

# Coronavirus: At school in Aberdeenshire

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Guidance from our health experts

#### What should I do if my child is unwell?

If your child is unwell – for instance where they have quite a heavy cold – they may need to take a day or two off to recover.

ONLY if they have one of the three common symptoms of COVID-19 (coronavirus) - a continuous cough, a fever or high temperature or loss of, or change in, sense of smell or taste (anosmia) - please follow the latest advice via <https://www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus> and book a test. This website includes advice on what is considered to be a fever in children.

If your child does not have symptoms of COVID-19 but has other cold-like symptoms, such as a runny nose, they do not need to be tested and they and you do not need to self-isolate. Your child can go to school if fit to do so.

For vomiting and/or diarrhoea, as per normal circumstances, they should remain at home for at least 48 hours after symptoms have passed. This now also relates to a fever or high temperature (alongside a negative coronavirus result) and they should not return to school for at least 48 hours after symptoms have passed.

#### What exactly is meant by a 'new continuous' cough?

A new continuous cough means coughing for longer than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours. If the person usually has a cough, it may be worse than usual.

#### Do parents need to inform their school if a child goes for a test?

Yes. This will help to ensure the school has an awareness of any suspected cases of Covid-19 and will help to inform their decision making in the event of an outbreak. As part of the information provided by Test and Protect with test results, they suggest making your school aware of the outcome, even if it is negative.

#### Must parents/carers inform schools if children or young people have COVID-19 symptoms?

Yes. Parents/carers should let schools know if their children are not attending school and why. If the pupil has COVID-19 symptoms, the household are required to self-isolate and call 111 for advice. It is important for schools to be able to record any COVID-19 symptoms among the school community, as this can help detect a possible cluster of cases of COVID-19 at an early stage, and involve the Health Protection Team promptly if needed.

#### Can a pupil who has had a negative result return to school if their sibling has COVID-19 symptoms?

No. A pupil whose sibling has a fever, new continuous cough, or loss/change in sense of smell/taste, should not return to school until the sibling receives a negative test result. This is the case even if the pupil has received a negative result themselves.

If the sibling's test results are positive for COVID-19, they must remain isolated for 10 days from the start of their symptoms and the rest of their household including the pupil should isolate for 14 days.

**Can a pupil who has had a negative result return to school if their sibling has other symptoms such as a runny nose or sore throat?**

Yes. If the sibling is only showing other symptoms, such as a runny nose or sore throat, the pupil can return to school.

**Why encourage physical distancing and/or consistent groupings only 'where possible'? Wouldn't all the same measures have to be in place all the time?**

It is important to emphasise that both the approaches of maintaining distance between young people where possible (in secondary schools) and the use of consistent groups (all age groups) are not all-or-nothing approaches. These will bring public health benefits even if practical arrangements mean they can only be implemented partially.

**What happens if someone in the class/school tests positive?**

All schools will have a COVID-19 risk assessment in place and will have support from the local authority and Health Protection Team. This will outline the appropriate steps and infection prevention and control measures to be taken in the event someone within the school tests positive for COVID-19.

The Test and Protect process will ensure that anyone who is identified as a close contact of a confirmed case will be notified and advised accordingly.

**Will all parents/carers and children/young people be notified if someone in the school/class tests positive for COVID-19?**

Those who have been identified as close contacts of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 will be contacted by the Test and Protect service and advised to self-isolate to protect others from further spread of the virus.

For others, including teachers, parents, guardians and carers, appropriate communication will be provided via the school, including a letter to outline the situation. It is important to remember that if you are not contacted by Test and Protect, you or your child(ren) have not been assessed as a close contact, and there is no need to get tested unless you or they develop symptoms.

It is important to note that no names will be shared with parents/carers, children and young people, and staff of any individual who has tested positive for COVID-19 in the school who do not need to know. The standard Test and Protect processes will identify any close contacts and make any necessary phone calls, without disclosing the name of the person who has tested positive. It is important for all to avoid speculation and blame.

**If a positive case of COVID-19 is identified in the school, do those previously shielding need to go back into self-isolation?**

No. If there is a positive case in the school of COVID-19, there will be a risk assessment

to determine the possible spread of infection and risk to others. This will include whether shielded or vulnerable staff or children have come into contact with the case.

The Health Protection Team will advise the school if any shielded or vulnerable people need to stay off school. Similarly, if there is an outbreak in the school, the Health Protection Team will review the situation and assess if it is still safe for shielded/vulnerable staff or children to stay at school.

**If a child or young person's parent/carer tests positive (or has COVID symptoms) must the child stay off school for 14 days?**

Yes, all household members including children and young people must self-isolate for 14 days if anyone in their household tests positive for COVID-19.

**If someone is isolating with COVID-19, do they need to get a negative test before they can return to school?**

No. The test picks up traces of virus in the nose and throat, and in some cases those traces will remain once a person has recovered and is no longer infectious. So **a repeat test, following a positive result, is not helpful** and should be avoided.

The important thing is to stay isolated for at least 10 days from the start of symptoms (14 days for any household members) and only come out of isolation once symptoms have improved and there has been no fever for at least 48 hours.

It has been shown that cough and change in sense of smell/taste can persist for weeks, beyond the time that they are infectious. As long as they have isolated for 10 days and have had no fever for 48 hours, the individual can return to school even if cough or change in sense of smell/taste remain.

## **What to expect at school**

**What are schools having to do differently from August 2020?**

The Scottish Government has published [national guidance on preparing for the new term](#). This explains the many considerations school leadership teams are taking into account to support the health, safety and wellbeing of children and young people as well as staff.

The [summary version of the guidance](#) is particularly helpful in providing families with reassurance about being at school so that you can work with your children to support any concerns or worries they may have.

**Are we asking pupils not to bring their own equipment to school?**

Schools are carefully considering localised arrangements on an ongoing basis and may ask you to limit the number of belongings brought into school but there is no blanket ban on bringing your own equipment to school.

**Are parents/carers able to visit schools as they would have done before?**

Unfortunately not for the moment. The national guidance advises against inviting parents/carers into school buildings unless they are working there. This means that for now a lot of the interactions you will have with your school will continue to be online.

Schools are carefully considering how best to continue to engage with families and this will be reviewed as new national guidance becomes available.

### **How are we ensuring schools are operating consistently safely across Aberdeenshire?**

Every aspect of schools' work is carefully risk assessed. Risk assessments have been completed for each school and continue to be updated and shared with staff. Schools will also communicate health and safety arrangements with children and young people as well as parents and carers.

There will be variations in how schools operate across Aberdeenshire but this is due to the fact that the number of young people in each school varies from less than 10 to more than 1400. It is important the arrangements put in place locally are proportionate and appropriate.

Each school across Aberdeenshire has assessed its own needs and put appropriate health and safety arrangements in place, in line with [national guidance](#).

### **Are face coverings and/or perspex screens going to be used in classrooms?**

Where adults cannot keep 2m distance and are interacting face-to-face for a sustained period (about 15 minutes or more), face coverings should be worn. Anyone wishing to wear a face covering in school will be allowed to do so.

From Monday, August 31 face coverings are mandatory for secondary school pupils and adults (teachers, staff, etc.) when moving around the school (corridors and communal areas) where physical distancing is difficult to maintain. While teachers and students can continue to wear face coverings in the classroom if they wish, there will be no requirement to do so because there is greater scope for physical distancing and face coverings can have an impact on teaching and learning. However, it remains the case where adults cannot keep 2m distance and are interacting face-to-face for 15 minutes or more, face coverings should be worn.

For the most part, perspex screens have not been installed in classrooms although there are some examples of where these are being utilised for specific subjects/circumstances according to schools' risk assessments.

### **Is PPE being provided in schools?**

Careful risk assessments are completed on all aspects of schools' work and shared with staff. PPE is provided wherever it is needed. Staff who are working intensely with pupils, particularly those with Additional Support Needs who require personal care, for example, will have PPE. Hand sanitiser is widely available at entrance points in all schools.

### **Are children expected to wear school uniform?**

Young people should be asked to dress appropriately for school but given the pressures many families may be under at present, no undue pressure should be placed on young people to wear school uniform. It is appreciated that some young people may stretch the definition of 'appropriate' and individual schools will work with young people and their families on what is acceptable and what is not.

### **Is more emphasis on outdoor learning being considered?**

Yes, where appropriate an increased focus on outdoor learning is being carefully considered. Schools would always recommend children and young people are dressed appropriately to enable outdoor learning and parents and carers can help to support this.

### **What daily cleaning arrangements are in place?**

Rigorous cleaning arrangements have been put in place for each school, proportionate to building size and school roll. All frequently touched surfaces, such as door handles, light switches and tables, will be cleaned at least twice per day.

### **How are PE (Physical Education) and library sessions being managed?**

A lot of careful planning and thought has gone into schools preparing for our worst case scenario (the contingency Local Delivery Phasing Plan) and a lot of this will continue to be relevant, at least for the time-being. This means they've considered which sports may be higher risk than others and how to ensure the safe handling and cleaning of equipment.

Based on the public library 'Click and Collect' model which is being introduced, it is likely that this will be extended for school libraries which are managed by Live Life Aberdeenshire moving forward. Digital services provided by Live Life Aberdeenshire continue to be available to all pupils and staff and schools have found lots of other creative ways of using digital technology. For schools that operate their own libraries, the physical borrowing of books should be carefully managed allowing for a three-day quarantine as per the national guidance.

### **Will school trips continue to go ahead?**

The advice given to Head Teachers is to postpone all school trips until 2021 for the moment. This is a rapidly-changing situation, however, and school teams will take on board the latest public health and government advice to ensure careful consideration is given to any remaining bookings before the end of the year.

## **Instrumental music lessons**

### **How will instrumental lessons be delivered now that schools are open?**

The Instrumental Music Service will be operating in a variety of ways now that schools have reopened. Some instructors will be back in schools delivering face to face lessons.

The frequency of lessons face to face will depend in part on the risk assessment of individual schools. Currently brass and woodwind instructors will not be teaching face to face because Scottish Government guidance states that these activities should be avoided. This also applies to singing.

Instructors will continue to use online platforms such as Google Classrooms and MS Teams via Glow, to set assignments as well as send and receive audio and video recordings. In addition, where circumstances allow, video conference lessons are now able to take place on Google Meet and MS Teams platforms, again via Glow.

### **Are fees being requested for instrumental music lessons?**

Instrumental music lesson fees remain under review. The review commenced when the schools initially closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There are currently no requests

for fees being sent to parents/carers

## School meals

### **Will school meals continue to be available?**

Yes. Primary school meals have started with a tailored menu and secondary schools are using a new app for young people selecting their meal choices. For those who are charged for school meals, please ensure there are sufficient funds available in your child's school meal account. More details on new school meal arrangements are available on the council's website: <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/schools-covid-19/school-meals-covid-19/>

### **Are packed lunches allowed?**

Yes. Families can continue to choose whether children and young people enjoy packed lunches from home or school meals. However, children and young people should be reminded about the importance of hygiene – sharing of snacks will not be permitted.

## Out of school care

### **When will out of school clubs open again?**

Council-run out of school clubs are re-opening from the week commencing Monday, August 24. There may be some local variation to this date, and we are working very hard to identify what is possible at each site. Staff will provide families who usually access the service with an update providing specific details as soon as information is available.

Lets of council premises are also allowed for the purposes of out of school care, helping many privately-run services get up and running too.

In terms of wider clubs and groups, school-led activities will be given careful consideration as national guidance or local public health advice evolves. Beyond those, the First Minister has set out indicative dates for when various activities are allowed to resume.

### **What happens if there are delays to reopening or if there are closures?**

Council-run Out of School Clubs will endeavour to reopen from Monday, August 24. Where this is not possible, the Childcare Strategy team will write to parents concerned informing them of a delay to the reopening of their setting. This letter will include a list of local childcare providers in your area who are registered with the council's Family Information Service who may be able to assist with childcare provision during this time.

## School transport

### **How is school transport operating?**

School transport arrangements across Aberdeenshire have been reviewed in line with the [Scottish Government guidance on school transport](#) and the latest national update on preparing for the start of term.

From Monday, August 31, children aged five or older are required to wear face coverings on dedicated school transport. [View parental guidance on school transport arrangements in Aberdeenshire.](#)

### **What provision is being put in place for pupils who get free school transport to school if parents don't feel comfortable using the service without physical distancing?**

We will carefully follow the advice of Public Health Scotland and the Scottish Government to ensure appropriate health and safety measures are in place. If parents do not wish to use the service then the expectation would be for families to make their own arrangements.

## **Advice and support**

### **I am really concerned and feel myself and/or my family members should be shielding. What should I do.**

Broadly speaking, there is no longer a requirement for shielding across Scotland. However, if you are in a very high risk group and have been clinically advised to avoid school or if you would prefer your child does not attend school, please discuss alternative arrangements with your school directly.

### **Can I arrange flexi schooling for my child?**

Aberdeenshire Council has a joint working group set up to consider the complexities of flexi schooling which will report back to the Education and Children's Services Committee in due course. This is where part of the responsibility for educating a young person rests with the school and part rests with the parent, attending school for part of the week only. Making this an option and meeting the different requests of families at the same time as ensuring a comprehensive educational experience for each child would be difficult for schools to manage.

### **Is blended learning available, if parents wish to choose this rather than going back to school full time?**

The blended learning approach – where young people can access part of the learning package their school is offering from home – remains an essential part of our contingency plan should there be any requirement for physical distancing among pupils in the future. In terms of complimenting work done at school, supporting homework activities or ensuring young people can continue to access learning even if they are not at school (due to self-isolating, for example), blended learning remains an important tool for us and schools will be able to build on what they have learned so far.

### **How will young people who are anxious about being at school be supported?**

Schools have been considering how best to support children and young people, as well as staff, for some time. There have been and will continue to be many continued professional learning opportunities for teaching staff and the focus is on continuing to deliver a nurturing, happy school environment. The safety and hygiene measures we encourage are based on expert, national advice and these are coupled with a friendly, understanding approach.

We understand that many families have been impacted by lockdown and therefore nurture and wellbeing continues to be a key priority. The principles of GIRFEC (Getting It Right For Every Child) still apply and schools will continue to work with parents and other professionals to ensure that appropriate support plans are put in place for those children who need it.

**What is being done to ensure children and young people with additional support needs are safe and well catered for?**

Ensuring appropriate arrangements are in place for children and young people with additional support needs is a priority across Aberdeenshire. Our approach centres on the needs of each child, so appropriate arrangements are put in place tailored to their specific needs. If you have concerns, please discuss these with your school directly.

**How are schools ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children and young people if an incident occurs requiring them to receive First Aid or purely if they require comforting?**

First Aid will continue to be available to all children and young people in Aberdeenshire's schools. It is also recognised and understood that younger children in particular may require support and reassurance involving close contact from time-to-time. This will continue to be provided.

**What happens if parents/carers do not feel it is an acceptable risk for their child(ren) to attend school? Will they be prosecuted or fined?**

Providing there are no shielding requirements, parents are encouraged to enable their children to attend school and schools can work with families to address any concerns they may have. However, the Scottish Government has indicated that parents will not face fines and further guidance is awaited on how any such absences should be recorded.

**I'm really struggling to adapt to challenging circumstances. Can you help?**

We know it's unsettling when there is so much change ongoing. Please remember the remarkable resilience young people, parents and staff have shown so far and the importance of continuing to work together positively to ensure the best possible outcomes for our children and young people.

Our Educational Psychology team offers a dedicated phone line service to parents and carers on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 9am to 3pm. Please call 01779 403721 or email [eps@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:eps@aberdeenshire.gov.uk) with your name and number if you would prefer they call you. They will be happy to help by offering guidance and reassurance. You can also watch a series of FAQ videos they have developed on their website: <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/as/aberdeenshireeps/transition-support/>

**How will my child be affected if others haven't done home learning? And how are you going to help children catch up?**

Teachers are taking each child from where they are when they return to school. It is a varied picture and we will continue to support each child based on their individual needs. Teachers are no strangers to supporting mixed ability classes and will provide tailored support.

As part of the work of our Regional Improvement Collaborative, a national e-learning

offer is being considered to enhance the learning and teaching offering to children and young people across Scotland. Educators are used to being creative and will find new ways to support those who need it.

If you have concerns, work with your school, make suggestions and find solutions which work for you and your family.

## Early Learning and Childcare

### **I was looking forward to extended early learning and childcare (1140 funded hours per year) will I still be able to access this?**

Eligible children are entitled to 600 hours of funded Early Learning and Childcare from August 2020. This is as a result of the Scottish Government reducing the legal entitlement from 1140 to 600 hours for 2020/21, following the Covid 19 crisis.

In Aberdeenshire, eligible children are able to access 900 hours of fully funded Early Learning and Childcare in funded providers (private, voluntary and independent settings that deliver ELC on behalf of Aberdeenshire Council). This position will be reviewed in January 2021 and it is hoped that all Early Learning and Childcare Settings will be delivering 1140 hours by July 2021.

From August, Aberdeenshire Council settings are offering the statutory 600 hours of funded childcare. As soon as possible after that and where staffing and opening hours allow, this will increase to 900 hours.

### **I have accepted a place at a school but would now like to use a funded provider instead. What do I do?**

If you have accepted a place at a school but would now prefer to use a funded nursery and childcare provider instead, the school place you have accepted will be on hold until you make the final arrangements.

Funded providers will be able to discuss arrangements should parents wish to purchase additional hours from them.

If you secure a place at a funded provider and no longer wish to take up a school place, please provide details to [elcadmissions@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:elcadmissions@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)

### **What is happening about split placements?**

Split placements can now be organised and will be funded up to a maximum of 900 hours, however this is reliant on both settings being able to take children as some funded providers/agreements with other local authorities may not now be able to continue due to Covid 19.

## Contingency arrangements

### **Have schools planned for all scenarios when it comes to physical distancing? If not, why not?**

Schools have the maximum capacity figures for each classroom across Aberdeenshire's

170+ schools to enable 1m, 1.5m or 2m physical distancing to take place. However, physical distancing has a knock-on impact on many other aspects of school life, including school transport. School timetabling can take up to four weeks to plan so schools have a contingency plan ready to implement based on the 2m physical distancing guidance as set out by the Scottish Government. Plans will be revised in line with the latest advice.

**When will the missed week of summer holidays be taken?**

The five days holiday missed by bringing this year's school term forward will be taken next June, with effect from Monday 28<sup>th</sup> June 2021. This makes for a seven-week summer break next year.

**If contingency plans are enacted, will siblings be in school on the same day so they can be in the same bubble?**

Yes. Every effort will be made to keep family groups together where possible.

**Why couldn't we have always just planned for all young people to be back in school at the same time?**

The safety, wellbeing and education of children and young people has always been at the heart of return to school plans. Our Local Phasing Delivery Plan, which is now our contingency plan, was put together in line with the Scottish Government's [Re-opening schools guide](#). This included a requirement to ensure 2m physical distancing between pupils.

A series of operating models were worked up to support head teachers and enable physical distancing, and our contingency plan would see all, half or one third of a school's pupils in class at any one time – depending on available space and staff.

**If the contingency plan had to be enacted, would the offering be the same for each young person?**

In the event of our Local Phasing Delivery Plan (our contingency plan) being enacted, young people will have a mix of class-based learning at school and e-learning, and arrangements will vary depending on the school. This is because we have over 170 schools, with varying numbers of children and young people attending and a variety of different building designs, and we want to enable head teachers to deliver the best possible solutions for their local communities.

**Why couldn't the council just hire more buildings and recruit more staff quickly in order to guarantee all children and young people could go back to school full-time, even if physical distancing is required?**

While we would all prefer not to be operating within the context of a pandemic, it's important we strike the right balance between prioritising face-to-face learning and childcare where possible, following safety guidance and delivering a sustainable and affordable offering – in the event the infection rate creeps up.

It is important to understand that even in terms of delivering what many may consider the basics in these circumstances – blended learning and key worker childcare – there are still resource implications.

**What are the costs and resource implications of Covid-19 on Aberdeenshire's**

### **schools so far?**

Cover will be put in place for those colleagues who are shielding as well as those who may have to self-isolate, and the new measures being put in place within our buildings to encourage good hygiene practice come at a cost too. As well as the loss of income we have seen from the closure of leisure and culture facilities and school catering, over £1m was set aside to cover the cost of key worker childcare up to August.

In Aberdeenshire we have also prioritised supporting hundreds of local suppliers since lockdown began, by continuing to pay for things such as funded early learning and childcare, and school transport.

### **Could you offer funded childcare to make up for any loss of in-school time, should the contingency plan be enacted?**

While expanding the childcare we would be able to deliver would be beneficial to many families, we also have to ensure these options would be safe, sustainable and affordable.

### **Why isn't schools' approach to schooling standardised across Aberdeenshire in the event of school closures and/or blended learning?**

While there is robust guidance in place to support all head teachers, we also have to respect the empowerment agenda. Working within an empowered system is based on the principle that schools are empowered to make the decisions that ensure positive outcomes for their children and young people. Sometimes this means there will be variations in how different schools operate but they all have the best interests of their children and young people at the centre of their decision-making which is of course also guided by the council and the government. Visit [Education Scotland's website for more information about empowerment](#).

In time it is hoped that in time e-Sgoil, the e-learning school based in the Western Isles which we work alongside as part of the Northern Alliance regional improvement collaborative, will deliver a 'national offer' which would be closer to what some parents are keen to see in terms of a national bank of resources. However, the e-learning school specialises in delivering remote online face-to-face teaching and would agree there is no substitute for the direct, tailored guidance of a class teacher. Practices will vary among staff, if you have a particular concern or complaint, please discuss this with the staff member concerned in the first instance.

## **Digital learning and teaching**

### **Will schools build on the expertise they have developed in remote learning and teaching in the future?**

The council's Learning with Technology Team will be using lessons learned in relation to how learning has been delivered remotely, seeking the feedback from staff, pupils, parents and partners, in order to establish what worked well and address the challenges to improve on the delivery of remote learning in the future.

The opportunity to expand the delivery of real-time remote learning and teaching across the Northern Alliance regional improvement collaborative area, and indeed nationally, is being led by e-Sgoil, our e-learning school based in the Western Isles. They have

developed tried and tested methods of delivery which have proven results and we are keen to build on their expertise across the board.

Further details on return to school arrangements are on our website at:

<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/schools-covid-19/>