



Dear

Following the Government's decision to extend national Covid-19 safety measures, we are writing to encourage you to take additional measures to help protect students and staff, particularly in response to the new Delta variant.

Public Health England (PHE) has confirmed that this variant is far more transmissible, can lead to more serious illness and that most cases are now among those of school age children. Absences related to Covid-19 are rising, with almost one third of students absent from secondary schools in Bolton at one stage.

The suggestion that children aged 12 and above may begin to be vaccinated in August, if approved for this age group, is welcome but does not help now when cases among school age children are high and rising, exposing many children to the risks posed by long Covid.

We therefore urge you to:

Reintroduce face coverings in classrooms and communal areas in secondary schools and colleges, as permitted by DfE guidance, and permit their use by staff and pupils in primary schools in classrooms and communal areas. It would be sensible to take this precautionary measure now, rather than when infections get out of control as is already happening in some areas.

Maximise ventilation. As well as keeping windows open and ensuring adequate ventilation in classrooms and corridors, encourage outdoor lessons wherever possible. Purchasing carbon dioxide monitors (only one or two are needed per institution) will allow you to monitor rooms' ventilation. We are asking Government to fund the purchase of air filtration devices as well to supplement air cleaning. Maintaining adequate ventilation will be increasingly challenging if precautions remain necessary in the colder months. The benefits of long-term investment in better ventilation will outlast the pandemic, given the known positive impacts of cleaner air.

[This study](#) demonstrates the impact on case rates in some schools which had improved their ventilation systems and required face coverings.

In addition, we also ask you to:

Help ensure that all staff on site can self-isolate when appropriate by acting to ensure that contractors (catering, cleaning etc) and agencies pay full pay when staff are required to isolate. Staff want to do the right thing and should not be deterred from doing so by financial worries about the consequences of self-isolation.

Act cautiously on end-of-year events. With new DfE advice discouraging indoor summer events, we are urging care around any outdoor events, with distancing and security of bubbles best achieved through separate events for each bubble. Induction and open events will be most safely managed on-line.

Support recovery from Long Covid. Punitive action under absence management or other procedures is inappropriate, given that staff may have contracted Covid at work. We ask you not to apply such procedures to staff diagnosed with long Covid or awaiting such a diagnosis. We also ask you to agree not to count absence against sick pay entitlements, given that Covid may have been contracted at work.

We are committed to doing everything we can to support you to keep schools and colleges safely open, including by calling on Government to provide additional support and resources and by updating our [joint safety checklist](#) to help you keep your risk assessments and procedures up to date in consultation with union reps.

By acting together now, we can help protect students' education and health.

On behalf of,

National Education Union, GMB Union, Unison and Unite
