

Up-to-speed on: what the lifting of coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions means for schools

This article breaks down what you need to know about the announcement from Education Secretary Gavin Williamson and the update to the DfE's 'Schools COVID-19 operational guidance' on 6 July, regarding the easing of certain coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions for schools from 19 July.

Key points

The key points are as follows:

1. **[Updated]** [Key restrictions for schools will come to an end as we move into step 4](#)
2. **[Updated]** ['Bubbles' and consistent groups to be removed from schools](#)
3. **[Updated]** [Face coverings and social distancing will no longer be advised](#)
4. [Test and Trace will be 'significantly scaled back' in schools](#)
5. **[Updated]** [The rules on self-isolation are changing](#)
6. [Asymptomatic test kits will remain available over the Summer holidays](#)
7. [Enhanced hygiene and ventilation to continue for Autumn term](#)

Read on to learn more about each key point.



[Updated] Key restrictions for schools will come to an end as we move into step 4

[Updated] The government has announced that some key coronavirus restrictions will not continue once the country enters step 4 of the roadmap out of lockdown – this includes certain restrictions that have been in place in schools.

[Updated] The government confirmed on 12 July that step 4 of the roadmap out of lockdown will commence on 19 July 2021; this date was confirmed following an analysis of the latest data.

The full guidance can be found [here](#) and is applicable to:

- Primary schools.
- Secondary schools, including sixth forms.
- Special schools, special post-16 providers, and alternative provision.
- 16-19 academies.
- Infant, junior, middle and upper schools.
- Boarding schools.

Separate guidance is available for [early years settings](#), [further education colleges and providers](#), and [special schools](#).



[Updated] ‘Bubbles’ and consistent groups to be removed from schools

[Updated] From 19 July, it will no longer be recommended that schools use ‘bubbles’ in early years settings, schools and post-16 settings. This includes during any Summer provision, e.g. Summer schools.

Alongside enabling flexibility in the delivery of curriculum, the lifting of this restriction also allows assemblies and lunches to resume as normal, i.e. mixing is permitted.

[Updated] Schools should, however, make sure their [contingency plans](#) (also known as ‘outbreak management plans’) cover the possibility that in some local areas it may become necessary to reintroduce bubbles for a temporary period in order to reduce mixing between groups.



[Updated] Face coverings and social distancing will no longer be advised

[Updated] The need for face coverings for all pupils, staff and visitors in communal areas and classrooms will be lifted from 19 July; however, people are still permitted to wear face coverings if they choose to or are advised by a healthcare professional. This change extends to dedicated or public transport to and from school or college. Face coverings and social distancing will not be required for schools that remain open over the Summer, e.g. to run Summer schools.

Pupils and staff will also no longer need to adhere to social distancing rules in communal areas and classrooms. Staggered starts and finishes in schools will not be required from 19 July, but schools can continue with this approach if they wish until the Autumn term.

The Education Secretary confirmed that sports days would be able to go ahead from 19 July and spectators will be able to attend as normal.

If a school suffers an outbreak, it may be advised by a Director of Public Health that face coverings should be worn temporarily in communal areas and classrooms by pupils, staff and visitors, and that social distancing measures are temporarily put back in place. Schools should ensure that their contingency plans cover this possibility.



[Updated] Test and Trace will be ‘significantly scaled back’ in schools

Schools will no longer be responsible for Test and Trace close contact tracing from 19 July. This will be taken over by the NHS Test and Trace service, who will inform staff and pupils if they have been in close contact with a positive case and advised to take a confirmatory polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test.

Schools will continue to have a role in working with local health protection teams (HPTs) in the case of a local outbreak. If there is an outbreak in a school, the NHS will contact the school and a Director of Public Health may advise school leaders to temporarily reintroduce control measures.



[Updated] The rules on self-isolation are changing

From 16 August, there will be significant changes to the rules around self-isolation. Pupils under 18 will only need to self-isolate if they have tested positive for coronavirus, meaning that pupils in this category will not need to self-isolate if they are identified as being a close contact of a positive coronavirus case.

Individuals who are 18 years old will be expected to follow the same self-isolation rules as those under 18, until four months after their 18th birthday when they must follow the same rules as adults – this is to give them enough time to get fully vaccinated.

Starting in the Autumn term, staff will not need to self-isolate if they are identified as having close contact with a positive case as long as they are fully vaccinated. Staff who have only had one dose of the vaccine, or who have not been vaccinated at all, will still need to self-isolate if they are identified as a close contact.

Staff whose second dose of the vaccine is close to 16 August will need to follow the self-isolation rules for unvaccinated adults until two weeks after their vaccination, at which point they can begin to follow the guidance for fully vaccinated adults.

[Updated] In schools, the changes regarding self-isolation will not come into effect until the start of the Autumn term – this means that the current guidance will remain in place for Summer school provision and close contacts must still self-isolate.



Asymptomatic test kits will remain available over the Summer holidays

Testing remains important to reduce the transmission of infection within schools. Over the Summer, staff and secondary school pupils should continue to test regularly if they are attending schools that remain open, e.g. Summer schools. Regular testing can pause over the Summer holidays once the school has closed.

Testing kits will still be widely available and can either be collected from a local pharmacy or ordered online.

All secondary school pupils should receive two on-site lateral flow device (LFD) tests, three-to-five days apart, on their return to school in the Autumn term. Schools can start testing as early as three working days before the start of term and can stagger the return of pupils across the first week to manage this if they wish. Pupils and staff should then continue to test twice weekly at home until the end of September, when the guidance on testing will be reviewed.

Secondary schools should retain a small asymptomatic testing site (ATS) on-site until further notice so they are able to offer testing to pupils who cannot test themselves at home.

The guidance that primary-age pupils do not need to test will remain in place.



Enhanced hygiene and ventilation to continue for Autumn term

The current guidance on enhanced hygiene and ventilation will continue to remain relevant for the Autumn term.

Schools should continue to encourage frequent and thorough hand cleaning with soap and water, or hand sanitiser. The 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach should continue to be implemented.

Schools should also continue to identify any poorly-ventilated spaces as part of their risk assessments and take steps to improve the air flow. Mechanical ventilation systems should be adjusted to increase ventilation rates, and doors and windows should be opened to improve natural ventilation where possible.



[Updated] What's next?

- Add this article to your 'Watch List' to be notified of our next update.
- **[New]** Update your coronavirus risk assessment with the latest version of our [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Risk Assessment for Schools](#).
- **[New]** Read our [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Testing in Schools](#) guidance and find out the latest information on testing and managing a positive case.
- **[New]** Get the need-to-know information on Summer school provision by reading our [Up-to-speed on: The Summer Schools Programme](#).

Bibliography

DfE (2021) 'Schools COVID-19 operational guidance (applies from Step 4)'