Local COVID-19 Infection Control Decision Framework for schools

Audience: local authorities, maintained, foundation, community and voluntary schools, church diocesan authorities, Pupil Referral Units, EOTAS and independent schools.

Overview: This Framework sets out arrangements for the delivery of learning in schools enabling them to tailor interventions to reflect local risks and circumstances.

This guidance sets out the actions school leaders should take to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in their school. This includes public health advice.
It is for leaders and staff in:
- maintained nursery settings
- primary schools
- secondary schools (including sixth forms)
- special schools, special post-16 providers
- infant, junior and middle schools
- PRUs
- boarding schools
- independent schools.

Schools should work closely with parents, carers, staff and unions when agreeing the best approaches for their circumstances.

We use the terms 'must' and 'should' throughout the guidance. We use the term 'must' when the person in question is legally required to do something and 'should' when the advice set out is good practice.

1. Introduction

The [Coronavirus Control Plan for Wales: autumn and winter 2021 update](#) sets out that, despite the challenges the winter period poses, we expect schools, alongside childcare and play settings, colleges and universities, to remain open.

Risk assessments will guide schools on the reasonable measures to take to minimise exposure and spread of respiratory viruses including Covid-19. These reasonable measures can include good personal hygiene, adequate ventilation and appropriate cleaning measures.

Other measures may be introduced to reflect the situation at a point in time, as part of a proportionate system of controls. For schools, this allows some flexibility for local decision-making and tailored interventions, supported by local authorities and public health officials.

This guidance should be read in close conjunction with:

- [Alert level 0: guidance for employers, businesses and organisations](#) which outlines fundamental advice on how COVID-19 is spread and what

reasonable measures employers should take in reducing the risk in their setting
- any additional support material provided to schools by Welsh Government.

2. Guiding principles

In recognising the balance of benefits and harms to learners and staff our guiding principles are to:

- enable schools to offer as wide a range of support and experiences as possible, including the provision of free breakfast and after school clubs, extra-curricular activities and practical subjects
- secure the best outcomes for all learners by considering both their educational needs and wellbeing
- manage ongoing risks of COVID-19 as safely as possible as for other infections, and ensure clarity of actions required if there is a case in a school.

3. COVID-19 Alert Levels

As we transition from pandemic to endemic the alert level system still allows measures and interventions to address specific risks. Regardless of the alert level at any point, the following three key points are central to the approach in schools.

- The fundamental principle remains that the most effective way to prevent transmission of COVID-19 in our schools is to stop infection being brought into the school.
- The best way to manage personal risks is to take up the offer of vaccination, and we encourage those eligible for vaccination to take up this offer.
- If anyone tests positive for COVID-19 they should self-isolate and not attend school.

In Wales the person or persons responsible for any premises, or the work activity being undertaken on the premises, are under a specific duty to take all reasonable measures based on a risk assessment to minimise the risk of exposure to, and the spread of, COVID-19. As part of this, schools will need to ensure that regular COVID-19 risk assessments continue to be undertaken. The assessment should directly address risks associated with COVID-19, to enable measures to be put in place to control those risks.

The Hierarchy of Risk Controls outlined in this advice and in the guidance for employers, businesses and organisations underpins the risk assessment. All employers have a duty to consult employees on health and safety, and they are best placed to understand the risks in individual schools. Employers should share the risk assessment results with the workforce.

Schools working with their local authority must also follow the requirements of the Management of Health and Safety in the Workplace Regulations 1999.

4. Determining the risk of Covid-19 to the general population

The overall risk for Wales will continue to be determined nationally by Welsh Government guided by surveillance and epidemiology, with all partners kept informed.

Locally there are well-established systems in place to gather intelligence and feedback information to Welsh Government. Local Authorities and the wider public health system have excellent relationships with schools and other education settings and throughout the pandemic have evidenced a collaborative approach to managing risks in these settings.

5. Core interventions to be implemented

The following core measures should remain in place to protect learners and staff:

- All staff and learners should be reminded to follow the Welsh Government guidance for self-isolation.
- Staff and learners should not attend school if they have any COVID-19 symptoms. If a staff member or learner becomes symptomatic they should get a test as soon as possible, and should self-isolate until the outcome of the test. Further guidance is available.
- Regular handwashing, and respiratory etiquette (Catch it, Bin it, Kill it) are key interventions to prevent spread and manage cases, incidents & outbreaks.
- Adequate ventilation by opening windows or adjusting ventilation systems are also important. Further guidance is available here. Carbon dioxide monitors have been made available to all schools – a 'how to use' guide for these devices as an aid to managing ventilation in education settings is available.
- Maintain appropriate levels of cleaning in line with other communicable diseases. There will, however, no longer be a need for schools to set aside specific days for deep cleaning. However if there is a confirmed cluster associated with one class in the school a deep clean of the immediate area will continue to be helpful in reducing transmission.

Face coverings

For the immediate return after half term i.e. 28 February as a minimum face coverings should be worn by secondary aged learners/staff when moving around communal areas. There may be circumstances where schools, taking on board public health advice may need to consider moving to the 'very high' advice for a limited period of time. This advice should be followed until further notice.

Testing

As part of our asymptomatic testing programme, staff and secondary-aged learners are strongly encouraged to use LFD tests **twice a week** up to the end of the current term i.e. 8 April. This advice does not impact on arrangements for those identified as contacts of positive cases or those who have symptoms (who should self-isolate and take a LFD test).

[Further guidance for settings in relation to children and young people with higher clinical risk and clinically extremely vulnerable adults](#) is available.

6. Tailored interventions to be implemented based on local risk

Annex A provides details of the hierarchy of controls. This is a way to prioritise risk control measures based on how effective different types of control are in reducing risks and will be a helpful tool for local authorities and schools when considering tailored interventions.

If, through local intelligence, it is assessed that the public health risk– for a region, area or individual school – differs from the national risk level, for example, due to evidence of significant spread of infection in the school or a significant spike of cases within the local community, schools will be supported to review their risk assessment and put additional proportionate tailored interventions in place using the table below. **Further details are set out in section 7 and 8.**

Schools may also identify that additional interventions may need to be put in place to address risks identified for some learners. Schools will be supported by the local public health system to consider how to tailor these interventions accordingly.

Table 2: Schools intervention framework

The tables below describe the possible control measures that can be applied to reduce transmission risk. In general schools would be supported by the local public health system to agree which of the control measures would be proportionate to the perceived risk.

	Low	**Moderate**	**High**	**Very high**
Reducing close interactions	Implement arrangements aimed at reducing close interactions between staff and learners where possible.	Implement arrangements aimed at reducing close interactions between staff and learners. This may include: • not holding large group gatherings such as assemblies • the use of one way systems • consistent seating plans (recognising this may not be possible for younger learners) • using outdoor spaces where possible.	Implement arrangements aimed at reducing close interactions between staff and learners. This may include: • not holding large group gatherings such as assemblies • the use of one way systems • consistent seating plans (recognising this may not be possible for younger learners) • using outdoor spaces where possible • floor signage.	Reduce close interactions between learners to the lowest practical level. This may include the measures set out at the High level as well as introduction of contact groups and potentially pausing after school/breakfast provision, or team sports where necessary.
Physical distancing	Encourage physical distancing in indoor communal areas outside of the classroom, such as corridors, recognising that this may not be possible with younger children or with learners that require one to one support.	Physical distancing in place in classrooms depending on room capacity and risk assessment, recognising that this may not be possible with younger children or with learners that require one to one support.	Physical distancing and seating plans in place in classrooms. This may include forward facing desks depending on room capacity and risk assessment, recognising that this may not be possible with younger	Physical distancing and seating plans in place in classrooms. This may include forward facing desks depending on room capacity and risk assessment, recognising that this may not be possible with younger

			children or with learners that require one to one support.	children or with learners that require one to one support.
Use of face coverings by secondary aged learners	Face coverings are not routinely recommended, but may be worn by secondary aged learners anywhere on the school site should they wish to do so. Face coverings continue to be recommended on school transport.	Face coverings are not routinely recommended, but may be worn by secondary aged learners anywhere on the school site and in particular when moving around indoor communal areas outside of the classroom, such as corridors. Face coverings continue to be recommended on school transport.	Face coverings should be worn by secondary aged learners when moving around indoor communal areas outside of the classroom, such as corridors, where physical distance cannot be maintained. Face coverings continue to be recommended on school transport.	Face coverings should be worn by secondary aged learners in all indoor areas, including classrooms, where physical distance cannot be maintained. Face coverings continue to be recommended on school transport.
Use of face coverings by staff and visitors	Face coverings are not routinely recommended, but may be worn by staff and visitors anywhere on the school site should they wish to do so.	Face coverings may be worn by staff and visitors in schools when moving around communal areas outside of the classroom, such as corridors.	Face coverings should be worn by staff and visitors in schools when moving around indoor communal areas outside of the classroom, such as corridors, where physical distance cannot be maintained.	Face coverings should be worn by staff and visitors in all indoor areas, including classrooms, where physical distance cannot be maintained.

As we transition from pandemic to endemic we will inevitably have to live with a background of on-going transmission of Covid-19, and therefore we can expect to continue to see cases amongst learners and staff.

7. What happens if there is a case of COVID-19 in your school

If a school becomes aware of one isolated confirmed case of Covid-19 in a class in any setting this is not evidence of transmission within a class, particularly when community transmission is very high.

As is the case with the close contacts of any confirmed positive case TTP will lead on identifying the close contacts of staff and learners who have tested positive, where possible. When a single case is identified, primary and special schools should issue an inform letter to the class. Secondary schools do not need to do this as it is recognised that they operate on a different basis; learners are encouraged to undertake LFD tests twice a week, therefore issuing inform letters is not considered necessary. In addition, secondary age learners have been offered vaccination, are able to wear a face covering and are generally more likely to be able to identify and provide details of their close contacts and provide this information to TTP if required.

The inform letter should be used to let learners and parents/guardians know there has been a positive case with which the learner may have been in contact, and reminding them of precautionary steps that can be taken.

The majority of learners in the class/year group are unlikely to be identified as close contacts. However if a school becomes aware of two or more cases within 7 calendar days in a class, the approach for primary and special schools would be that the school issues a warn and inform letter. Given secondary schools operate on a different basis and that learners are encouraged to undertake LFD tests twice a week, it is not considered necessary for the school to issue a warn and inform letter. In addition, secondary age learners have been offered vaccination, are able to wear a face covering and are generally more likely to be able to identify and provide details of their close contacts and provide this information to TTP if required.

If you have already issued a warn and inform letter during the past 7 days, we do not advise issuing a further warn and inform letter to the same group of parents and should instead continue to monitor the situation. If you feel the situation is deteriorating further you can seek advice from your regional contact (TTP or EHO lead).

The TTP teams will be responsible for contacting each positive case and collecting information about their close contacts both within and outside the school. For learners and staff this will focus on community contacts, close friendship groups and close interactions. It is TTPs role to identify which individuals meet the definition of a close contact and who, if anyone, would be required to self-isolate.

Contact tracing is supported by the use of an 'e-form' which gathers information to help the contact tracing process, particularly when the TTP system is experiencing high volumes of cases.

A close contact is anyone who has had any of the following types of contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19:

- face-to-face contact including being coughed on or having a conversation within 1 metre
- skin-to-skin physical contact for any length of time
- contact within 1 metre for one minute or longer without face-to-face contact
- contact within 2 metres of someone for more than 15 minutes (as a one-off contact, or added up together over 1 day)
- travelled in the same vehicle or a plane.

This 'warn and inform' approach reinforces key messages about the risk to others from COVID-19 and what can be done to minimise this risk, e.g. by remaining vigilant for new symptoms, having a low threshold for seeking a test even with mild symptoms, and avoiding contact with vulnerable family and friends in the short-term (e.g. elderly relatives or those who are unvaccinated or higher risk of severe COVID-19 infection). It also strongly advises against any hospital and care home visits for 10 days.

Schools should not request evidence of a negative test result or other medical evidence before a learner returns to school. If a child does not have symptoms and has not been advised to stay home/self-isolate by TTP then they can attend the school. Further information is available [here](#).

PHW will be responsible for providing guidance to support the TTP teams and schools where a review of control measures is required to manage incidents. This will be coordinated through the IMT arrangements as described below.

Everyone has a responsibility to self-isolate if they develop any symptoms of COVID-19. Those with symptoms should [self-isolate and take a LFT test](#).

8. What happens if there is a potential outbreak?

PHW's [Communicable Disease Outbreak Plan for Wales](#) (2020) provides advice for managing all communicable disease outbreaks with public health implications across Wales.

If there is evidence of significant spread of infection in the school setting, local public health officials will discuss with the head teacher or nominated deputy of the school and may judge that additional action is taken if they have assessed that transmission is likely to be occurring in the school. Advice based on the assessment of each individual situation will be provided to support the school in preventing further spread through use of additional tailored interventions identified in Table 2 if necessary.

Typically a specific IMT or Outbreak Control Team (OCT) will not need to be convened to manage an incident/outbreak associated with a school. TTP teams or designated local teams will continue to be responsible for contacting each positive case and collecting information about their close contacts both within and outside the school.

Schools should already have contingency plans (sometimes called outbreak management plans) outlining what they would do if learners or staff test positive for COVID-19, or how they would operate if they are advised to take extra measures to help break chains of transmission. On the rare occasion that an outbreak is declared the decision will be made by local public health experts, in line with the Communicable Disease Outbreak Control Plan for Wales and if it is felt necessary to provide a coordinated public health response.

9. Contact Tracing in Different Age Groups

TTP may interview learners, who are aged under 16, with a parent or legal guardian. Individual assessment of all contacts will be easier in older learners, where learners are likely to be more able to reliably report who they have had contact with.

The focus of contact tracing for children in primary schools, early years settings and for learners with ALN will be to work with parents/carers to identify close friendship groups and community contacts they may be aware of and in some circumstances this will include a discussion with the school.

10. Further guidance

Children and Young People with Higher Clinical Risks and Clinically Extremely Vulnerable adults

- Further advice for children and young people with higher clinical risks and clinically extremely vulnerable adults is available here.

Staff who are at increased risk

- Staff who are at increased risk can continue to attend school. While in school they should follow the interventions to minimise the risks of transmission - including taking particular care to observe good hand and respiratory hygiene, minimising contact and maintaining physical distancing - and should have an individual workplace assessment.
- People who live with those who are at increased risk can attend the workplace but should ensure they maintain good prevention practice in the workplace and home settings.

Staff who are pregnant

- Staff who are pregnant are encouraged to take up vaccination and have a workplace risk assessment.

- Those who are 28 weeks pregnant and beyond, or are pregnant and have an underlying health condition, should take a more precautionary approach. Employers should consider both how to redeploy these staff and how to maximise the potential for homeworking, wherever possible.
- If home-working is not possible, pregnant staff and their employers should follow the advice in the [COVID-19: advice for pregnant employees](#)**.**

Attending more than one setting

- Attendance at more than one setting will require close partnership working between schools, childcare settings and parents. If there is a positive COVID-19 case Test, Trace, Protect (TTP) will lead on identifying the close contacts of staff and learners who have tested positive, supported by discussions with schools and settings.
- If a child is accessing both education and childcare, and this is taking place across two settings or sites, it will be important to ensure schools and childcare settings all understand the transition arrangements and are clear about when the child will be in each setting and what collection and transport arrangements are in place.
- Where a learner routinely attends more than one setting on a part-time basis, e.g. because they are dual-registered at a mainstream school and either a PRU setting, a EOTAS setting or a special school, the settings should work through the system of controls collaboratively, enabling them to address any risks identified.

Visitors

- Schools should consider how to manage visitors on to the site, such as contractors, and ensure that guidance on physical distancing and hygiene is explained to visitors on or before arrival.
- Signage on the mitigations in place is encouraged and this should be prominently displayed on the premises.
- A record should be kept of all visitors as this may be needed at a future point to assist with contact tracing processes.
- Schools should take steps to encourage parents/carers not to remain on the premises/at the gates longer than necessary especially when dropping off/collecting children.

Catering provision and free school meals

- Breakfast clubs should operate as normal. Schools that have decided not to operate free school breakfast clubs in primary schools are reminded that the legal duty to do this still applies. Further information is available [here](#).

School transport

- Local authorities are responsible for working with their contracted operators to ensure necessary measures are put in place in line with risk assessments (which should involve appropriate consultation with trade unions and staff).

- Face coverings should be worn by pupils in year 7 and above when travelling on dedicated school transport to secondary schools. This is in line with the Welsh Government advice for public transport.
- Further [guidance](#) for taxis and private hire vehicles is available here.
- The use of [active travel](#) routes should be encouraged.
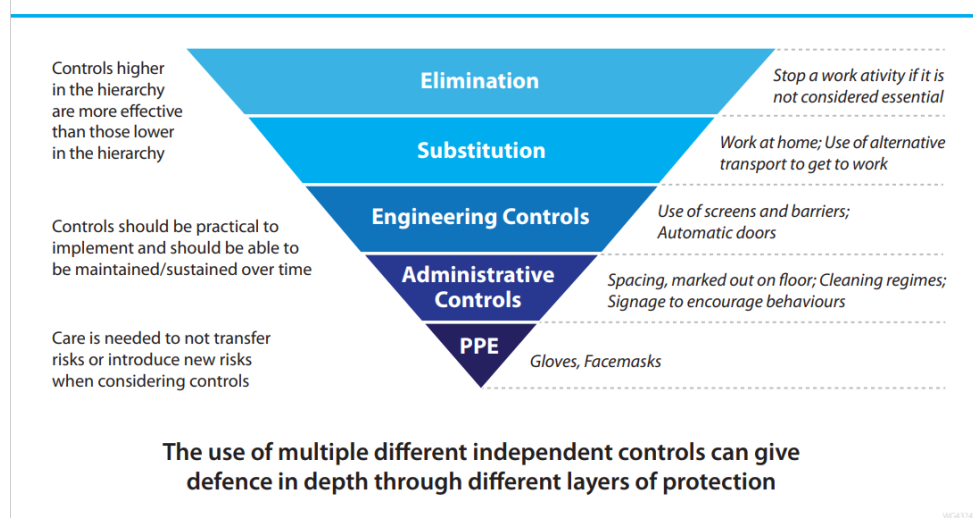
Educational visits

- Schools wishing to undertake any type of educational visit should continue to undertake the usual risk assessment process. This risk assessment should include arrangements for what will happen if a member of the group (a learner or staff member) develops COVID-19 symptoms during the visit.
- The [Association of British Insurers (ABI) has produced information on travel insurance implications following the COVID-19 outbreak](#). If schools have any further questions about their cover or would like further reassurance, they should contact their travel insurance provider.
- Further guidance regarding educational visits is available from local authority Education Visits Advisers, as well as the Outdoor Education Advisers Panel, which has developed [guidance](#) which may be useful for schools considering undertaking visits.

Annex A

Hierarchy of controls

- The hierarchy of controls is a way to prioritise risk control measures based on how effective different types of control are in reducing risks. Risk reduction measures should be assessed in order of the priority given in the hierarchy. Types of control higher up the hierarchy e.g. elimination/containment are more effective at reducing risks than those lower down e.g. PPE.
- Controls should be practical to be implemented and, ideally, should be able to be maintained easily over time.
- It is critical to remember that it will only rarely be feasible to eliminate the risk completely. The combination of controls introduced should aim to reduce the risk to as low as reasonably practicable, prioritising structural and environmental interventions over individual level ones.
- This of course does not simply mean considering risks of transmission, but also balancing these against risks to wider health and well-being and learning. Ultimately schools need the flexibility to respond to these risks as they are able to and as quickly as possible.

Hierarchy of controls

Controls higher in the hierarchy are more effective than those lower in the hierarchy

Elimination — Stop a work ativity if it is not considered essential

Substitution — Work at home; Use of alternative transport to get to work

Engineering Controls — Use of screens and barriers; Automatic doors

Controls should be practical to implement and should be able to be maintained/sustained over time

Administrative Controls — Spacing, marked out on floor; Cleaning regimes; Signage to encourage behaviours

Care is needed to not transfer risks or introduce new risks when considering controls

PPE — Gloves, Facemasks

The use of multiple different independent controls can give defence in depth through different layers of protection

Elimination/containment – aim to physically remove or contain the hazard measures. Includes: adherence to TTP process, do not attend school with COVID-19 symptoms, testing.
Substitution – aim to replace the hazardous activity with a less hazardous one measures. Includes: managing contacts, use of outdoor space.
Engineering controls – aim to isolate people from the hazard measures. Includes: increased ventilation, introducing one way systems, effective communication, encouraging vaccination.
Administrative controls – aim to change the way people work. Measures include: hand hygiene, cleaning.
PPE – aim to protect the worker from residual exposure through use of PPE. Measures include: face coverings, PPE.