on public transport. They should avoid large gatherings. House parties have been linked to outbreaks and are strongly discouraged. See Scottish Government guidance for more information.

17. If there is a positive case in a class or group, will everyone in the group be a close contact?

Not necessarily. Test and Protect and the Health Protection Team will help work out who is a close contact and needs to self-isolate and stay at home.

18. Do teachers and other school staff have to physically distance?

Yes. Teachers and other staff should stay 2 metres apart from each other and from children and young people. Where this is not possible they should wear a face covering, and this should be for as short a time as possible.

19. Will schools help children keep their hands clean?

Schools will make sure hand washing facilities are in place. Schools will support children, young people and staff to keep their hands clean throughout the school day.

Outdoor hand basins or hand sanitisers (gel) will be available at entrances/exits. Help will be given to children who need it.

Hand washing is advised (instead of hand gel) for children with sensitive skin or allergies.

20. Will face coverings be used in schools?

Face coverings are made from cloth or other textiles that cover the mouth and nose, through which you can comfortably breathe. Face coverings are not the same as medical-grade face masks. If you are infected, a face covering may help to limit the spread of infection to people around you.

Face coverings are not required for children in primary schools.

Face coverings are not required for young people in secondary school when they are in class. However secondary school pupils will be asked to wear a face covering in corridors and other communal areas.

Schools may advise pupils and staff to wear face coverings in other situations, e.g. if there is an outbreak in school.

Staff in schools should use face coverings if they cannot physically distance from pupils or other adults.

21. Will school staff be required to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) e.g. a surgical mask, gloves and apron?

For most staff in schools, PPE (which may include a fluid resistant surgical mask, gloves, apron, eye protection) is not normally needed.

Schools have PPE supplies and training on how and when to use it. Examples of when it might be used are when caring for someone with suspected COVID-19 (e.g. if someone at school develops symptoms), or for providing personal care to a child or young person.

22. Will there be additional cleaning in schools?

Yes, all schools have an enhanced cleaning programme. Guidance from Health Protection Scotland tells schools what they should do to keep areas safe and clean.

Where children, young people or staff have to move to different desks there will be cleaning materials to wipe down desks and chairs before and after use.

Additional cleaning precautions are taken when a child or staff member has developed symptoms whilst in school.

23. What about more vulnerable groups?

Some groups may be more at risk of serious illness as a result of COVID-19. Guidance for people with underlying health conditions has been prepared and will continue to be updated. NHS Inform also has additional information that can support anyone in these groups who have further questions. Talk to your school if you need any more help or have any further questions or concerns.

The support required for children and young people with additional support needs will vary and should be considered in individual plans. Talk to your school if you have any questions or concerns.

There is some evidence that children, young people and adults from a **Minority Ethnic** background who are infected with COVID-19 may be more at risk of serious illness as a result of COVID-19. Talk to your school if you have any questions or concerns.

24. Drop off and pick up: can parents/carers enter schools and/or playgrounds?

Some parents and carers need to drop off and pick up children and young people. If so, they should take extra care to socially distance and reduce the risk of spreading coronavirus.

When dropping off or picking up children:

- Please stay 2 metres away from other families/households. Close contact and large groups can increase the spread of coronavirus and could lead to an outbreak in school.
- To help stop crowding at the school gates, only one adult per family/household should be dropping off or picking up children.
- If your child can walk safely to and from school without an adult, or be dropped off and met at a safe distance from school, please let them. This will make physical distancing easier for those who have to accompany their child.
- Parents and carers should not enter school buildings unless required. Please discuss with your school first.

Special arrangements may need to be made for drop-offs and pick-ups of children and young people with additional support needs and those using school transport, including taxis.

25. How can you protect yourself from catching COVID-19?

There are things you can do to reduce the risk of you and your children getting ill with COVID-19. Children and young people may need reminded of how they can keep themselves safe.

You should all:

- regularly wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, particularly before and after eating
- use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
- avoid direct contact with people that are ill wherever possible
- cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or elbow (not hands) if coughing or sneezing. Put used tissues straight in the bin and wash your hands
- avoid touching your face.

Adults should also:

- maintain physical distancing, and wear a face covering if you cannot stay at least 2 metres away from anyone who is not in your household.

Older young people (secondary school age) should also:

- physically distance from young people and adults where possible in school, AND physically distance when out of school
- wear a face covering in school when in corridors or other communal areas
- wear a face covering and maintain social distancing in shops and other public places
- avoid house parties and other large gatherings
- avoid sharing food and drink, and other products like cigarettes
- consider how kissing and sexual activity might put themselves and any partners at risk.

26. Further questions?

Please get in touch with your school in the first instance. Or visit NHS Inform for health advice.

Appendix 1

How to Arrange a COVID-19 Test

Early identification of suspected cases of COVID-19 is an important component in controlling the spread of coronavirus.

The symptoms of COVID-19 for children and adults are:

- High temperature and/or
- New, continuous cough and/or
- Loss or change to taste or smell.

If anyone has one or more of these symptoms they need to follow government advice, self-isolate and get tested. All household members should stay at home until the test result, and then follow the advice given with the result.

Testing for COVID-19 is essential, even though in most cases the symptoms will have another cause. **The test is most reliable if you have coronavirus symptoms. If you do not have one or more of the above symptoms you should not arrange a test.**

Further advice can be found here:

https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-general-advice

https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/test-and-protect/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-infection

1. Arranging a test

Children and Young People and Their Households: General Population Testing

If you have symptoms or a member of your household is symptomatic, you can request at Coronavirus test at the UK Government Citizens' Portal (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/)

Tests can also be arranged by calling **0800 028 2816.**

You can choose whether to attend one of the testing sites or, subject to availability, to have a home testing kit delivered to your home (see section 3 'Self Testing Kits').

Please note: People who have symptoms but who *cannot manage a drive-through test or a self-taken home-test* should phone 0800 028 2816 (you should not book a home-test via the UK portal) and NHS 24 will redirect you into the local alternative testing pathway.

If a child or young person tests negative they can return to school once well enough to do so (N.B. they must not have had a fever for 48 hours).

2. If someone has COVID-19 symptoms and medical attention is needed

If a child, young person or staff member has one or more of COVID-19 symptoms **and** needs medical attention:

- They should **not** attend their local GP but phone NHS 24 on 111 or phone **0800 028 2816.** They may be offered an appointment, usually at the Western General Hospital, Edinburgh.
- If you do not have a car transport can be arranged.

In an emergency call 999 as usual.

3. Self Testing Kits

If you order a self-test kit it will be delivered to your home. The test involves taking a swab of the inside of your (or your child's) nose and the back of the throat, using a long cotton bud. Each kit comes with instructions. You can watch a short video which shows the process step by step. You will carry out the test, packing it up as instructed. A Royal Mail courier will arrive the next day to collect the test and take it to the lab. Your result should be sent by text message within 48 hours.

You should get tested as soon as possible after developing one or more COVID-19 symptoms.

If you have had symptoms for longer than 5 days it is not usually helpful to get tested as your result may not be accurate. You can get advice from a health professional. If you cannot or do not get tested, and you have had one or more of the COVID-19 symptoms, you should self-isolate for 10 days. You can only then come out of isolation if your symptoms have improved and you have not had a fever for 48 hours. Your household should self-isolate for 14 days.

A self-help guide to access to testing for coronavirus can be found on NHS Inform:
https://www.nhsinform.scot/self-help-guides/self-help-guide-access-to-testing-for-coronavirus

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