

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. What is the current position with risk assessments?

A. It is a legal requirement for schools to review and update risk assessments. The Omicron variant is much more transmissible than previous variants and risk assessments and procedures need to reflect this. Revised procedures should be clearly communicated to staff, including contractor staff, and their implementation and effectiveness monitored. In special schools revised risk assessments should fully reflect the additional challenges in protecting pupils and staff, particularly where pupils are unable to wear face covering.

Q. Should I be provided with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

A. If a risk assessment identifies the need for PPE, then this needs to be provided by the employer. Appropriate PPE should be provided for all staff, including catering, cleaning, and estates staff. For clinically extremely vulnerable staff, or those at significantly greater risk, FFP2/3 masks should be provided. These masks protect the wearer, unlike face coverings which protect those around the wearer.

Q. How do I know if I am working in a well-ventilated room?

A. The [Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\) recommends rooms are kept below 800ppm](#) (parts per million) and this is indicated by CO2 monitors. If you do not have CO2 monitors in place, ensure the windows (and door if possible) are open and that fresh air is circulating. The room should not feel stuffy and should not smell stale. All rooms should have ventilation risk assessments. The results from CO2 monitors should feed into a risk assessment and if levels are consistently above 800ppm and ventilation cannot be improved, either naturally or mechanically, then measures such as reducing number of people or time spent in the room should be introduced until such time as supplemental ventilation is provided.

Q. I am pregnant. Should I be at work?

A. Working in a school involves considerable public contact which may carry a higher risk of exposure to the virus and a risk assessment needs to consider this. Employers are required to carry out a risk assessment for pregnant employees. These workplace risk

assessments are usually carried out by the employer in conjunction with occupational health. Pregnant employees should only continue working if the risk assessment advises that it is safe to do so. Employers should remove or manage any risks and if this cannot be done, arrangements for suitable alternative work or working arrangements (including working from home) should be made and if this is not possible the alternative is suspension on normal pay. Guidance states covid vaccination is recommended for pregnant women and those who are unvaccinated should take a more precautionary approach. This is because unvaccinated pregnant women have an increased risk of becoming severely ill and of pre-term birth if they contract COVID-19.

Q. I have been identified as a close contact but am unable to get hold of any LFDs to carry out daily testing. What should I do?

A. Given the current issues around supply with LFDs, GMB would advise you request to work from home for the isolation period.

Q. What are the self-isolation rules for staff in education settings?

A. The government has updated the guidance on self-isolating for confirmed cases of Covid. Changes mean that instead of isolating for 10 days, those who test positive on a PCR test will only have to isolate for seven days providing they get negative lateral flow test results on days six and seven of their isolation. The tests on day six and day seven must be taken 24 hours apart. The DfE states that if both these tests are negative and any temperature has passed, the period of self-isolation can end after the second negative test result staff can return to their education setting from day 8.

This guidance applies to adults, and the government recently confirmed it also applies to children who usually attend an education or childcare setting.

The guidance does however strongly advise those who end their isolation before the 10 days to limit close contact with people outside their households and to limit contact with anyone at higher risk of severe illness. This may not be an appropriate procedure though for some schools, especially special schools, and Head Teachers may choose to take a more cautious approach.

Importantly, those working in education settings, **need to continue testing for three days even if they return to work after two negative lateral flow tests.**

Q. What is GMBs' advice about classes being combined to address staff shortages?

A. GMB is concerned that combining classes will lead to an increase in transmission. Any such proposal would need to be considered as part of a risk assessment not only looking at Covid risks such as ventilation but also risks such as lone working and pupil to staff ratios.

Q. Do I have to cover for staff who are absent?

A. Your employer can ask you to cover the duties of a colleague who is absent but you should only take on extra duties or responsibilities if you are trained and feel confident and capable to do so. Any additional duties should be discussed and mutually agreed. If extra hours will be worked, these should be paid, and it is reasonable to know how long you will be covering for. Cover should only be for short term absence. Any longer-term absence is a foreseeable event and should be properly planned for and alternative cover should be arranged. If you do take on additional duties, you will need to ensure you can still carry out your role safely and competently. As the cover classroom-based staff is different to other support staff roles, a separate information sheet is available at the bottom of the webpage.

Q. Is there anything else my school should be doing?

A. Your employer should be **communicating regularly and effectively** with all staff including informing staff of any positive cases, as soon as possible, without identifying the individuals directly or indirectly. Schools should also be **encouraging testing for all staff and pupils** at least twice weekly. There should be a **renewed focus on enhanced hygiene and cleaning regimes** throughout the premises and additional payments should be made to cleaning and site staff for extra workload or additional hours worked.