

AUTUMN TERM 2021- Questions & Answers

Q. What can I expect when I return to school for the Autumn Term?

A. All previous restrictions have now been lifted. There is no longer a requirement for bubbles, staggered start and finish times or face coverings. Assemblies can resume and there is no need to avoid mixing at lunch or break times. Schools are no longer required to undertake contact tracing as this will be done by NHS Test and Trace and the rules on self-isolation have changed.

Q. How will self-isolation work in schools?

A. Individuals are not required to self-isolate if they live in the same household as someone with Covid-19, or are a close contact of someone with COVID-19, and any of the following apply: they are fully vaccinated; they are below the age of 18 years and 6 months; they have taken part in or are currently part of an approved COVID-19 vaccine trial; they are not able to get vaccinated for medical reasons. Instead, they will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace, informed they have been in close contact with a positive case and advised to take a [PCR test](#). Staff who do not need to isolate, and children and young people aged under 18 years 6 months who usually attend school, and have been identified as a close contact, should continue to attend school as normal. They do not need to wear a face covering within the school.

Q. What is the Contingency Framework?

A. The Contingency Framework describes the principles of managing local outbreaks of COVID-19 in education and childcare settings. Local authorities, directors of public health (DsPH) and PHE health protection teams (HPTs) can recommend measures described in the contingency framework in individual education and childcare settings – or a small cluster of settings – as part of their outbreak management responsibilities. If a school experiences a substantial increase in the number of positive cases, it may wish to take extra action and the Contingency Framework details what additional action may be appropriate e.g. it may become necessary to reintroduce 'bubbles' for a temporary period, to reduce mixing between groups. The Guidance does state though that ***"Any decision to recommend the reintroduction of 'bubbles' would not be taken lightly and would need to take account of the detrimental impact they can have on the delivery of education."***

Q. Will there still be Risk Assessments?

A. Absolutely. Schools must comply with health and safety law and put in place proportionate control measures. These need to be regularly reviewed, updated and treated as 'living documents', meaning any change in the circumstances in school or in public health advice need to be reflected. This can be done by having active arrangements in place to monitor whether the controls are effective and working as planned. Schools must make sure that a risk assessment has been undertaken to identify the measures needed to reduce the risks from COVID-19 so far as is reasonably practicable but risk assessments should



be produced for many other reasons including, lone working, working with violent or challenging pupils and school trips.

Q. Will face coverings still be worn in schools?

A. No. Face coverings are no longer required in schools but are required on public transport or dedicated school transport. DfE Guidance does state though that if there is a substantial increase in the number of positive cases in a school, a director of public health might advise that face coverings should temporarily be worn in communal areas or classrooms (by pupils, staff and visitors, unless exempt) and schools should cover this possibility in their contingency plans.

Q. Can transparent face coverings be worn if face coverings are required to be worn in schools again?

A. **Transparent face coverings**, which may assist communication, can be worn however the evidence to support their effectiveness is currently very limited. Face coverings (whether transparent or cloth) should fit securely around the face to cover the nose and mouth and be made with a breathable material capable of filtering airborne particles. Whilst transparent face coverings have the benefit of aiding communication, e.g. Lip reading, this needs to be considered alongside other factors such as comfort and breathability. **Face visors or shields** can be worn by those exempt from wearing a face covering but they **are not an equivalent alternative in terms of controlling transmission of Covid-19** and are unlikely to be effective in preventing the escape of smaller respiratory particles when used without an additional face covering. Therefore, they should only be used after carrying out a risk assessment for the specific situation and should always be cleaned appropriately.

Q. Will secondary schools still be testing pupils?

A. As pupils will potentially be mixing with lots of other people during the summer holidays, all secondary school pupils should receive 2 on-site lateral flow device tests, 3 to 5 days apart, on their return to school in the autumn term. Schools can start testing from 3 working days before the beginning of term and, if need be, stagger return of pupils across the first week to manage this.

Pupils and staff should continue to test themselves twice weekly at home until the end of September, when this will be reviewed.

Q. What happens if my LFD test is positive?

A. If you have a positive LFD test result you should self-isolate in line with the guidance and get a free PCR test to check if you have Covid-19. If your PCR test is taken within 2 days of the positive lateral flow test, and is negative, it overrides the self-test LFD test and you can return to school if you don't have Covid-19 symptoms.

Q. I'm Clinically Extremely Vulnerable- what should I do?

A. Although social distancing measures have ended in the workplace, employers still have a legal responsibility to protect their employees from risks to their health and safety. The NJC Guidance, dated 16th July, states **"CEV employees should be offered individual risk assessments and their requests to**



continue working from home should be properly considered and granted unless there are compelling reasons not to do so". Further it goes on to state "If employees were previously in the shielded categories, it should be made clear what steps are being taken to protect them, for example discussing an option to reassign them to tasks where stringent social distancing guidelines can be followed if that cannot be assured in their normal role or allowing them to continue to work from home if possible."

Ask your Head Teacher, or employer, to explain to you the measures they have in place to keep you safe at work. If you have access to occupational health and employee assistance programmes in the workplace, these services can also provide you with a range of health support and advice for your physical and mental health needs. If you have any questions about this or would like support and advice, please contact your local branch or email schoolsteamlondon@gmb.org.uk.

