



HR CORONAVIRUS

FAQs

Guidance for headteachers in schools and educational settings during the coronavirus pandemic - 8th September 2022

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This guidance applies to all schools and educational settings (maintained, community, voluntary aided, academies and free schools) and will support Headteachers to handle potential teaching/support staffing matters that may arise due to the coronavirus.

Please ensure that all teaching/support staff are kept informed of the latest government advice through school staff communications. All teaching/support staff must read and follow with that guidance.

The relevant guidance is:

- [COVID-19 Response: Living with COVID-19](#)
- [Emergency planning and response for education, childcare, and children's social care settings.](#)

Public Health guidance: [City & Hackney's guidance for education settings](#) sets out useful information and guidance on managing Covid-19 in schools.

If you have a question or concern regarding a member of staff related to COVID-19 and it is not covered in these FAQs, please contact your HR Business Partner or Advisor for further advice.

A list of questions covered in this document is below. It is advisable to read and understand all of the guidance. However, if you quickly need to refer to a specific answer, click on the question or heading below to jump to that section.

Table of contents

Health Guidance	5
1. What are the main symptoms of coronavirus?	5
2. What are the appropriate steps if someone in our education setting has symptoms (a suspected case) of COVID-19?	5
3. What if a member of staff is confirmed to have COVID-19?	5
4. What precautions should be taken if a member of staff has been in close contact with a child or young person who has tested positive in a setting?	5
Testing	5
5. If a member of staff has a suspected case of COVID-19, can we ask them to take a COVID-19 test?	6
Working Guidance	6
6. What are the guidelines for working arrangements for schools?	6
7. What if a member of staff insists on coming into work with symptoms or a positive test result?	6
8. Can a member of staff work from home whilst they have COVID-19?	6
9. What if a member of staff has a confirmed case of COVID-19 but feels well enough to attend work (i.e. asymptomatic or has very mild symptoms) but the nature of their work means they cannot work from home?	7
11. Do we need to ask agency workers to carry out a vulnerability risk assessment before they start a placement?	7
12. Does a coronavirus vaccination impact on the vulnerability's risk assessment?	8
13. If staff have received the vaccine do they now need to review or recomplete vulnerability assessment?	8
Vaccinations	8
14. If a member is unwell after having the coronavirus vaccination, how should any sickness absence be recorded?	8
15. Do we need to keep a record of staff who have been fully vaccinated and are we legally allowed to ask for evidence?	9
Supporting staff who are at increased risk from COVID-19	9
16. What about staff who were previously identified as clinically extremely vulnerable?	9
17. What arrangements should be made for staff who are immunosuppressed?	9
18. What arrangements should be made for pregnant staff?	10
19. If it is agreed that an employee will work from home for an extended period, what are the key considerations?	10
Local outbreaks and variants of concern	11
PPE and face coverings	11
20. What is the current general guidance on staff wearing PPE?	11
21. What is the current guidance for face coverings for staff, pupils and students during the coronavirus pandemic?	11
22. What if a member of staff wants to wear PPE or a face covering and it is not a requirement for their role?	11

COVID-19 related absence	12
23. If an employee has a confirmed case of COVID-19 (by a lateral flow or PCR) test?	12
Sickness	12
‘Other’ absence	12
25. How can I support a member of staff who experienced prolonged symptoms after contracting coronavirus (Long COVID)?	13
Annual leave for support staff who work 52 weeks per year	13
26. Carrying over holiday	13
27. What considerations should be made for a member of staff who wants to go on holiday abroad?	13
Dependency leave	14
29. What are the provisions for staff who need to look after dependents due to COVID-19?	14
Contingency workers and contractors	15
30. Can we ask external contractors what provision they have put in place to reduce the risk to their staff and school staff on school premises?	15
DBS checks	15
31. Are there any changes to the DBS process?	15
Further information	16
Voluntary Aided Schools, Free Schools and Academies	16
Government advice	16
Local Government Association	16
London Diocesan Board of Schools	16

Health Guidance

1. What are the main symptoms of coronavirus?

The NHS have set out details of symptoms of COVID-19 here:

- [COVID 19 symptoms in adults](#)
- [COVID-19 symptoms in children](#)

Staff can also check their symptoms online using the [111 online coronavirus service](#).

2. What are the appropriate steps if someone in our education setting has symptoms (a suspected case) of COVID-19?

Pupils, staff and other adults should follow guidance on [People with symptoms of a respiratory infection including COVID-19 or a positive test result](#).

If staff have symptoms of a respiratory infection, such as COVID-19, and they have a high temperature or they do not feel well enough to go to work or carry out normal activities, they are advised to try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people.

If the member of staff has symptoms of a respiratory infection including COVID-19, they should make their line manager aware so they can discuss any potential precautions to take. These could include:

- Working from home, where possible if they feel well enough (please refer to Question 8)
- Avoiding close contact with anyone who is at higher risk of becoming seriously unwell if they are infected with COVID-19 and other respiratory infections, especially those whose [immune system means that they are at higher risk of serious illness, despite vaccination](#).

3. What if a member of staff is confirmed to have COVID-19?

Staff and other adults who have tested positive for COVID-19 are advised to stay at home and avoid contact with other people for 5 days; in line with the guidance in [People with symptoms of a respiratory infection including COVID-19](#).

4. What precautions should be taken if a member of staff has been in close contact with a child or young person who has tested positive in a setting?

Staff who have been in contact with someone in a setting with COVID-19 should follow the guidance on [Coronavirus: how to stay safe and help prevent the spread](#) and the protocols put in place for their setting.

Testing

A small number of eligible groups are still able to get free rapid lateral flow tests as outlined in [Changes to testing for coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in England](#).

5. If a member of staff has a suspected case of COVID-19, can we ask them to take a COVID-19 test?

Schools cannot require staff to take a coronavirus test. However, headteachers have a duty of care to the staff and children in the school and may request a member of staff stay home if they have a suspected case but unconfirmed case of COVID-19.

If the member of staff is unable to provide proof that they are unable to attend work due to COVID-19 (e.g. a test result), then their sickness absence will be recorded as a reason unrelated to COVID-19.

Please refer to the COVID-19 related absence for further information.

Working Guidance

6. What are the guidelines for working arrangements for schools?

School leaders and staff should be following the guidance [COVID-19 Response: Living with COVID-19](#).

The government guidance [emergency planning and response for education, childcare, and children's social care settings](#) provides information on how schools should plan for and deal with emergencies, including significant public health incidents and severe weather.

Public Health guidance: [City & Hackney's guidance for education settings](#) provides information for prevention, mitigation and control of COVID-19.

7. What if a member of staff insists on coming into work with symptoms or a positive test result?

While most staff will agree that if they have symptoms or a positive test result, they should not attend work, there may be some who feel otherwise. In this instance, headteachers can take the decision to refuse the member of staff from attending work, if in their reasonable judgement it is necessary to protect others from COVID-19, in line with [national guidance](#).

8. Can a member of staff work from home whilst they have COVID-19?

Staff may be asymptomatic or have very mild symptoms whilst they have COVID-19. Where their role allows and the member of staff feels suitably well enough, it may be feasible for them to work from home either in their role or carrying out appropriate alternative duties for the period whilst they are considered infectious. Headteachers/managers should hold sensitive conversations with staff to explore if they are able to work from home and the priority should be given to allowing the member of staff to convalesce at home.

If it is agreed that the member of staff is able to work from home, the headteacher/manager should keep in regular contact with the individual and review the arrangement if the member of staff's symptoms change or get worse.

9. What if a member of staff has a confirmed case of COVID-19 but feels well enough to attend work (i.e. asymptomatic or has very mild symptoms) but the nature of their work means they cannot work from home?

If a member of staff has a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 and feels well enough to work, they should be supported to work from home either carrying out their role or if this is not possible being given suitable alternative duties. If suitable alternative duties cannot be undertaken at home, the member of staff will be on SPECIAL LEAVE - COVID-19.

10. Which staff should complete a COVID-19 vulnerabilities risk assessment?

It is recommended that schools continue to use the COVID-19 vulnerabilities risk assessments for all staff and that these are regularly reviewed, particularly where the individual's assessment is critical or high risk or the staff member's circumstances change or where guidance or new restrictions come into place from the government.

Please see Questions 12 and 13 for guidance on the impact of the coronavirus vaccination on a member of staff's vulnerabilities risk assessment.

Schools have a duty under health and safety law to assess risks to staff in their workplace.

Further guidance on the control measures for schools in relation to COVID-19 is in the [City & Hackney's guidance for education settings](#).

In order to ensure schools have complied with their legal obligations to protect staff, it is recommended that in addition to a whole school risk assessment, schools should carry out a [COVID-19 vulnerabilities risk assessment](#) with all members of staff to ensure that any risks on an individual basis are identified. These risk assessments should be carried out with staff who have been identified as being at increased risk from coronavirus as a priority.

Where a risk assessment identifies the member of staff is at increased risk, the school and the member of staff should discuss measures the school has put in place to reduce these risks and consider any additional measures that could be put into place. Headteachers should try as practically possible to accommodate additional measures, where appropriate.

11. Do we need to ask agency workers to carry out a vulnerability risk assessment before they start a placement?

We recommend that agency workers are asked to complete a vulnerability's risk assessment before commencing their placement so the school can assess if they need to make adaptations for the agency worker depending on the outcome of their risk assessment. If the school is concerned that they will not be able to make adaptations to sufficiently reduce risk to the agency worker then they do not have to take on the agency worker for the assignment.

12. Does a coronavirus vaccination impact on the vulnerability's risk assessment?

The impact of the coronavirus vaccine on risk reduction for each individual is extremely difficult to measure because it is difficult to know the level of immunity each individual will acquire after vaccination. This varies from person to person and depends on a lot of factors, including age, current or previous treatment with medicines and some underlying conditions. Therefore, Public Health cannot predict whether or how much staff clinical vulnerability has been changed by being vaccinated.

But it is important to note that being vaccinated does not provide a guarantee that individuals cannot be infected (or infect other people). Instead vaccination reduces the risk in those people for whom it's been effective and at population level reduces the overall risk of infection and burden of the disease. Despite this, each individual will not know how well their vaccine has worked.

There remains an ongoing risk that the vaccines currently available might not offer as good protection against new variants as they do for the original virus strain and earlier variants.

13. If staff have received the vaccine do they now need to review or recomplete vulnerability assessment?

No, as the change in the member of staff's clinical vulnerability due to being vaccinated cannot be predicted, the underlying vulnerability evaluated within the vulnerability assessment will not be changed by an individual's vaccination status.

There are circumstances where reviews of the vulnerability assessment are necessary, such as if there was a change in their personal vulnerability characteristics, such as if there is a new diagnosis since the last risk assessment or if there has been significant deterioration or control of the known long term conditions or risk factors, or a new health diagnosis/deterioration. In these cases staff should discuss these changes in circumstances with their manager and where necessary update their vulnerability assessment.

Vaccinations

14. If a member is unwell after having the coronavirus vaccination, how should any sickness absence be recorded?

The government has created guidance on [What to expect after your COVID-19 vaccination](#). Although feeling feverish is not uncommon for a day or two, a high temperature is unusual and may indicate the member of staff has COVID-19 or another infection.

If a member of staff becomes unwell, following receiving a coronavirus vaccination and is unable to attend work, this sickness absence should be recorded as Covid-19 Sickness.

If a member of staff is concerned or their symptoms get worse, they should call 111.

15. Do we need to keep a record of staff who have been fully vaccinated and are we legally allowed to ask for evidence?

As restrictions and measures in response to the coronavirus pandemic have changed, Hackney Education recommends that headteachers/managers need to carefully consider if they need to ask and retain staff information on their vaccination status. The Information Commissioner's Office provides further guidance on [Data protection and Coronavirus-19 – relaxation of government measures](#).

Supporting staff who are at increased risk from COVID-19

16. What about staff who were previously identified as clinically extremely vulnerable?

Staff are no longer identified as being clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) and the requirement for staff who were previously considered vulnerable to shield has been removed. Staff who were previously considered CEV may still have concerns about the risk of catching COVID-19 and Hackney Education recommends that headteachers/managers should :

- discuss how the school are managing the risks from COVID-19 with all staff including staff previously identified as CEV
- talk to staff about any concerns they may have and any measures that can be put in place to reduce these concerns
- staff should have their vulnerability risk assessments regularly reviewed to determine whether any changes need to be considered

There remains a smaller number of people whose immune system means they are at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19, despite vaccination. Please refer to Question 17 for further information.

Staff who were previously identified as clinically extremely vulnerable should continue to follow the guidance in [Coronavirus: how to stay safe and help prevent the spread](#).

Headteachers and staff should consider advice from the member of staff's health professional on whether additional precautions are right for them.

17. What arrangements should be made for staff who are immunosuppressed?

UK government [public health guidance](#) advises people who are immunosuppressed may work from home if it feels right for them and they can.

Due to the nature of their work, long term working from home is not normally possible for most posts in schools. For staff who are immunosuppressed and cannot work from home, headteachers should talk to their staff member about any arrangements that could be made to reduce the risks.

Headteachers should be aware that staff who are immunosuppressed may be entitled to a [Reasonable Adjustment under the Equality Act](#). See [Public health principles for reducing the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections in the workplace](#).

18. What arrangements should be made for pregnant staff?

Pregnant staff are advised to follow the guidance on [Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19](#).

Schools should make the following arrangements for their pregnant staff :

- Routinely carry out a [risk assessment](#) in line with the Management of Health and Safety Regulations at Work (1999).
- Review the school risk assessment and the vulnerability's risk assessment for the individual regularly (including when the member of staff reaches 26 weeks gestation) and make any changes necessary.
- Discuss with the individual any work adaptations that can be put in place for the pregnant member of staff
- If headteachers and managers have carried out risk assessments for their pregnant member of staff and are concerned about their working arrangements and the risk from coronavirus, they should contact their HR Business Partner or Advisor for further advice.

Pregnant staff should be reminded they can commence their maternity leave at any point 11 weeks before the expected date of childbirth. The start date of their maternity leave is the employees decision.

Further guidance is available from:

- Health and Safety Executive: [Protecting new and expectant mothers at work](#)
- Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\), infection and pregnancy FAQs](#).

19. If it is agreed that an employee will work from home for an extended period, what are the key considerations?

- Is the space sufficiently free from noise and interruption?
- Will it be necessary to transport equipment or files?
 - If yes: can this be done safely:
 - Can the load be reduced?
- Are you able to have conversations that are sensitive and confidential without being overheard?

Further guidance on supporting staff who are working from home for an extended period of time is available in the [Health and Wellbeing Section](#) on the Services for Schools website.

Local outbreaks and variants of concern

Government guidance is available in the [Emergency planning and response for education, childcare, and children's social care settings](#)

Local guidance is available in: [City & Hackney's guidance for education settings](#)

In the meantime, if schools have any questions, please contact your HR Business Partner or Advisor.

PPE and face coverings

20. What is the current general guidance on staff wearing PPE?

The government guidance in [personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#) states that in most cases based on current evidence, there is very little scientific evidence of widespread benefit from PPE. Instead, practising good hand hygiene and social distancing is key to minimising the risk of infection. Guidance on the circumstances where PPE should be used in schools is available in: Health protection in education and childcare settings Chapter 2: [infection prevention and control](#).

21. What is the current guidance for face coverings for staff, pupils and students during the coronavirus pandemic?

Those attending education or childcare settings will not normally be expected to wear a face covering. Face coverings for children under the age of 3 are not recommended for safety reasons.

Staff and pupils should follow the guidance on [When to consider wearing a face covering or a face mask](#)

Schools should prepare to be flexible as the Director of Public Health may recommend the use of face coverings in communal areas or classrooms during COVID-19 outbreaks or in enhanced response areas (areas where the COVID-19 risk may put exceptional local pressure on the healthcare system).

22. What if a member of staff wants to wear PPE or a face covering and it is not a requirement for their role?

We recommend that headteachers consider requests from staff to wear PPE and face coverings on a case by case basis taking into account their level of risk based on their COVID-19 vulnerabilities risk assessment, their individual circumstances and the nature of their role.

Please contact HR for further guidance if required.

[Back to table of contents](#)

COVID-19 related absence

Recording absence due to COVID-19:

Please remember to record COVID-19 absence on iTrent or an alternative sickness absence database with the correct absence related code so the impact of the virus in your school can be monitored as detailed in questions 46 and 47.

23. If an employee has a confirmed case of COVID-19 (by a lateral flow or PCR) test?

Business Managers must record sickness on iTrent or on an alternative database as sickness absence due to Covid-19.

The normal sickness procedure applies as stated in the Green Book (support staff) and Burgundy Book (teaching staff). Academies and other education settings will follow their own sickness absence procedures.

Teaching and support staff are required to provide medical certification for absences over 7 days (including a weekend). If managers have a member of staff who is unable to provide a fit note due to being unwell with COVID they should speak to their HR Business Partner or Advisor.

Business Managers are urged to record the actual reason for absence for monitoring purposes.

Please note: In order for an absence to be recorded as COVID-19 related, staff will need to provide evidence that their absence is due to COVID-19. As reporting of test results on the NHS is no longer available, the schools may choose to accept photographs of a lateral flow test (with evidence of a time and date the test was taken) or another suitable alternative such as a doctor's note.

Displaying potential symptoms related to coronavirus would not normally be sufficient evidence to justify it being recorded as a COVID-19 related absence. Otherwise the reason for the sickness absence should be recorded as the most closely related reason (not COVID-related) in the schools absence management system.

24. How is COVID-19 related absence recorded on iTrent?

[iTrent](#) has Covid-19-related absence codes. **It is important that absence related to Covid-19 is recorded accurately to help monitor the impact of the virus.**

Sickness

- Covid-19 Sickness (confirmed cases only).

'Other' absence

- Special Leave (Paid) – Covid-19 Dependency leave.
- Special Leave (Paid) – Covid-19 Self-isolation.
- Special Leave (Paid) – Covid-19 Service closure.

Absence is recorded on the system as follows:

- To record sickness: Click **Add New Sickness Dates** > find and select the employee > enter the sickness dates and reason > click **Save** or
- To record 'other' 'Covid-19'-related absence: Click **Add 'Other' Absence Details** > find and select the employee > enter the absence dates and reason > click **Save**.

If you have any queries, please e-mail: Education.payroll@hackney.gov.uk

If a member of staff has a confirmed case of COVID-19 but feels well enough to attend work (i.e. asymptomatic or has very mild symptoms) but the nature of their work means they cannot work from home, this should be recorded as .Special Leave (Paid) – Covid-19 Self-isolation.

25. How can I support a member of staff who experienced prolonged symptoms after contracting coronavirus (Long COVID)?

How COVID-19 impacts on individuals and how they recover will be different for each person. Headteachers should treat any cases where a member of staff is experiencing prolonged symptoms of COVID-19 (long COVID) sympathetically and on a case by case basis. This could involve making reasonable adjustments, phased return to work and if absences persist informal meetings under the Sickness Absence Policy can be arranged.

If additional support and advice is required please discuss the individual cases with your HR Business Partner / Advisor and further advice/referral can be made to Occupational Health.

Any sickness absence related to coronavirus should be recorded as Covid-19 Sickness.

Annual leave for support staff who work 52 weeks per year

26. Carrying over holiday

Where leave has not been taken because of the coronavirus: 2020/21 Leave year: In exceptional circumstances, Headteachers could authorise the carry forward of up to 20 days leave (where a member of staff has been unwell due to COVID-19 or were on the frontline responding to the Covid pandemic). This must be taken by the end of the 2022/23 leave year. The maximum that can be carried forward in total is 20 days.

For the annual leave year 2021/2022, staff may be able to carry over a maximum of 72 hours (10 days') into the next leave year which runs from the beginning of April 2022 to the end of March 2023. Staff will need to take 36 hours (5 days) of these days by 30 June 2022 and the other 36 hours (5 days) by the end of March 2023.

27. What considerations should be made for a member of staff who wants to go on holiday abroad?

The latest guidance on travel to England can be accessed at [Travel abroad from England during coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

Staff should check relevant guidance relating COVID-19 when travelling abroad and if they are concerned that this may impact on their ability to attend work, they must discuss this with their manager prior to travel.

28. How should headteachers respond if an employee refuses to come to work?

Some staff may be nervous about attending their workplace at certain times during the pandemic. If the member of staff refuses to attend work, the Headteacher should take into account their reasons and consider if there is any way the member of staff's concerns can be managed (see information on employees staff who are at increased risk from coronavirus and those with childcare responsibilities).

Dependency leave

29. What are the provisions for staff who need to look after dependents due to COVID-19?

Dependency Leave provisions are set out in the [Leave Entitlements policy](#). The policy provides for up to seven days paid dependency leave per year (pro-rata for part time staff) to deal with circumstances involving the illness, injury or death of a dependent. Employees may make the request to their managers who should consider the circumstances of each case in line with the policy. Staff can also apply for unpaid dependency leave.

Staff also have the option to take unpaid parental leave as details in the [Leave Entitlements policy](#). Where a member of staff is not able to attend work due to the care of a dependant, the headteacher or leader may consider agreeing to interim flexible working arrangements if the member of staff's role allows for it.

For dependency leave to be recorded as COVID-19 related, staff will be required to provide evidence that the dependency leave is due to COVID-19 e.g. evidence of a positive test result for the dependent.

Both dependency leave and other leave related to COVID-19 should be recorded as outlined in Section 3.

Please refer to the [Leave entitlements policy](#) for further guidance.

Contingency workers and contractors

30. Can we ask external contractors what provision they have put in place to reduce the risk to their staff and school staff on school premises?

We recommend that you request details of the measures external contractors have put in place for their staff on your premises. Headteachers need to ensure that any provisions they make are to their approval and in line with the control measures of the setting. It is imperative that these discussions

are had to ensure that all parties on the school site, regardless of employer, are strictly following measures to reduce risks.

Please request details of any risk assessments for the whole service carried out by the external contractor and raise any concerns with them. This is important as if anything happens to a worker in school as a result of the third party contractors failures, both the school and the third party could be named in any personal injury claims.

DBS checks

31. Are there any changes to the DBS process?

Changes to reflect Right to Work rules

The DBS has published a number of changes to the DBS identity checking guidance to reflect the changes to Right to Work rules. The new identity checking guidance takes effect from **1st July 2021** and the Online DBS system will be updated on this date to reflect the changes.

All ID Routes are unchanged, but the question which asked, 'Is the applicant an UK/EEA National' has changed to 'Is the applicant a **United Kingdom National**'.

Additionally, 'Group 1a' has been renamed 'Group 1a: Primary' and three new ID documents have been added to this group.

The flowchart and guidance on our [DBS Documentary Evidence Sheet](#) was updated on 1 July.

Verification of ID documents

At the start of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the DBS relaxed their rules so that verification of identity documents could be done over video link. This guidance has also been updated to:

When checking the validity of the documents it is **best practice to carry out this examination face-to-face**. Other alternative methods include via a live video link, for example Skype and FaceTime. In both cases you **must be in physical possession of the original documents**. Any risks identified when using live video must be assessed and mitigated by you if implementing this practice. You **must not** rely on the inspection of the documents via a live video link, or by checking a faxed or scanned copy of the document.

Further information

You can view full guidance about the changes on the [Government DBS website](#) or refer any queries to the Hackney Education DBS Team (hackneyeducation.dbs@hackney.gov.uk).

Further information

Additional information can be accessed as stated below:

Voluntary Aided Schools, Free Schools and Academies

Please refer to your Leave policies and Sickness Absence schemes.

Government advice

- **Full list of guidance:** [Guidance for schools: coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

Please also see the Schools bulletin for the full list of government guidance.

Local Government Association

<https://www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus-information-councils>

London Diocesan Board of Schools

www.ldbs.co.uk/coronavirus

If you wish to discuss matters further please do not hesitate to contact your HR Business Partner/Advisor.