

NASUWT

The Teachers' Union

Operational Guidance (Autumn Term 2021)

The Prime Minister has announced that from 19th July, the vast majority of coronavirus restrictions will be lifted. The Government has also announced that a number of restrictions currently in force in schools will be relaxed from this date.

It is important to note that although restrictions may be lifted from 19th July, there is nothing in the revised Government guidance that prevents schools continuing aspects of the restrictions in the Autumn Term.

The general regulations pertaining to risk assessment remain in place, and schools and employers remain obliged to risk assess and take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure the health, safety and welfare of staff and pupils. As throughout the pandemic, risk assessments should be shared with our members and any concerns raised must be resolved.

Clinically vulnerable and pregnant members

In respect of clinically vulnerable (CV) and clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) people, the guidance states that staff in schools who are CEV should currently attend their place of work if they cannot work from home and the Department of Health and Social Care has published updated guidance, which can be found at [Guidance on protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from Covid-19](#).

The guidance makes clear that employers still have a legal responsibility to protect their employees and others from risks to their health and safety and that employers should be able to explain to employees the measures they have in place to keep them safe at work.

The NASUWT advises employers to ensure that individual risk assessments for CV and CEV people are updated, taking into account any advice from their medical professional or occupational health advisor.

Updated government guidance for pregnant women can be found at [Covid-19 advice for pregnant employees](#). This states that for women who are 28 weeks' pregnant and beyond or with underlying health conditions that place them at a greater risk of severe illness from coronavirus should take a more precautionary approach.

The NASUWT has produced specific guidance on this on [Pregnancy and Maternity Leave During the Covid-19 Pandemic \(England\)](#).

Testing

Secondary schools will be expected to undertake two in-school lateral flow tests when pupils return in September. Although schools can start testing up to three days prior to the start of term, members should not be expected to return to school early, in the holiday period, to administer the tests. If they volunteer to do so, they should be paid.

Schools also have the flexibility to stagger the return of pupils in the first week of term to enable testing to be managed.

Staff and secondary school pupils will still be expected to take twice-weekly lateral flow tests at home at least until the end of September. As of now, if anyone tests positive on a lateral flow test, they will require a confirmatory PCR test, although self-isolation must start immediately.

Mixing and bubbles

There is no longer any requirement to 'bubble', meaning that the guidance permits pupils to mix freely in schools and that large gatherings such as assemblies can resume. Schools do have the discretion to continue bubble arrangements and bubbling may be reintroduced in the case of local outbreaks.

Preventing mixing of pupils is a very effective way of stopping large-scale transmission of the virus and the NASUWT would urge schools to continue to consider limiting the mixing of pupils as part of their risk assessment.

Contact tracing

The guidance on contact tracing remains that staff and pupils who are symptomatic must not attend school until they have a negative PCR test and anyone with a positive test must also self-isolate. This remains a legal duty.

Schools must retain procedures for dealing with suspected cases, including immediate isolation.

Schools are no longer required to undertake contact tracing, as this duty has passed to NHS Test and Trace.

All children under 18, 18-year-olds until four months after their 18th birthday and fully vaccinated adults (i.e., those who have received two vaccine doses) will no longer be required to self-isolate if contacted by NHS Test and Trace, instead being advised to take a PCR test. This includes where a household contact is symptomatic and/or has tested positive.

Government guidance is explicit that headteachers/principals can take the decision to refuse a symptomatic pupil attending school, stating:

'If a parent or carer insists on a pupil attending your school, you can take the decision to refuse the pupil if, in your reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect other pupils and staff from possible infection with COVID-19.'

In relation to asymptomatic pupils, the Government guidance states:

'In exceptional cases, settings may decide to refuse a pupil if, in the setting's reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect those within the setting from possible infection with COVID-19 and the need outweighs the likely educational disruption. The decision would need to be carefully considered in light of all the circumstances, including the significant disruption to education throughout the pandemic and current public health advice.'

It is therefore the case that:

- there is no longer any legal basis for refusing an asymptomatic pupil who has been a close contact of someone who has tested positive for Covid-19;
- headteachers are entitled to request that a pupil close contact seeks a test, but cannot require the pupil to do so;
- headteachers are entitled to refuse to admit a pupil who, in their view, appears to have symptoms of Covid-19 pending the pupil taking a Covid-19 test.

The NASUWT would strongly advise any headteacher considering refusing to admit an asymptomatic pupil under the 'exceptional cases' guidance to obtain advice from their employer/governing body/local authority before doing so. Any concerns around the Covid status of a pupil can also be raised with local health protection teams.

Irrespective of the above, schools must take such appropriate steps to ensure safety on site, including revised risk assessments which may involve additional measures such as providing education separately for pupils who have been advised to take a Covid test but who refuse to do so.

In relation to staff, members should declare to their employer where a household contact becomes symptomatic and/or has a positive Covid-19 test. Where the employer/headteacher decides to require the teacher to work from home due to this, pay must be unaffected and must not be counted against sick pay entitlement.

Adults who are not fully vaccinated must still self-isolate. Where members choose not to be vaccinated, they should not experience a detriment if they are required to self-isolate.

Face coverings

All requirements to wear face coverings were removed from 19th July. However, the NASUWT would still urge all schools to strongly recommend their continued use by staff and pupils in classrooms and communal areas.

There is nothing in the regulations to prevent schools making this request, although it appears that schools would not be able to mandate this. Likewise, there is nothing to stop individuals wearing face coverings if they choose to do so and pupils and staff should be permitted to do so.

Ventilation and cleaning

Given the removal of most other mitigations, it is vitally important that schools stringently apply the recommendations around enhanced ventilation and cleaning.

Advice around cleaning and ventilation remains in place and schools should continue to ensure that enhanced cleaning takes place, with touch surfaces being cleaned and disinfected at least twice a day, people regularly washing or sanitising their hands, and good ventilation of all rooms being achieved.

The Government advice stresses the need to ensure that rooms are well ventilated and for schools to identify poorly ventilated areas and take steps to improve ventilation.

The Government has announced that all settings are to be provided with carbon dioxide (CO₂) monitors during the autumn term, with special schools and alternative provision being prioritised for delivery at the start of September. It is unclear when mainstream schools will receive allocations, but any delays in receiving monitors cannot be used as an excuse for inaction.

The NASUWT has specific guidance on [Ventilation and Covid-19](#), which includes the use of CO₂ monitors.

Remote education

Where pupils are self-isolating, there is still a requirement to provide remote education. However, this should not extend to other situations, such as when pupils are off sick or where parents are reluctant to let their children attend school.

The NASUWT has full guidance on remote learning on [Arrangements for Remote Teaching Learning](#).

Outbreak Management Planning

The Department for Education (DfE) has specified that all schools and colleges should have a contingency plan (sometimes called an outbreak management plan) ready for the start of the autumn term. This document should detail the steps to be taken in the event of a Covid-19 outbreak in the school/college.

The NASUWT has produced some further guidance on [Outbreak Management Planning](#).