

2020



Ennis
National School

COVID 19 FAQs and Information

Measures have been put in place to ensure children can return to school safely

The Department of Education, in close consultation with experts in the HSE, have produced a suite of guidance documents to facilitate the safe reopening of schools.

These are all available on www.gov.ie/backtoschool and includes the following:

- the Roadmap for the full return to school
- COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable reopening of primary and special schools
- COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable reopening of post primary schools
- curriculum guidance
- wellbeing resources

These resources are designed to guide schools in the correct implementation of public health measures to:

- reduce the risk of introduction of COVID-19 to the school
- reduce the spread of COVID-19 within the school if it is introduced into the school

These measures include making sure that:

- children with symptoms of COVID-19 do not attend school
- there is rapid identification and appropriate management of children who develop symptoms of COVID-19 while in school
- there is physical distancing between students and staff (for example: the reconfiguration of classrooms)
- there is strict adherence to hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene (for example: the provision of adequate handwashing facilities and hand sanitiser)

Financial support is being provided to schools to enable them to implement the changes required for a safe return to schools, including the continued purchase of hand sanitisers and other necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies and consumables.

Travelling to school

- Whatever mode of transport is used for travel to school, the aim is to minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19 by ensuring physical distancing, good hand hygiene, good respiratory hygiene and wearing of face coverings where appropriate.
- walking or cycling to school should be encouraged as much as possible, where safe and appropriate. If walking or cycling with people from other households, a distance of 2 metres between people should be maintained where possible
- if driving to school, wherever possible family groups should use their own private vehicle and should not arrange carpools or offer/accept a lift from others
- public transport should be avoided if possible. Where public transport must be used, strict adherence to physical distancing must be maintained and students aged 13 years and older should wear face coverings in line with national guidance
- information on school transport has been sent directly to eligible parents and more information will be [posted here when it is available](#)
- Congregation of people at school gates should be strictly avoided.
- Some approaches that schools may consider to avoid congregation include the following:
 - staggered drop off and pick up times where practical or feasible, so that not all children arrive onsite at one time
 - if the school has additional access points, consideration may be given to whether it would be beneficial to open these to reduce congestion
 - consideration may be given to where children go as they arrive at the facility. This could include heading straight to their small group's designated learning space or classroom
 - for those arriving by car, parents may be encouraged to park further away from the school and then walk with their children to avoid congestion, or alternatively use active travel routes where feasible
 - where learning spaces can be accessed directly from outside, this should be encouraged to decrease interactions between individuals in circulation spaces

What is meant when you hear about class bubbles and pods?

Physical distancing is a key measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In order to facilitate physical distancing in primary schools, pupils and their teachers may be sorted into 'Class Bubbles' and 'Pods'.

A 'Class Bubble' is a class grouping which stays apart from other classes as much as possible.

Within the Class Bubble, pupils and teachers may be further separated into small discrete groups or 'Pods', to the extent that this is practical. Pod sizes should be as small as is reasonably practical in the specific classroom context. If the class is divided into Pods, there should be at least 1 metre distance between each Pod, and between individual pupils and teachers in each Pod, whenever possible.

The objective is to limit contact and sharing of common facilities between people in different Class Bubbles (and Pods within those Class Bubbles) as much as possible, rather than to avoid all contact between Pods, as this will not always be possible.

The aim of the system within the school is that Class Bubbles mix only with their own class from arrival at school in the morning until departure at the end of the school day. Pods within Class Bubbles are an additional measure, to further limit contact between pupils and teachers in the Class Bubble.

Whenever possible, pupils and teaching staff should consistently be in the same Class Bubbles. Different Class Bubbles should have separate breaks and mealtimes or occupy separate areas at break or mealtimes. Sharing educational material between Pods should be avoided or minimised. Movement of staff members between Class Bubbles should be limited as much as possible.

General

Staff and students are likely to have their own face coverings for use in schools.

The department has advised schools that they should have additional disposable face coverings available for students, teachers and staff in case a back-up face covering is needed during the day.

The department has also provided a framework and funding for PPE, including face coverings.

In certain situations in schools, the use of clear visors should be considered for staff interacting with students with hearing difficulties or learning difficulties.

Staff, such as SNAs and bus escorts, who may be in closer and continued proximity to students, may wish to use medical face masks to EU Standard 14683. These masks are available on the PPE framework.

Travel abroad

Government policy, which is based on official public health advice, continues to advise against non-essential travel overseas for everyone.

It is a requirement for anyone coming into Ireland, from locations other than those with a rating of 'normal precautions' ("green"), to restrict their movements for 14 days, and this includes school staff, parents and children or other students coming from abroad to attend school in Ireland.

Restricting your movements means staying indoors in one location and avoiding contact with other people and social situations as much as possible.

The school has a duty of care to all of its pupils and staff members. If a school has reasonable grounds for believing that its duty of care toward its staff and pupils is being undermined in circumstances where a person – staff member or pupil - has not observed the mandatory requirement to restrict movements for 14 days following return from a non-green list country, it is reasonable for the school to refuse access to the pupil or staff member during this period.

Pupils who live with someone who travels abroad for work

The general public health advice outlined above for people returning to Ireland having worked abroad should be followed by the person who has worked abroad (for example: a parent or guardian).

Living with a parent or guardian who travels abroad for work does not prevent children from attending school. The parent or guardian should follow all of the HSE guidelines when they return home.

Uniforms

There is no evidence to suggest that asking children to wear freshly laundered uniforms or clothes every day is an effective measure to limit the spread of COVID-19. School uniforms or clothes should be laundered

regularly in line with usual good hygiene. If uniforms or clothes are visibly dirty or soiled, they should be laundered.

Lunchboxes and water bottles

Your child can bring a lunchbox/water bottle to school, but they should be the only person to handle these items during the school day and should not share or swap their lunch with other children. This aligns with regular good practice to protect children with allergies from accidental exposure to allergens such as nuts.

The virus that causes COVID-19 survives for longer on hard surfaces like lunchboxes and water bottles, compared to soft fabrics like clothing, so these items should only be used by one child and should be cleaned daily with regular household cleaning products.

Sharing school equipment with other children

Wherever possible, children should have their own individual resources, for example: textbooks, pencil cases, art equipment. Some resources can be shared when necessary, but strict adherence to the Department of Education COVID-19 response plans for the safe reopening of schools must be maintained:

Shared Equipment

- art – where possible students should be encouraged to have their own individual art and equipment supplies
- electronics – shared electronic devices such as tablets, touch screens and keyboards should be cleaned between use. Consideration could be given to the use of wipeable covers for electronics to facilitate cleaning
- musical equipment/instruments – to the greatest extent possible, instruments should not be shared between students. If sharing is required, the instruments should be cleaned between uses
- books – where practical, students should have their own books. Textbooks that are shared should be covered in a wipeable plastic covering that can be wiped with a suitable household cleaning agent between uses. Students should be encouraged to perform hand hygiene before and after using any shared item

- shared sports equipment – Minimise equipment sharing and clean shared equipment between users by different people
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What to do if a child has symptoms of COVID-19?

Students who have symptoms of COVID-19, including fever, new cough, shortness of breath, breathing difficulties, or loss or change to their sense of smell or taste, should not attend school.

Please phone your doctor and follow guidance on self-isolation. Your doctor will advise whether COVID-19 testing is required and will arrange testing if necessary.

What happens if a child develops symptoms of COVID-19 while in school?

If your child presents with any of symptoms or has any other type of sickness, THEY SHOULD NOT BE SENT TO SCHOOL. This is extremely important advice that will prevent the spread of COVID 19.

If a pupil displays symptoms of COVID-19 while at school, the following are the procedures to be implemented:

- Class Teacher informs the COVID 19 Lead Worker Representative (LWR) for their class Hub and immediately contacts the pupil's parents/guardians
- LWR will take the child's temperature using a hand held thermometer. After this they will accompany the pupil to the isolation area (Dressing Rooms) making sure that themselves and others keep a 2 metre distance from the pupil.
- The pupil will be given a face mask to wear and asked to sanitise their hands.
- The pupil will be supervised by the LWR until the pupil's parent/guardian arrives in the front foyer. The pupil will be brought to meet the parent/guardian at the front foyer. Parent/guardian will not be allowed enter the building.

- The isolation area and work areas involved will be appropriately cleaned as soon as possible.
- There will be an incident report filled in by the class teacher to keep a record of any suspected COVID 19 case.
- After collection it is expected that the parent/guardian will immediately seek the advice of their local doctor.

N.B. These procedures will be performed in a sensitive and calm manner to make sure the pupil feels comfortable and safe.

N.B. It is of the utmost importance that a parent/guardian makes their way to the school to pick up their child as soon as possible.

COVID-19 testing arrangements if a child develops symptoms of COVID-19 in schools

If your child develops symptoms of COVID-19 in school their symptoms will be assessed to determine whether they require emergency medical attention:

- if emergency care is not required, the parent or guardian will be asked to collect their child/arrange for them to come home immediately, from where they can continue self-isolation and phone their GP for advice on further management and whether COVID-19 testing is required. If the GP determines that COVID-19 testing is required, they will be able to arrange testing for your child
- if emergency care is required, the emergency services (ambulance) will be called and the parents or guardians will be informed without delay. COVID-19 testing will be undertaken at the hospital if required

What happens if a child attending school is diagnosed with COVID-19?

Under the law, all cases and outbreaks of COVID-19 must be notified to Public Health. It is very important to note that management of confirmed cases and outbreaks of COVID-19 in schools will be Public Health led, and action taken will be based on Public Health risk assessment undertaken by the regional Department of Public Health.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach for the management of cases and outbreaks of COVID-19 in schools. This is because every situation and every school is different.

Public Health doctors consider many factors when they risk assess an outbreak of COVID-19 in a school, including:

- where the cases have been in the school
- what class they are in
- what contact have they had with other children or staff
- what is the size and configuration of the school
- what is the level of interaction between students, and between students and staff
- what COVID-19 prevention or infection prevention control measures are in place in the school and how well are they monitored and adhered to
- where have confirmed cases been outside of the school environment. For example, have they been in a social or household situation where they may have picked up COVID-19

All of these factors, and more, allow Public Health doctors to assess the level of risk to students and staff within the school. Outbreak management is a complex process undertaken by highly trained Public Health doctors and affiliated staff. Many factors are considered in deciding the right course of action in each individual situation.

Sharing textbooks, pencils and so on with other children

Wherever possible, each child should have their own set of textbooks and their own pencils/pens and pencil case. They should not share these items

with other children. The virus that causes COVID-19 survives for longer on hard surfaces like textbook covers and pencil cases so these items should be only be used by one child and should be cleaned daily with regular household cleaning products. Cleaning of textbook covers can be facilitated by laminating the cover/lining the cover with clear plastic wrapping.

Temperature checks/COVID-19 symptoms

The public health advice is that temperature checking is not recommended because fever is not a consistent symptom of COVID-19 in children.

Parents and/or schools do not need to take children's temperatures every morning.

Parents and pupils/students are reminded that, if they feel unwell or have ANY COVID-19 symptoms, they should not attend school. More information is available on the symptoms of COVID-19.

Visitors to schools

Visitors to schools during the day should be minimised as much as possible and by prior appointment and should be received at a specific contact point.

Visitors who are admitted to schools should then be subject to the same controls as apply to staff entering the school.

Visitors should perform proper hygiene on arrival at school.

Schools should consider the use of Perspex in school offices if there is likely to be a high throughput of visitors, despite the restrictions above.

Visitors should maintain 2 metres physical distancing from pupils/students and staff while in school.

Visitors should sign a contact tracing log which each school is required to keep. You will find a copy of the contract tracing log in our COVID 19 FAQ section on the website.

Movement of staff between schools and within schools

Education staff move routinely between schools in the context of substitute teachers, shared special education teachers and so on, and it is not possible to eliminate this movement entirely.

The department has provided additional staffing resources which will help to minimise the movement of staff within and between schools. It is recognised that there will continue to be movement of staff between schools, albeit perhaps at a reduced level.

In these circumstances the following should be considered:

- a staff member shared across classes within a school should take particular care to maintain physical distancing, proper hand and respiratory hygiene in moving throughout the school
- records of their contacts should be maintained as they may be needed for contact tracing purposes

Speaking to children about COVID-19

You should provide your child with age-appropriate information about COVID-19 so that they know how to protect themselves and others and know how to recognise and report symptoms of COVID-19. Empower children to protect themselves and others by teaching them key health behaviours to reduce risk, for example: physical distancing, hand washing and respiratory hygiene.

Role model these behaviours for your children and make them the norm in all circumstances. Practice handwashing, respiratory hygiene and physical distancing with younger children so that they learn effective behaviours to protect themselves and others. [See HSE.ie for further information on protecting your child from coronavirus.](#)

Wellbeing resources to help children cope with the changes in the school environment due to COVID-19

A suite of wellbeing resources for the primary school settings is [available here](#).

These resources include:

- guidance for schools: supporting the wellbeing of school communities as schools reopen
- wellbeing toolkits for schools

The wellbeing toolkits for schools are guidelines for teachers that focus on promoting a sense of safety; a sense of calm; a sense of belonging and connectedness; a sense of self-efficacy and community-efficacy; a sense of hope.

The Toolkits comprise of a combination of materials developed by the [National Educational Psychological Service](#) (NEPS) and information collated from other acknowledged sources that promote natural resilience for all and recovery for those with additional educational needs.

How communities can support the safe reopening of schools

Everyone can support the safe reopening of schools, and help prevent the spread of COVID-19, by following the public health measures put in place by the government.

These measures include the following:

- physical distancing should continue to be maintained at all times
- hand hygiene – wash your hands well and often
- respiratory hygiene – cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or bent elbow when coughing or sneezing, and discard used tissue safely
- wear a face covering when appropriate – by law, you have to wear a face covering on public transport, in shops, shopping centres and some other indoor settings.
- keep your close contacts/social network to a small number of people

- avoid crowded areas. If an area looks busy, go somewhere else or return at a quieter time

Parents and guardians can support the safe reopening of schools by following the advice included on www.gov.ie/backtoschool and by complying with all measures advised by Government and schools to reduce the risk of COVID-19.

These measures include:

- encourage children to walk or cycle to school where safe and appropriate
- do not congregate at school gates
- provide your child with age-appropriate information about COVID-19 and empower them to protect themselves by teaching them about physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene and wearing face coverings as appropriate. Role model these behaviours and make them the norm in your household
- comply with measures introduced by individual schools, for example: staggered drop off and collection times for pupils

Impact of reopening schools on COVID-19 rates in Ireland

As many countries have not yet implemented a full return to school, experience of spread of COVID-19 in school settings is limited. However, the international evidence to date is reassuring and suggests that schools may be low risk environments for the spread of coronavirus, provided that appropriate Public Health measures such as physical distancing are rigorously implemented.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) examined the international scientific evidence regarding the role of school settings in the spread of COVID-19 and published their conclusions in a technical report entitled [‘COVID-19 in children and the role of school settings in COVID-19 transmission’](#).

The report found that:

- child-to-child spread of COVID-19 in schools is uncommon
- children are not the primary drivers of COVID-19 transmission to adults in the school setting
- there is little evidence of spread of COVID-19 from adults to children in schools

- adults are not at higher risk of COVID-19 in the school setting than in the community or household
 - very few significant outbreaks of COVID-19 in schools have been documented (internationally)
 - if appropriate physical distancing and hygiene measures are applied, schools are unlikely to pose a greater risk for transmission of COVID-19 than other occupational or leisure settings with similar densities of people
 - there is limited evidence that schools are driving transmission of COVID-19 in the community. However, there are indications that community transmission is imported into or reflected in the school setting
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Someone in your child's pod or class is not in school today – what does this mean?

It is important to remember that there are many reasons why a child may not attend their pod or class. However, if a child does not attend because they have tested positive for COVID-19, then the school will be informed by Public Health services (HSE). If your child is identified as a close contact of someone with COVID-19, then they will need to restrict their movements for 14 days after last exposure to the child who tested positive, and they will be offered testing for COVID-19 (day 0 and day 7 tests).

It is important to await official confirmation from Public Health services that specific action needs to be taken in relation to COVID-19 to prevent any misunderstanding and unnecessary restrictions.

If a child has symptoms of COVID-19 and is awaiting a test, only members of that child's household are asked to restrict their movement until the test results are known. This is because there are many illnesses that have similar symptoms to COVID-19 and the test may come back as 'not detected' and therefore no restrictions of movement are necessary for those in school who remain well.

I heard there is a positive case in my child's school – what does that mean?

It is important to await official confirmation from Public Health services or the school that specific action needs to be taken in relation to COVID-19 to prevent any misunderstanding and unnecessary restrictions when they were not needed.

If there is a positive case of COVID-19 identified in your child's school, the Department of Public Health will work with the school to perform a risk assessment. See the [Schools Pathway – a Public Health Approach](#) document for further details. As per current guidelines, all children in the pod with the child who has tested positive for COVID-19, may be considered close contacts, offered testing (day 0 and Day 7) and will be advised to restrict their movement for 14 days after last exposure to the person who tested positive.

My child's teacher is not in school today

It is important to remember that there are many reasons why a teacher may not be in school on any given day. However, if their absence is because they tested positive for COVID-19 then the Department of Public Health will work with the school to perform a risk assessment to determine who would be considered a close contact of the person with a positive COVID-19 test. As per current guideline anyone considered a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19, is offered testing and will be advised to restrict their movements for 14 days after last exposure to the person who tested positive.