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**149A Academy and School News and Resources Update, Jan 3 2022**

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**Covid Update for the return to school on 4.1.22**

This contains the latest published information, and also some information which is relevant now but was first issued in Updates 147 and 148. There is still other less urgent covid information in these Updates that would be useful to read and which is not covered here

**Revised documentation**

There are **only minor changes** as indicated below, usually about face coverings being needed in the classroom, **so to a large extent you can work from the documents issued in December**

* **Actions for schools during the coronavirus outbreak**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak> **Changes**: Updated the Face coverings section to include the use of face coverings in classrooms for Year 7 and above
* **Actions for FE colleges and providers during the coronavirus pandemic**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision> **Changes**: Updated advice on the face coverings section to include the use of face coverings in classrooms and teaching environments
* **Special schools and other specialist settings: coronavirus (COVID-19),** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-full-opening-special-schools-and-other-specialist-settings> **Changes**:
  + Update to the Face coverings section to include the use of face coverings in classrooms for Year 7 and above.
  + Update to Residential specialist settings section to clarify reporting requirements for any children and young people not in their setting.
  + Update to the Home to school transport section to confirm the continuing option of personal travel budgets / mileage allowances.
* **What parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges during COVID-19**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-years-providers-schools-and-colleges-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>
* **Guidance for parents and carers of children attending out-of-school settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-of-children-attending-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak> **Changes**: Updated advice on face coverings
* **Protective measures for holiday or after-school clubs and other out-of-school settings for children during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protective-measures-for-holiday-or-after-school-clubs-and-other-out-of-school-settings-for-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak> **Changes**: Updates to the Face coverings section to include the use of face coverings in classrooms and indoor activity rooms for adults and children aged 11 and above.
* **Critical workers and vulnerable children who can access schools or educational settings**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision> The government has updated its guidance on which children should be prioritised for education should schools have to partially close. In these instances, the children of key workers and pupils considered vulnerable must continue to be offered face-to-face education. Children were previously considered vulnerable if they had a social worker, an education, health and care plan or if they were considered by schools or councils to be “otherwise vulnerable”. But the definition has now been expanded to include children who have been known to children’s social care services in the past, and those whose circumstances might be “particularly challenging” because of “domestic abuse, parental offending, adult mental health issues, and drug and alcohol addiction”. However, the DfE said the list was “not intended to be exhaustive”, and that local assessment would be “based on knowledge of family and community risk”.
* **How to complete the educational setting status form**, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-complete-the-educational-setting-status-form> From 4 January, settings will be asked to provide information on the phased return process and the number of pupils or students absent due to attendance restrictions put in place to manage an outbreak or exceptional circumstances related to coronavirus (COVID-19).
* **Responsibility for exams**. Guidance for schools, colleges and exam centres on who should enter students for exams, the health arrangements for exams and the support DfE is providing, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/responsibility-for-autumn-gcse-as-and-a-level-exam-series>
* **Coronavirus (COVID-19): assessment processes for selective school admissions**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-assessment-processes-for-selective-school-admissions>
* **Early years** The guidance published on 14th December continues, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures> The UKHSA has advised there are limited public health benefits to regular **testing of early years children** with LFD tests. The exception is if they have tested positive for COVID-19 themselves. If a child tests positive they may be able to end their self-isolation period before the end of the 10 full days by following the guidance on LFD testing as below. Testing is at the discretion of a parent or carer, but those who do not receive negative LFD test results will need to complete a 10-day self-isolation period.

The staff-to-child ratios set out in the **early years foundation stage (EYFS**) can temporarily be changed if necessary, for example to respond to COVID-related workforce absences. In some cases, providers may choose to respond to staff and child absences by **temporarily mixing age groups** of children who would otherwise be educated or cared for separately. Ratios should be guided by all relevant requirements and by the needs of individual children within the group.

**Testing of students**

* See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/testing-measures-to-ensure-young-people-return-to-classrooms>

All secondary schools have been asked to provide one **on-site test** for pupils ahead of their return to the classroom this term to help reduce the transmission of Covid-19. Education staff and college students are being asked to self-test at home before they return, and were sent home with tests ahead of the Christmas break. Schools and colleges ordered tests before Christmas and have received these in advance of pupils returning, and will continue to be able to order additional tests through a separate supply route. Schools and colleges made test kits available to pupils before the end of term and they will have access to more as needed.

**Secondary, college and university students and education staff and early years** **staf**f should then continue to test themselves twice a week, and more frequently if they are specifically asked to do so, such as in the event of an outbreak.

Rapid tests were unavailable on the government website several times over the festive period. The DfE says it was working “closely” with the UK Health Security Agency to ensure schools receive “adequate supplies” of test kits. Schools that run out can **order more** through the online ordering platform, <https://request-testing.test-for-coronavirus.service.gov.uk/?utm_source=2%20January%202022%20C19&utm_medium=Daily%20Email%20C19&utm_campaign=DfE%20C19> and should call 119 if they need further advice or support. However, schools have been told to “only order the test kits your setting requires”, given the “huge demand” for the kits nationally.

**Testing and isolation**

The government updated its guidance for the general public on isolation requirements for confirmed cases of Covid last week. It has now told leaders how this will affect schools. Under the change, 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 first test must be taken no earlier than day six, and the two tests must be taken 24 hours apart. “If both these test results are negative, and you do not have a high temperature, you may end your self-isolation after the second negative test result and return to your education setting from day 8,” the DfE said. This guidance applies to adults, and the government recently confirmed it also applies to children who usually attend an education or childcare setting. However, the guidance also “strongly advises” those who end their isolation before the 10 days are up to limit close contact with people outside their households and to limit contact with anyone at higher risk of severe illness. Health and social care workers, including **those working in education settings**, also need to continue testing for three days even if they return to work after two negative lateral flow tests

A record high of 162,572 **new Covid cases** in England were reported in the latest 24-hour period. School-age children were most likely to be infected. Data from the Office for National Statistics shows children have been among the most likely to be infected, with one in 15 children aged **two to Year 6**, and one in 20 for Years **7-11**, testing positive for Covid for the week ending 23 December in England.

**Face coverings**

* To maximise the number of children in school and college for the maximum amount of time, the Government is temporarily **recommending** that face coverings are worn in classrooms and teaching spaces for students in year 7 or above, in light of the Omicron variant surge. The advice is short term only to support pupils and teachers as they return to schools this term and builds on the existing proportionate guidance that recommends face coverings for all adults in communal areas of all settings. The advice on face coverings in classrooms will be in place until the 26 January, when Plan B regulations are currently scheduled to expire, at which point it will be reviewed. In its guidance the DfE says it would “**not ordinarily expect teachers to wear a face covering in the classroom if they are at the front of the class**”; settings should also be “sensitive to the needs of individual teachers”.

In its email to leaders, the DfE said all settings should have a “**small contingency stock**” of face coverings, in case anyone has forgotten or damaged their own. To support this, the Department of Health and Social Care has begun delivering face coverings to schools, and “most” secondary schools should have received their delivery by the end of last term. Deliveries for the remaining schools will resume from this Friday, January 7.

The **Children’s Deaf Society** has tweeted out their big reservations about mask policy, and what I worry about is the effect that masks have on children’s wellbeing, mental health and anxiety.” A number of **conservative MPs** have criticised the decision to recommend face coverings in the classroom

**Ofsted**

* Ofsted will not ask inspectors who are also school, college and early years leaders to undertake inspections, so they can focus on their leadership responsibilities at this critical time. This will be a temporary measure from the start of January. The inspectorate currently contracts around 1,170 school Ofsted inspectors, more than 800 of whom are serving headteachers and senior leaders,. It only employs around 180 full time HMI. Ofsted has already confirmed that it will not be inspecting secondary schools during the first week of term in January, as schools undertake on-site pupil testing. Ofsted will also encourage early years settings, schools and colleges that are significantly impacted by COVID-related staff absence to ask for their inspection to be deferred. The **NAHT** said, encouraging schools to ask Ofsted for deferrals was “helpful”, but it would be “even better if all uncertainty were removed by simply suspending inspections entirely this term so inspectors can return to the classroom, to help the effort”.

**Ventilation**

* The DfE has announced an **additional 7,000 air cleaning units** to be provided to early years, schools and colleges to improve ventilation in teaching spaces. The 7,000 new air purifiers will be for areas where quick fixes to improve ventilation are not possible, such as being able to open a window, and will help to improve ventilation in schools. This builds on the 1,000 air purifiers announced for special schools and alternative provision settings. Feedback from schools suggests that the 350,000 carbon dioxide monitors rolled out across the country are also acting as a helpful tool to manage ventilation.

The DfE has published a **guide on how to apply for the units**, which will be given out based on schools’ CO2 levels and occupation density. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1K9jZhgH1fjbBvYKg2b4sjIMiVWrQK1vH/view> To qualify for a government-funded air-cleaning unit, a school must have “sustained” CO2 readings of 1,500 particles per million (ppm) or higher for at least one week while the room is occupied. Less than 800ppm implies a space is well ventilated. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) also recommends rooms are kept below 800ppm. Schools must also be in need of lengthy remedial building works to address poor ventilation that cannot be completed before the end of February this year. Air-cleaning units “may be suitable” while remedial work is undertaken, but “should not be used as a substitute for ventilation”. Units will also be allocated for teaching spaces only, but not non-teaching rooms like staff rooms, halls, corridors and dining rooms. Applications will open on January 4 and close on January 17. The DfE has said it will start delivering the devices from next month.

* Mainstream schools can apply online via this page, <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=yXfS-grGoU2187O4s0qC-cTrsVQ_sDZGqR3GQgCYBoFUOE1QVkdDVENNTTJTSDM5NzAxUDcwSVVMTy4u>
* SEND and Alternative Provision settings can apply here, <https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=yXfS-grGoU2187O4s0qC-cTrsVQ_sDZGqR3GQgCYBoFUMFFFUU1CWFhIV0NOQzlMQ04yTEJCSVhDVy4u>

An online marketplace for schools to buy air purifiers was launched by the DfE last term. See <https://find-dfe-approved-framework.service.gov.uk/list/air-cleaning>

Staff have **criticised the number of air units being offered to schools**. The 7,000 units for mainstream schools now brings the total number funded by government to 8,000 – which averages just over one unit per every three schools. The **NEU** said, “Seven thousand more air purifiers is something, but it is completely inadequate for what should be a basic human right, the provision of clean air in every classroom in every educational setting. The fact that the government have provided the extra purifiers shows that it recognises the problem but with over 300,000 classrooms in England they have failed to provide an effective solution.”

**Vaccinations**

* **12-15 year olds** are encouraged to get fully vaccinated (two doses), to ensure they are protected. **16 and 17 year olds** are now eligible for boosters and are being strongly encourage to take up this offer when invited to do so, along with university students. The JCVI also recommended that a Pfizer booster be offered to **vulnerable children aged 12 to 15**
* Last week, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation recommended that children aged **five to 11 in a “clinical risk group**”, or who are household contacts of someone who is immunosuppressed, should be offered two 10 micrograms doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine. It comes after the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency approved a new paediatric formulation of the Pfizer vaccine for children aged 5 to 11 after it was found to have met the required safety, quality and effectiveness standards.
* The DfE has told leaders that the NHS was working through **updated guidance and would set out how this would be operationalised “shortly”**. Again, the NHS will communicate how eligible children and young people will get their boosters “shortly”.

**Other DfE advice**

* In an email, <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2022/01/02/an-open-letter-from-education-secretary-nadhim-zahawi-to-education-and-childcare-leaders/> Nadhim Zahawi asked leaders to “**do everything in your power to protect face to face learning for our children and young people**”, adding he was “confident that you will of course make every endeavour to do so”. While urging them to maximise on-site education, he acknowledges that that staff absence might make this impossible. Schools have been told to **use staff “more flexibly” and consider “combining classes”** to ensure pupils continue learning in the classroom amid expected Omicron disruption next term, saying that high rates of Covid absence may also “cause difficulties”; for example, recent figures for NHS staff show absence doubled in a fortnight over the festive period. “This should only be on a **short-term** measure and settings should return to full-time in-person attendance for all pupils as soon as practicable,” “Where workforce issues arise, you may wish to **use existing teaching, temporary and support staff more flexibly** where required to ensure your setting remains open, whilst ensuring that you continue to have appropriate support in place for pupils with **SEND**. As pupils do not need to be kept in consistent groups, you may wish to consider combining classes.” Government officials are working with school leaders to **share case studies on “developing and adopting flexible learning approaches**”, which will be published “over the coming days”. The **one case study currently available** states there is “no reason why hybrid lessons – teaching simultaneously to the classroom and to those accessing remotely – cannot be the norm in every classroom, should it be required”, <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1VXAfORN-5yMvPRlv0ZJpmfaumzyHiUWQ> Schools can continue to access free bespoke support from **the EdTech Demonstrator networ**k, <https://edtechdemo.ucst.uk/>
* The government guidance states that **live streaming of lessons to pupils at home is the “preferred method” where remote education is required.** The emailreminds staff that they have a **legal responsibility to provide remote education** to pupils not able to be in school. **.”** The DfE saysschools should focus on lifting the experience for those at home without compromising the experience for those physically in the classroom. It adds: "The teacher's priority should always be those in the classroom but modifying their delivery sufficiently to enable those at home to have the best experience possible with the resources available." The advice offers this **guidance on remote learning**:
* Live streaming is the preferred method for providing this wherever possible. There should be regular feedback and checking in with students and pupils."
* "Isolation or an inability to attend school should not preclude a pupil or student from being part of their normal timetabled lessons, except perhaps PE and the practical element of some subjects. It is not simple, but neither is it particularly difficult and need not come at the expense of those in school."
* Some retraining will be required to help teachers "understand the limitations and considerations around capturing their voice with sufficient clarity and volume" and on the most effective ways of using screen sharing to deliver their explanations
* Ensuring schools understand the pupils' experience of remote learning "can easily be done by delivering a test lesson to colleagues in the next-door classroom". It adds: "Taking on the roles of a teacher and a remote pupil is important so that the teacher can understand the limitations and possibilities of the tools they are using, and departments and schools can work collaboratively on how to make the experience as beneficial as possible without adversely affecting the classroom experience."
* There is a need for consistency across all departments and staff where possible. It adds: "Pupils understand that it is not easy but get very frustrated when some staff can do it and others do not seem to try. If there is a consistent approach the pupils know when they should be able to ask questions or seek support, reducing interruptions to the class teacher and improving lesson flow."
* Recording lessons enables the teacher to make these available to pupils who were unable to connect. Teachers can also focus on key concepts by cropping a copy of the recording down to the salient points to share with the whole class. It adds: "This enables those who did not fully understand in class to revisit it, as well as a resource for revision in the future. It can also be used as evidence should there be any behavioural issues from remote pupils."
* Leadership unions welcomed the measures, but said **action should have been taken earlier**. **ASCL** said the measures represented a “recognition by the government that the spring term will be extremely challenging for schools and colleges”. “The biggest problem they face is the likelihood of high levels of staff absence caused by the prevalence of the Omicron variant,” he added. “While schools and colleges will do their very best to minimise the impact on pupils, as they always do, **there is a possibility that this will mean that some classes and year groups have to be sent home for short periods of time to learn remotely**
* The government says all planned **January examinations** should go ahead, and that schools should contact the awarding organisation for any adaptations to the processes deemed necessary.

**Covid workforce fund**

* Last week, the DfE announced **the 2021 Covid workforce fund for schools** has been extended to the February half term, as teacher and leader absence rose by 20 per cent in just a fortnight amid the surge of Covid cases caused by the Omicron variant. Heads' leaders have called for a widening of the "strict" criteria that allows schools to apply for more cash to support increased workforce costs as new data reveals that only around 4 per cent of schools applied to the Covid workforce fund last year. In response to a freedom of information request, the Department said that 974 schools applied to the 2020 Covid Workforce Fund that ran from 1 November to 31 December 2020; 8 per cent of claims (72) were rejected as 67 schools did not meet the absence thresholds, while four schools withdrew as they did not meet the reserves criteria and one school missed the deadline, according to the DfE. The current criteria for accessing the workforce fund are:

**Mainstream schools**:

* A total teacher and leader absence rate at or above 20 per cent on a given day.
* A lower total support staff absence rate at or above 10 per cent but have been experiencing this for 15 or more consecutive school days.

**Special schools and alternative provision schools**:

* A total support staff absence rate (teaching assistants and other support staff) at or above 15 per cent on a given day.
* A lower total support staff absence rate at or above 10 per cent but have been experiencing this for 15 or more consecutive school days.

The following **expenditure is also not permitted** within the scope of this fund:

* enabling schools to maintain their reserves above the 4% of annual limit set out in the financial reserves criteria
* capital costs to support staff delivering education remotely

Government guidance says schools cannot claim for "training or other incidental staff-related costs", as well as "increasing pro-rata pay, unless there is a **commensurate increase in responsibilities associated with undertaking the work**".

See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-workforce-fund-for-schools/coronavirus-covid-19-workforce-fund-to-support-schools-with-costs-of-staff-absences-from-22-november-to-31-december-2021#conditions>

**Return of ex-teachers**

* The Government is asking former teachers who have the skills and time to return to the classroom to sign up at https://www.gov.uk/government/news/education-secretary-calls-for-ex-teachers-to-return-to-classrooms <https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk/urgent-call-for-qualified-teachers> But many schools will not be able to afford to employ the **ex-teachers the government has encouraged to come back to classrooms** to "plug gaps" caused by surging Covid absences, headteachers and supply teacher leaders have warned. Headteachers say that the costs of such a scheme may be unattainable for many schools with supply budgets already stretched, as the Omicron variant is expected to create even further disruption next term. There have also been concerns about delays and backlogs to the application process, amid claims that it could be up to 25 days before ex-teachers have been cleared and are ready to go back to the classrooms. Heads also say, "It isn't just a matter of strolling back in". Schools have "really evolved in the last couple of years" and returning to the classroom in January will be "really challenging", because of changes in school culture during the pandemic.

**Tony Stephens**