



Department of Health & Social Care

*From the Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
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The Rt Hon. Robert Halfon MP
Chair, Education Committee
House of Commons
Westminster
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29 June 2020

Dear Robert

Thank you for your letter of 24 June, following your discussion with the Minister of State for Patient Safety. I am very happy to update you, and the Committee, on the guidance for managing suspected COVID 19 cases in schools.

In order to advise schools on what to do if children or staff fall ill whilst in school displaying symptoms of COVID 19, the Government has published the following guidance:

- ['Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings'](#); and
- ['Safe working in education, childcare and children's social care settings, including the use of personal protective equipment \(PPE\)'](#).

The guidance states that, if anyone in an education or childcare setting becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, or has a loss of, or change in, their normal sense of taste or smell, they must be sent home and advised to follow the self-isolation guidance. If a child is awaiting collection, they should be moved, where possible, to a room where they can be isolated behind a closed door, depending on the age of the child and with appropriate adult supervision. Ideally, a window should be opened for ventilation. If it is not possible to isolate them, they should be moved to an area which is at least 2 metres away from other people.

Priority access to testing is available to all essential workers and their households. This includes anyone involved in education, childcare or social work, including both public and voluntary sector workers, as well as foster carers. Essential workers, and those who live with them, can book tests directly online. Education, childcare and children's social care employers can obtain access to a secure online employer referral portal, through which they can upload a full list of names of self-isolating essential workers that need a test. All children, young people, and other learners, as well as their households, also have access to a test if they display symptoms of COVID 19.

On contact tracing, the response in every school is likely to be slightly different on account of their specific circumstances. If NHS Test and Trace discovers that a pupil or teacher who tests positive for coronavirus has spent some time in a school while they could be infectious, they will take details of the school and the classes the person attended where possible. NHS Test and Trace may contact the school for further information. This work may also include finding out if there are any staff or children who may be more vulnerable to severe. The process is handled sensitively and in confidence.

We will also provide the school with information to pass on to wider groups of staff and pupils to reinforce hand and respiratory hygiene messages and remind them to self-isolate if they experience symptoms.

Regarding the use of PPE, wearing a face covering or face mask in schools or other education settings is not recommended. Schools and other education or childcare settings should therefore not require staff, children and learners to wear face coverings. Changing habits, cleaning and hygiene are effective measures in controlling the spread of the virus. Face coverings (or any form of medical mask unless instructed to be used for specific clinical reasons) should not be worn in any circumstance by those who may not be able to handle them as directed (for example, young children, or those with special educational needs or disabilities) as it may inadvertently increase the risk of transmission.

The majority of staff in education settings will not require PPE beyond what they would normally need for their work, even if they are not always able to maintain a distance of 2 metres from others. PPE is only needed in a very small number of cases including:

- children, young people and students whose care routinely already involves the use of PPE due to their intimate care needs should continue to receive their care in the same way; and
- if a child, young person or other learner becomes unwell with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) while in their setting and needs direct personal care until they can return home. A fluid-resistant surgical face mask should be worn by the supervising adult if a distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained. If contact with the child or young person is necessary, then disposable gloves, a disposable apron and a fluid-resistant surgical face mask should be worn by the supervising adult. If a risk assessment determines that there is a risk of splashing to the eyes, for example from coughing, spitting, or vomiting, then eye protection should also be worn

If a member of staff has helped someone with symptoms, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves (and in which case, a test is available) or the child subsequently tests positive. They should wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds after any contact with someone who is unwell. Cleaning the affected area with normal household disinfectant after someone with symptoms has left will reduce the risk of passing the infection on to other people.

If there is a spike in the infection rate in a school's local catchment area, it is the responsibility of local authorities and Directors of Public Health to respond and, in particular, to consider whether there should be an impact on local schools. They can also call on support from Government where necessary. The Government is currently

strengthening its capacity to support local areas: we want to make sure that they have the resources, powers, data and support that they need.

I trust that the Committee will find these answers helpful.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matt". The signature is stylized with a large 'M' and a cursive 'att'.

MATT HANCOCK