



## Contact Tracing and Self-Isolation

### Frequently Asked Questions

**Note:** Throughout this document we refer to ‘settings’ – this relates to educational and childcare settings, including early years settings, schools, children’s social care and FE providers.

#### **Why have NHS Test and Trace assumed contact tracing duties from step 4?**

Education and childcare settings have done a brilliant job in identifying contacts over the course of the pandemic, but it is very resource intensive. NHS Test & Trace already manage the contact tracing process for the rest of society and has expertise in supporting people to identify close contacts.

#### **At what point and how might a setting be asked to support with contact tracing?**

Settings will not be routinely contacted by NHS Test and Trace. Individual positive cases and/or their parents or legal guardians will instead be contacted by NHS Test and Trace and their close contacts will be traced and asked to follow relevant public health advice.

Contacts in an educational setting will be traced if the positive case specifically identified an individual as having close contact which will normally have occurred in a social setting e.g. sleepovers.

Education and childcare settings may be contacted, if deemed necessary, by local health protection teams in response to a local outbreak, as currently happens in managing other infectious diseases.

#### **How will a child or young person know what a ‘close contact’ is?**

NHS Test & Trace will contact those who test positive – or their parent or legal guardian – to identify close contacts. They will ask a series of specific questions to help the individual understand what is meant by a close contact, making it easier for them to be identified. Being in a setting with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19 will not necessarily mean a person is identified as a close contact. We expect there to be a very small number of close contacts on average for each case.

#### **How will a setting know if a student, pupil or member of staff has tested positive?**

Children, pupils, students and staff members who record a positive LFD or PCR test should let their setting know.

Staff, pupils or students (or the parent) are required to report the test result via the NHS Online reporting system for both negative, void and positive test results. They should also report positive, negative and void results to the setting.



There is a draft template letter available on the document sharing platform for settings to send to students, pupils and parents which sets this out.

**What is the guidance to settings on whether they inform parents that a child in a class has tested positive or may be a close contact?**

Settings should consider whether individuals in their setting (taking account of factors such as known vulnerability) need to be informed of a positive case. When informing individuals of a positive case, the setting should not disclose any information that could result in an individual being identified. Settings may make their own decisions on how they wish to communicate the information.

Individuals should only be asked to stay home for Covid-related reasons if:

- they are symptomatic
- they have tested positive with a PCR or LFD (they may return if a positive LFD result is followed by a subsequent confirmatory negative PCR within 2 days)

Template letters are available on the data sharing platform. Settings can contact the DfE helpline on 0800 046 8687 if they need access to this.

**What does a close contact have to do?**

From 16 August, fully vaccinated adults and those under-18 and 6 months identified by NHS Test and Trace as a close contact are strongly advised to take a PCR test. There is no requirement to self-isolate whilst awaiting that PCR test result and so individuals can continue to attend their education or childcare setting. If an individual is symptomatic they should stay at home.

Children and young people aged under 18 years 6 months who usually attend an education or childcare setting and who have been identified as a close contact should continue to attend the setting as normal. They do not need to wear a face covering within the setting, but it is expected and recommended that these are worn when travelling on public or dedicated transport.

Children who are aged under 5 years old and identified as close contacts are advised to take a PCR test only if the positive case is within their own household.

18-year-olds will be given the opportunity to get fully vaccinated before being treated as adults. But 6 months after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, they will be subject to the same rules as adults and so if they choose not to get vaccinated, they will need to self-isolate if identified as a close contact.

You should not however arrange to have a PCR test if you have previously received a positive PCR test result in the last 90 days unless you develop any new symptoms of COVID-19. This is because it is possible for PCR tests to remain positive for some time after COVID-19 infection.

**What if settings are asked to provide contact details for close contacts to parents or NHS Test and Trace?**



Settings must not provide any personal information if asked to by parents and/or close contacts that would be a breach of GDPR or data protection legislation.

In exceptional circumstances, education and childcare settings may be contacted by NHS Track and Trace if deemed necessary by local health protection teams in response to a local outbreak, as currently happens in managing other infectious diseases.

In this scenario settings may share proportionate and relevant information as requested by NHS Track and Trace without consent. The sharing of information in these exceptional circumstance does not require consent as it is enabled by specific legislation, but to support this, the existing privacy notices should continue to be in place and be easily accessible.

### **What if settings know they might have an outbreak as a result of several positive cases in a 14-day period, but haven't yet been contacted by NHS Test and Trace**

If you are concerned that you might have an outbreak in your setting you should call the dedicated advice service who will advise if any additional action is required, such as implementing elements of your outbreak management plan. You can reach them by calling the DfE helpline on 0800 046 8687 and selecting option 1, then option 1 again.

### **If a child knows their contacts names but not the details, does NHS Test and Trace disregard those contacts, or ask the setting for details?**

As with the process for adults, NHS Test and Trace will work with the positive case or, depending on the age of the individual, their parent/legal guardian, to identify those who have been in close contact. We expect this to be a very small number of individuals for each case on average. Contact tracers are trained in supporting people to identify close contacts and also work with local authorities to help trace contacts where needed.

### **What if a setting doesn't agree with the close contacts that have been identified by one of their pupils, students or legal guardian?**

NHS Test & Trace already manage the contact tracing process for the rest of society and have developed expertise in supporting people to identify close contacts. NHS Test and Trace will work with the person who has tested positive (or their parent or guardian) to identify close contacts, based on a series of questions.

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. The decision would need to be carefully considered in light of all the circumstances and current public health advice.

Individuals should only be asked to stay home for Covid-related reasons if:

- they are symptomatic



- they have tested positive with a PCR or LFD (they may return to the setting if a positive LFD result is followed by a negative PCR within 2 days)

If settings are concerned they may have an outbreak in their setting, initial support may be sought from the DfE helpline: 0800 046 8687, option 1 or by referring to local arrangements.

### **Do people who are asked to isolate before 16 August 2021 still need to continue their isolation period after 16 August 2021?**

From 16 August 2021, if you are under 18 or a fully vaccinated adult at the point when you have close contact with a positive case, you will be exempt from any legal requirement to self-isolate when identified as a close contact. Fully vaccinated means you have had a full course of an approved vaccine and two weeks have elapsed since the date of your final dose. This two-week period is to allow for an immune response to develop. Individuals will instead be advised to take a PCR test as soon as possible. Individuals may wish to minimise social contact whilst waiting for the results of a PCR test but will not be legally required to self-isolate and so can return to their setting as normal. This will also apply to anyone aged under 18 and 6 months who is identified as a contact.

Anyone who would qualify for this exemption and is part way through their self-isolation period (having been identified as a close contact) on 16 August, can stop self-isolating on that date.

Anyone who tests positive having taken a PCR test will still need to self-isolate regardless of their age or vaccination status. Individuals should also self-isolate immediately if they display COVID-19 symptoms and get a PCR test.

### **Can I refuse to allow a close contact to attend my setting?**

Government guidance is that from 16 August 2021, under 18's and fully vaccinated adults identified as close contacts of a positive case will no longer legally need to self-isolate but should take a PCR test. There is no requirement to self-isolate whilst awaiting the PCR test result but if the individual returns a positive test result, they should self-isolate and not attend their education setting.

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.

Individuals should only be asked to stay home for Covid-related reasons if:

- they are symptomatic
- they have tested positive with a PCR test or LFD (they may return if a positive LFD result is followed by a subsequent negative PCR within 2 days)



### **What is the legal basis for settings to send pupils home to self-isolate?**

We are no longer asking education settings to keep children and young people in consistent groups ('bubbles') or to reduce mixing between groups.

As with other diseases, the law allows a setting, in principle, to send particular pupils or groups of pupils home, or forbid them from attending on a temporary basis if, in the setting's reasonable judgement, this is a necessary measure to protect other pupils and staff from serious infectious disease. This power does not depend on the specific regulations or guidance about coronavirus, though public health advice and the broader picture on coronavirus, including the impact of the pandemic on children's education and wellbeing, will be important factors for the setting to take into account when making a decision.

### **Why is a PCR test not mandatory for close contacts?**

In line with wider government policy on testing, taking a PCR test is voluntary. However, we strongly encourage all individuals to take a PCR test if advised to do so. There is no legal requirement to self-isolate whilst awaiting PCR test results.

### **If you don't need to isolate while waiting for a PCR won't this allow Covid to spread rapidly?**

The findings of the Daily Contact Testing (DCT) trial showed that the number of close contacts in education settings who go on to test positive is very low. We know that being absent from education negatively impacts the education, mental health and wellbeing of those that are required to isolate and that being in face-to-face education is the best place for children and young people. The fantastic progress of the vaccination programme means that over three quarters of the adult population has had two doses of the vaccine<sup>1</sup>, providing them with significant protection, while we know the risk to children and young people from the virus is very low.

### **If close contacts don't have to isolate, do they have to wear a face covering while in schools or college? Can settings introduce other control measures?**

If you attend an education or childcare setting and are exempt from self-isolation you can continue to attend your setting as normal. You do not need to wear a face covering within the setting, but it is expected and recommended that these are worn when travelling on public or dedicated transport.

If you have any significant concerns about your setting you should call the dedicated advice service who will advise if any additional action is required. You can reach them by calling the DfE helpline on 0800 046 8687 and selecting option 1, then option 1 again.

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<sup>1</sup> [Vaccinations in the UK | Coronavirus in the UK \(data.gov.uk\)](https://www.data.gov.uk)



### **I work in a specialist SEND setting, what should I do?**

SEND settings should follow the guidance for [Special schools and other specialist settings: coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#). In line with other settings, from 16 August you are no longer required to self-isolate if identified as a close contact of a positive case of covid-19. You should take a PCR test as soon as possible and there is no requirement to self-isolate whilst awaiting results. Based on the level of risk and known vulnerabilities of students and staff within the setting, you may wish to take additional precautions whilst awaiting test results such as wearing a face covering. You should also continue to regularly engage with LFD testing programmes where available.

If you work in a health or social care setting, or are a student who is working in this sector as part of your programme of study who has been identified as a close contact and are exempt from self-isolation, there is [additional guidance](#) available that you should follow to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 in these settings.

### **What about young people and adults over the age of 18 years 6 months who are unable to be vaccinated for medical reasons?**

Those who are not able to get vaccinated for medical reasons are also exempt from the requirement to self-isolate if they are identified as a close contact of a positive COVID-19 case.

### **NHS Test and Trace App**

#### **Who is the NHS COVID-19 App for?**

The NHS COVID-19 app remains an important part of the country's COVID-19 response. The app complements the overall Test and Trace service by automating some aspects of contact tracing. The app is intended for use by individuals aged 16 and over and may be used by students and staff in education settings if they choose to do so.

#### **I have been identified as a close contact by the App, do I need to self-isolate?**

From 16 August fully vaccinated adults and individuals under the age of 18 and 6 months in England are no longer legally required to self-isolate if identified as a close contact. They should take a PCR test and follow relevant public health advice. The app has been updated to reflect this guidance.

#### **Who can override the App notifications?**

The NHS Covid-19 App complements rather than replaces existing contact tracing processes.

If an app user receives a notification that they have been in close contact with somebody who has tested positive, it is important they follow the advice they are



given. From 16 August fully vaccinated adults and individuals under the age of 18 and 6 months in England are no longer legally required to self-isolate if identified as a close contact. They should take a PCR test and follow relevant public health advice.

App users are anonymous and the app does not trigger the legal obligation to self-isolate or identify them if they are not self-isolating.