



Joint Union Safety Checklist for Schools

MARCH 2021

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BACKGROUND

Prior to full opening from 8 March, leaders should have reviewed safety procedures and should be keeping these under regular review to help ensure that schools do not, once again, become major vectors of transmission.

USING THIS ADVICE

This joint advice, like our advice for September opening, aims to help you to understand the [current DfE advice](#)¹, identify the most important areas to be considered and ensure that appropriate risk assessments and safety measures are in place for a safer workplace.

We aim to help leaders with their difficult responsibilities by providing comprehensive advice and helping to ensure confidence through full consultation and communication.

Union reps should seek regular meetings with leaders in order to review safety. If members have concerns about safety measures proposed or areas not addressed, then support will be available from their union.

¹ [gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools)

RISK ASSESSMENTS

The DfE advice continues to emphasise the importance of risk assessments and safety measures which are regularly reviewed and updated.

Matters which need to be considered by leaders, reps and members include:

- Has the risk assessment process considered all the areas identified in DfE and joint union advice, fully evaluated the risk of harm, and identified the measures to apply in each area?
- Has there been sufficient consultation with union reps and staff?
- Is it clear how revised procedures will be communicated to staff, students and parents/carers, contractor staff and visiting workers?
- Has the position of the most vulnerable staff been adequately considered through individual risk assessments?

Question to reps and members:

Are you and your colleagues satisfied with the risk assessment process or do you feel that the situation is unsafe due to omissions or errors?

SOCIAL DISTANCING & SAFETY MEASURES

The DFE's main concern is to reduce community transmission and the extent to which schools may contribute to this through contact on site and during travel between home and school. The joint unions are also concerned to ensure that members are kept safe while at work.

Safety around the school and within each classroom depends on a range of inter-connected factors – the number of staff and students, the extent to which they are kept distanced, and the other measures to reduce the risk of transmission such as face coverings, ventilation etc.

The Government's social distancing advice continues to be that everyone should stay 2 metres apart where possible, or 1 metre with extra precautions in place (such as wearing face coverings or increasing ventilation indoors). The DFE advice says that "this is not always possible" in some situations in schools but reaffirms the basic principle where possible.

The DFE advice does not go as far as the joint unions think necessary on face coverings. These should be supplied by the school, be of good quality and training given on how to use. Breaks from wearing should be implemented to avoid fatigue and discomfort. We recognise that expecting primary age pupils to wear them is more challenging. The World Health Organisation states that children aged 5 and under should not wear masks but that between the ages of 6 and 11 decisions should be made based on various factors, including local transmission, access to masks, ability of the children to use them and their well-being - [**Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): Children and masks**](#)². Mask wearing among younger children is required in a significant number of other countries, including the USA. If this is achieved even only among older primary pupils, it could help reduce transmission and disruption. Where face coverings are not required to be worn by pupils in classrooms, school staff should be provided with appropriate higher grade face masks, which protect the wearer, eg FFP2, or FFP3 in higher risk settings, such as SEND. Exemptions from wearing face coverings will of course be

² [who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-children-and-masks-related-to-covid-19](https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-children-and-masks-related-to-covid-19)

necessary for students who find it difficult to wear them, in particular in special schools.

Each school and each classroom is different and we advise you to consider the following issues and then decide whether you think matters are safe and, if not, seek support. You should also consider the advice on vulnerable and higher risk staff set later in this advice.

Safety measures around the school

- Are bubbles being made as small as possible (e.g. no return to full year bubbles)?
- Will staff and students be kept in one bubble, with staff movement between bubbles avoided altogether wherever possible except in emergencies?
- Will arrangements for moving around the site minimise the extent of contact and mixing?
- Will lunch breaks and other breaks be staggered?
- Will large gatherings e.g. assemblies be avoided?
- Have ventilation arrangements been reviewed in order to ensure maximum ventilation of all school spaces?
- What additional measures and equipment are being used to aid and improve ventilation? Are CO2 monitors available to enable regular monitoring to take place?
- Are there any areas of the school with unsafe ventilation which should not be used?
- Have enhanced cleaning regimes been introduced throughout the school including employing additional cleaning staff and payment for extra workload or hours worked to support cleaning and estates staff?
- Are toilets cleaned regularly?
- Are closed bins for tissue disposal provided?
- Will face coverings be required to be worn around the school as required or advised by DFE advice?
- Will face coverings also be required to be worn around the school more widely than required by DFE advice?
- Will face coverings be provided by the school where needed?
- Will personal protective equipment (PPE) including FFP2 or FFP3 grade masks, if appropriate, be provided for staff administering first aid, medical

care or personal care activities where social distancing cannot be maintained, for example in some special schools and nurseries.

- Will catering, cleaning and estates staff be provided with PPE?
- Will adequate arrangements for enhanced cleaning and hand washing be maintained?

Safety measures within the classroom

- Are class sizes being reduced to the smallest possible size for example through splitting into two groups?
- What level of social distancing will be maintained between staff and students?
- What distancing will be maintained between students?
- Is the classroom adequately ventilated?
- Will face coverings be required to be worn in the classroom where required or advised by DFE advice?
- Will face coverings also be required to be worn in the classroom more widely than required by DFE advice?

Safety measures on arrival and departure

- Has the use or possible use of staggered start and finish times been reviewed?
- Have arrangements for queuing on arrival, waiting to collect students, staff supervision etc been reviewed?
- Have arrangements for school transport, including when travelling, boarding and disembarking, been reviewed?
- Has the school agreed to apply public transport rules on social distancing and face coverings to both primary and secondary pupils on all dedicated school transport?
- Will pupils on dedicated school transport be kept within their bubbles?
- Have arrangements for visitors been reviewed?

Question to reps and members:

- **Are you and your colleagues satisfied with arrangements for safety in individual classrooms and / or around the school?**

PROTECTING VULNERABLE STAFF

While the virus is still spreading through communities, arrangements should be made for the most vulnerable staff to work at home. The Government's shielding advice to the clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) group ends as of 1 April. The Government continues, however, to advise that this group should work at home where possible. The letter, that has been sent to those shielding up to 31 March sets out that 'until the social distancing rules are eased more widely, it is important that you continue to keep the number of social interactions that you have low and try to reduce the amount of time you spend in settings where you are unable to maintain social distancing.'

The joint unions' advice is that education staff in this group should continue to work at home at this time, with no change to current arrangements, even if they have received their first vaccine. The joint unions continue to believe that this will also be an appropriate safety measure for clinically vulnerable staff and higher risk staff, e.g. staff aged 60 and above until they are advised by their GP that their initial vaccination has taken effect. Where possible, measures should be taken to protect others in phase 1 of the vaccination programme, aged 50 or above, if they are still awaiting their first vaccination. Pregnant women in their third trimester who are, with limited exceptions, currently being advised against vaccination should also be allowed to work from home. In all cases, individual risk assessments for vulnerable workers, should be undertaken before they return to work. See the full joint union guide for **Clinically Vulnerable & Higher Risk Workers**.

- Have individual Covid-19 risk assessments been carried out (and reviewed where previously carried out) for the most vulnerable staff and for staff concerned about vulnerable household members?
- Have individual risk assessments been offered to staff with characteristics that put them at higher risk, such as age, ethnicity, sex and disability?
- Will CEV and other employees previously covered by shielding arrangements be allowed to work from home?
- Will the most vulnerable remaining staff - CV employees and those aged 60 or above - be permitted to work at home until they are advised by their GP that their initial vaccination has taken effect, as per joint union advice?

Will individual risk assessments be undertaken before any return to school/college?

- Where possible, have measures been taken to protect others in phase 1 of the vaccination programme aged 50 or over, if still awaiting their first vaccination?
- Will pregnant women in their third trimester be permitted to work at home?
- Is it clear that no pregnant woman, whatever the stage of pregnancy, should be in the workplace unless an agreed risk assessment advises that it is safe?
- Will temporary changes in responsibilities be agreed as appropriate to allow the above where necessary to facilitate home working?
- Will appropriate PPE be provided for those staff at significant risk??

Question to reps and members:

- **Are medically vulnerable colleagues satisfied with arrangements for them personally?**

AVOIDING EXCESSIVE WORKLOAD

The Covid-19 pandemic has hugely increased workload for many staff and by now schools should have taken steps to ensure that new working arrangements minimise additional workload and that some existing practices are changed or dropped to reduce overall working time.

- Has the school conducted a review in order to seek to reduce staff workload?
- Have steps been taken to remove unnecessary working activities altogether and conduct others in a way which avoids the need for staff to be or remain present in school?
- Will the school maintain PPA time and other non-contact time for classroom staff?
- Will demands to work outside of normal responsibilities be kept to a minimum?
- Will there be arrangements in place to support staff wellbeing such as individual counselling support?

Question to reps and members:

- **Has your school taken satisfactory steps to address well-being and reduce workload?**

TESTING, TRACING & ISOLATING

The joint unions expect all schools to comply fully with the NHS Test & Trace system and also support testing system to identify cases which might not otherwise be identified. Procedures should ensure that all positive cases and contacts are excluded from school for the necessary period.

- Is the school complying with the NHS process, with all staff being encouraged to use the NHS Covid app in school, including in classrooms, and self-isolating when notified by the app?
- Has the school established workable arrangements for the LFT testing system to identify asymptomatic cases?
- Will all those with symptoms and close contacts of positive cases be expected to self-isolate in line with DFE advice for the necessary period?
- Will arrangements for supervising students with symptoms prior to them going home be satisfactory?
- Will all staff, including outsourced staff such as catering and cleaning staff, receive full pay when required to self-isolate, without any impact on their sickness absence record?

Question to reps and members:

- **Are the school's processes for testing, tracing and excluding contacts satisfactory?**

GMB ONLINE RESOURCES

For a workplace issue:

Contact your **Branch** of **Region** directly.

gmb.org.uk/gmb-regions

For National Schools Issues, or for help finding support:

Email schools@gmb.org.uk

Coronavirus Hub for Schools

gmb.org.uk/support/coronavirus/covid-19-staying-safe-while-working-schools

Schools, Academies, & Other Education Noticeboards (England)

Including all up to date Joint Union Guidance

gmb.org.uk/network/public-services-section/schools-academies-education-noticeboard

Schools Hub

gmb.org.uk/schools

Schools During Lockdown Survey

gmb.org.uk/schools/lockdown-feedback

BAME Risk Assessment Tool

gmb.org.uk/support/coronavirus/make-work-safe/bame-risk-indicator

Mental Health Resources & Learning

gmb.org.uk/mental-health-support