



Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

Education and Inclusion Service Directorate

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19): FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs) FOR PARENTS/CARERS

VERSION 18a – 06/12/21

Mae'r ddogfen yma ar gael yn y Gymraeg/This document is available in Welsh.

INTRODUCTION

This guidance is intended to support parents and carers in relation to the operational arrangements of Rhondda Cynon Taf schools.

These FAQs are informed by Welsh Government guidance:

<https://gov.wales/schools-coronavirus-guidance>

<https://gov.wales/school-operations-coronavirus>

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. How are risks to children, teachers and families managed?

All schools have undertaken risk assessments to directly address risks associated with coronavirus (COVID-19) so that sensible measures can be put in place to minimise those risks for children, young people and staff.

At alert level zero, there is more flexibility to determine what is required to manage risks. However, COVID-19 has not gone away, and the most important measure to take is to ensure symptomatic people waiting for PCR test results or those that have tested positive do not attend school. Reducing close interactions between individuals is still important in helping to control its spread, hence, to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), schools are using a range of protective measures to create safer environments in which the risk of spreading the virus is substantially reduced. Whilst such changes may look different in each setting, they are determined by individual circumstances and risk levels, and are all designed to minimise risks to children, staff and their families. They include:-

- Reminding all staff and learners to follow the Welsh Government guidance for self-isolation and household isolation as appropriate.



- Staff and learners not attending school if they have any of the classic COVID-19 symptoms (i.e. a new continuous cough, or a high temperature or loss of or change to their sense of taste or smell).
- Staff and learners who test positive for COVID-19 not attending school.
- Learners aged 5 -17 who live with someone who has symptoms or has tested positive for COVID-19 not attending school - **unless** they themselves have a negative PCR test.
- Fully vaccinated staff and learners aged 18 and above who live with someone who has symptoms or has tested positive for COVID-19 not attending school - **unless** they themselves have a negative PCR test.
- Unvaccinated staff and learners aged 18 and above who are a close contact of someone (household or otherwise) who has symptoms or has tested positive for COVID-19 not attending school, but self-isolating for a 10-day period.
- All contacts of suspected or confirmed Omicron cases self-isolating, regardless of their age or vaccination status. TTP will confirm with contacts how long they need to self isolate for.
- Ensuring regular handwashing, social distancing and good respiratory hygiene by promoting the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach.
- Ensuring adequate ventilation by opening windows or adjusting ventilation systems.
- Using carbon dioxide (CO₂) monitors issued by Welsh Government to assist in the management of ventilation.
- Ensuring that staff and learners who become symptomatic during the school day are sent home, self-isolate and take a test.
- Encouraging staff to maintain physical distance from other staff.
- Encouraging staff to maintain physical distancing from learners as much as possible (recognising that this may not be possible with younger learners or some learners with ALN);
- Supporting older learners to maintain physical distancing wherever possible;
- Ensuring cleaning regimes are appropriate.
- Active engagement with Test, Trace, Protect.

2. Is it compulsory for my child to attend school?

All children are required to attend school unless they are self-isolating or there are other reasons for absence.

You should notify your child's school as normal if your child is unable to attend so that staff are aware of any sickness absence and can discuss this with you.



3. Should I keep my child at home if they have an underlying health condition, or live with someone in a clinically vulnerable group, or if I am anxious about my child returning to school?

Any parent who has medical concerns about their child should seek and follow medical advice provided by their local GP or guidance from Public Health Wales.

Every school will continue to carry out risk assessments and put in place controls to minimise risks, such as frequent hand washing, surface hygiene and adequate ventilation.

Parents/carers of learners with significant risk factors who are concerned can discuss such concerns with the school and the school will explain the measures in place to reduce the risk and provide the required reassurance.

To provide an additional level of safeguarding to individuals who have higher clinical risks, any staff member who is identified as a contact (household or otherwise) of an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19 must agree to undertake a specific testing regime as set out in <https://gov.wales/children-and-young-people-higher-clinical-risk-and-clinically-extremely-vulnerable-adults-guidance>

All pupils of compulsory school age **must** attend school unless a statutory reason applies (for example, the pupil has been granted a leave of absence, is unable to attend because of sickness, is self-isolating, is absent for a necessary religious observance, etc.).

4. What are the arrangements for pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

Practical and flexible approaches are considered as part of the school's risk assessments to ensure individual needs are met in relation to learners with ALN.

Whilst schools are not advised to maintain contact groups from September onwards, some schools may wish to tailor provision for some pupils with ALN as a result of specific health needs identified as part of the risk assessment process.

Schools should continue to consult parents and carers about specific support needs, and agreeing the way forward for specific learners.



5. Are remote learning opportunities provided for children who need to self-isolate?

Remote learning opportunities will be provided for learners in all year groups who need to self-isolate.

SCHOOL BUILDINGS

6. Are there adequate hand-washing facilities for staff and pupils?

Pupils and staff are encouraged to wash or sanitise their hands upon arrival at school/when leaving school and regularly throughout the day, especially before and after handling food, when using the toilet facilities and when someone has sneezed or coughed.

Plentiful supplies of hand soap and hand sanitiser are available throughout all school buildings.

7. How often are schools being cleaned?

Cleaning regimes are appropriate and in line with standards to control COVID and other communicable diseases. If advice is received from the Test, Trace and Protect (TTP) Service that additional cleaning measures are required in any school, those arrangements are in place and will be undertaken to further reduce risk of transmission.

8. What if a parent/carer wants to enter the school building to speak to a teacher?

No parents/carers will be permitted within any school building unless they have a pre-arranged visit. Should teacher/parent contact be required, this should be by appointment and arrangements for audio and/or video communication explored as an alternative.

External visitors to the school will be admitted by pre-arranged appointment only and should follow the school's covid safety requirements.



THE SCHOOL DAY

8. What are the contact group sizes?

There is no longer a requirement for contact groups (bubbles). The Test, Trace, Protect (TTP) system will be used in order to identify close contacts of learners who have tested positive.

For learners testing positive, TTP will interview them (for those age under 16, this will be with a parent/carer) to establish their close friendship group, the locations they have visited, including social settings, sports and after school clubs and transport during their infectious period and who else they may have been in contact with. TTP may also need to contact the school for some contact details.

10. What are the requirements for the wearing of face coverings?

Welsh Government advice (whilst more is learnt about the Omicron variant) is that:-

- Face coverings should be worn by all staff and visitors (unless exempt) in all indoor areas of all educational settings including classrooms, where physical distance cannot be maintained.
- Face coverings should be worn by all secondary aged learners (unless exempt) in all indoor areas, including classrooms, where physical distance cannot be maintained.

Face coverings must continue to be worn by secondary school learners when travelling on dedicated school transport and must be worn by learners 11 years of age and above when using public transport.

11. Is there a requirement for learners in Years 7-13 to undertake twice-weekly lateral flow tests (LFTs)?

Staff in primary schools and staff and learners in **secondary schools** and colleges **not showing symptoms** should continue to take regular rapid lateral flow tests twice a week and report the results online. These tests should be taken on a Monday and a Thursday morning prior to attending school.

Staff in primary schools and staff and learners in secondary schools are also encouraged to take a lateral flow test 3 to 4 days prior to their return to school in January and another lateral flow test on the morning of their return to school in January. If additional tests are required during this period, these are available to [order from the community channel](#).



LFTs should be undertaken first thing in the morning whilst at home and ideally prior to having anything or eat or drink.

Anyone who tests positive should self-isolate and get a PCR test, only returning to school if the PCR test is negative.

NOTE - Secondary school learners who are household contacts of an individual who has tested positive for Covid-19 should start using lateral flow tests for 7 days regardless of whether they are vaccinated or if they have previously tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 90 days – see question 14 for further information.

Anyone who has had a positive coronavirus test result more than 90 days ago is encouraged to participate in the twice weekly lateral flow testing.

Further information regarding lateral flow testing is available via:
<https://gov.wales/lateral-flow-testing-people-without-symptoms>

NOTE - Lateral flow tests should not be used on primary school aged learners.

12. How is school pick up and drop off managed?

School start and end times are no longer staggered.

Parents/carers dropping off/collecting children should maintain distance from other families wherever possible and must leave the school site immediately and not congregate.

ILLNESSES AND POSITIVE TESTS FOR COVID-19

13. What happens if there is a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) in my child's school or childcare setting?

Where a child, young person or staff member tests **positive**, Test, Trace and Protect (TTP) will lead on identifying the close contacts of the member of staff/learner who has tested positive, supported by discussions with school with any further information the school may have available.

From the 7th of August 2021 Welsh Government removed the requirement for adults who have been fully vaccinated and are close contacts of someone who has tested positive, to self-isolate. This also applies to contacts who are under 18.



However, please note that there are differences in relation to self-isolation requirements if the close contact is a household contact – please see question 14 below.

- Also, all contacts of suspected or confirmed Omicron cases must self-isolate, regardless of their age or vaccination status. TTP will confirm with contacts how long they need to self isolate for.

The majority of learners in the class/setting will not be identified as close contacts. Instead the school may issue an advice letter to update parents/carers and staff on the situation and what they need to do.

For learners who are identified as close contacts of a confirmed case, the school will be advised by TTP to take a **'warn and inform'** approach to update parents/carers and staff on the situation and what they need to do, based on TTP advice. This 'warn and inform' approach will reinforce key messages about the risk to others from COVID-19 and what can be done to minimise this risk, including - getting a PCR test immediately and another PCR test in 6 days time; by remaining vigilant for new symptoms; by having a low threshold for seeking a test even with mild symptoms; and avoiding contact with vulnerable family and friends in the short-term (e.g. elderly relatives, or those who are unvaccinated, or those who are higher risk of severe COVID-19 infection).

There may be certain circumstances however where fully vaccinated and under 18s contacts may still be asked to self-isolate by the Test, Trace, Protect service but this decision will only be taken where it is necessary to protect public health.

Further details on self-isolation are available via: <https://gov.wales/self-isolation>

14. If my child has been identified as a close contact and advised to take a PCR test, can they attend school?

Non-household contact

All children who are identified as **non-household** close contacts can continue to attend school unless they themselves have tested positive for COVID-19 or have COVID-19 symptoms.

Learners aged 5 and above (non-household contact)

PCR tests will be offered on day 2 and day 8 to anyone **aged 5 years and above** who is identified as a **non-household** close contact - these are not mandatory but are recommended (day 2 and 8 refer to the amount of days after a contact has tested positive. For example if a contact tested positive on a Monday, day 2 would be Tuesday and day 8 would be Monday the following week).

If your child does **not** have symptoms and has not been advised to stay home/self-isolate by TTP then they can attend school.



Household contact

Learners aged 5 to 17 (household contact)

Where a learner aged between 5 and 17 years has a household contact who has symptoms or has tested positive for COVID-19, the learner will be required to self-isolate until they themselves receive a negative PCR result.

Secondary school learners who are **household contacts** of a positive case are also recommended to undertake lateral flow testing for 7 consecutive days from the household contact receiving a positive test result - this is in addition to the initial PCR test. Secondary school learners should start using lateral flow tests for 7 days regardless of whether they are vaccinated or if they have previously tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 90 days.

Learners aged 18 and above – fully vaccinated (household contact)

Where a learner aged 18 and above is fully vaccinated and has a household contact who has symptoms or has tested positive for COVID-19, the learner will be required to self-isolate until they themselves receive a negative PCR result. (Fully vaccinated means that a period of 14 days has passed since the full vaccination course was completed)

Learners aged 18 and above – unvaccinated (household contact)

Where a learner aged 18 and above is **not** fully vaccinated and has a household contact who has symptoms or has tested positive for COVID-19, the learner themselves will also be required to self-isolate for the full 10-day period regardless of the outcome of any test results they themselves may receive.

Children under 5 years of age

Where **children under 5** have been identified as a close contact (household or otherwise), Welsh Government no longer routinely recommend any COVID-19 tests unless directed to do so by a doctor, or if parents believe a test is absolutely necessary and in the best interests of the child. If a child under 5 develops symptoms they should **not** attend school or childcare. They should only return to school or childcare when their symptoms have resolved or when they are well enough to do so. There is no set isolation period for children under 5 and as such a 'common sense' approach is required of schools and parents.

PCR tests are no longer routinely recommended for children under 5 **with** symptoms, unless directed to do so by a doctor or if it is deemed absolutely necessary and in the best interests of the child. Children under 5 often find the testing process invasive and distressing and this can make getting a sample very difficult and distressing for parents and carers. Additionally, children under 5 do not spread COVID in the same way as an adult or in the same way that people consider young children to spread cold and flu. Young children have small bodies, small lungs and small breath capacity which means even if they are infected with the virus they cannot spread it to others in the same way as an older young person or adult would.



In summary - if a child is under 5 and identified as a close contact, they do not need to isolate or test, hence they can continue to attend school providing that they do not have symptoms of COVID-19.

Household contacts with examinations due

Learners aged 5 to 17 or 18 and over and fully vaccinated who have a positive household contact or someone in their household with coronavirus symptoms - the learner will need to self-isolate and get a PCR test. Should the learner receive a negative PCR result and remain asymptomatic, they can stop self-isolating.

However, if the learner is scheduled to attend an exam or assessment while awaiting their PCR test result, they should inform the school and in these circumstances it should be acceptable to take an LFT instead. If this is negative and the learner remains asymptomatic, they can continue to attend their exam. If the test is positive learners should contact the school to make necessary arrangements.

Child has previously had COVID-19 themselves and another household member later tests positive for COVID-19

If a learner who is a household contact has tested positive for COVID-19 within 90 days prior to their household contact testing positive, they are strongly advised to take a lateral flow test (LFT). If the LFT result is negative, they can stop isolating. If the test result is positive a PCR should be undertaken within 24 hours.

Child who has tested positive previously for COVID-19 exhibits symptoms again

If a child has tested positive within the last 90 days but **new symptoms** are developed by the child/staff member, they should isolate and take a PCR test, as these could be symptoms of a new infection.

If a child or member of staff tests positive for COVID-19 on a LFT or a PCR test, or has any of the COVID-19 symptoms they should self-isolate and not attend the school.

All contacts of suspected or confirmed Omicron cases must self-isolate, regardless of their age or vaccination status. TTP will confirm with contacts how long they need to self isolate for.

15. When should I not send my child to school? For example, if they have a fever?

All individuals should stay at home and those aged 5 and above should get a PCR test if:

- they have any of the three symptoms of COVID-19 (new continuous cough, fever or high temperature, loss of, or change in, sense of smell or taste)



- they have a household member who has symptoms or has tested positive for COVID-19
- **All contacts of suspected or confirmed Omicron cases must self-isolate, regardless of their age or vaccination status.** TTP will confirm with contacts how long they need to self isolate for.

The Welsh Government have made COVID-19 PCR testing available to people with a wider range of symptoms such as fatigue, muscle ache or pain, a sore throat, a headache, a runny nose, nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea. This is because some variants and young children do not display the classic three COVID-19 symptoms initially.

For children displaying wider symptoms parents/carers can book a test online by selecting the 'book a test if advised by a Public Health adviser' option. Individuals who take a test because of these other wider symptoms are not legally required to isolate while they await their test result.

However, if individuals receive a positive COVID-19 result, they need to self-isolate for a 10-day period and any household members need to self-isolate as outlined in question 14 above.

Children with a negative test result can return to school if they are feeling well enough (unless they are completing a required self-isolation period). Clearly, children with diarrhoea and/or vomiting should not attend their school/setting until they are symptom-free for 48 hours, even if their COVID-19 test result is negative.

CATERING

16. Are breakfast clubs operating?

Breakfast clubs have been operating as normal from the start of term in September 2021. If any change to the local or national risk levels require a change in the numbers which can be accommodated, this will be communicated at the earliest opportunity.

17. What are the arrangements for lunch time?

Kitchens are fully open and food is available to all pupils who want it, including those eligible for free school meals.



18. Will BACS payments be made to pupils who are self-isolating?

BACS payments will only be made for eligible learners who are self-isolating due to COVID-19. School registers are used to identify eligible pupils who are required to 'self-isolate' and a Free School Meal support payment of £3.90 per day will be paid into bank accounts via BACS.

School Holidays

The Welsh Government has also made available funding at the rate of £19.50 per week (£3.90 per day) per eligible learner to make free school meal provision available during school holidays until Easter 2022. Accordingly BACS payments will continue to be made throughout school holiday periods.

If you receive a payment to which you are no longer eligible, you will be required to repay it to the Council.

19. Is water available during the day?

All pupils should bring filled water bottles to school that can be refilled during the day. The refilling of water bottles will be managed and supervised by the school to ensure that the safe refilling of water bottles is available to pupils who need/or request it.

TRANSPORT

20. Is school transport operating?

Dedicated school transport services are running for all entitled learners, in line with the latest Welsh Government guidance

<https://gov.wales/operational-guidance-schools-and-settings-html>

21. My child is not entitled to free school transport, can I pay for a seat?

Applications to purchase a seat will be significantly limited, taking into consideration the need for social distancing on the vehicle between the driver / passenger assistant and the learners. It is likely that there will be some schools where there are no seats available to be purchased.

Applications opened on Monday 26th July 2021. You will need to apply to purchase a seat by completing an on-line application on the Council's website: www.rctcbc.gov.uk/schoolbuspasses or by contacting Customer Services on 01443 425001.



22. Is my child expected to wear a face covering on school transport?

Secondary age learners travelling on dedicated Rhondda Cynon Taf school transport **must** wear a face covering, but they are not a substitute for good hygiene. Not only will this measure help reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 but also common colds and flu, which will also be a benefit.

Learners who travel to school or college on **public** transport must wear a three layer face covering as mandated by the Welsh Government.

Learners must not touch the front of their face covering during use or when removing them. They must wash their hands immediately on arrival at school or home, dispose of temporary face coverings in a covered bin or place re-usable face coverings in a plastic bag for washing.

Please note that a refusal to comply with this requirement will result in your child's place on school transport being compromised. Your support in reinforcing this message with your child would be greatly appreciated. If your child has a medical or health condition, impairment or disability that would make it difficult to wear a face covering please advise school staff at the earliest opportunity.

23. What further precautions must my child take when travelling?

We ask that parents or carers help communicate to their children the importance of following good hygiene, as this will play a key role in keeping everyone safe.

This means taking the following precautions:

- **do not travel** if your child has any of the four identified COVID-19 symptoms (a new continuous cough, a high temperature or loss of taste or smell);
- **do not travel** if your child is required to self-isolate by Test, Trace, Protect (TTP) or is in quarantine having returned from a country specified by the Foreign Commonwealth Office;
- wash your hands for at least 20 seconds or sanitise your hands before leaving the house;
- use the hand sanitiser provided before accessing the vehicle;
- avoid physical contact with others;
- windows will be open for ventilation where possible;
- face away from other people when using school transport;
- minimise the number of surfaces you touch, and in particular avoid touching surfaces such as handrails and window ledges;
- do not touch your face;



- do not eat or drink whilst using transport;
- wash your hands for at least 20 seconds or sanitise your hands before leaving school.

Please note that a refusal to comply with health and safety requirements, good hygiene and where possible social distancing could jeopardise your child's place on school transport. Your support in reinforcing this message with your child would be greatly appreciated.

24. How will you ensure that transport services are not overcrowded?

Only named passengers that have prior approval to travel, or those with secondary school bus passes for the route, are allowed to use transport. Drivers have lists of those primary school learners that will be allocated to their vehicle each day. No pass, no travel will be strictly enforced on secondary school vehicles, and those not eligible to travel will be turned away from the vehicle.

EDUCATIONAL VISITS, SPORTING ACTIVITIES AND CONCERTS

25. Will off-site educational visits be taking place?

Schools may consider undertaking educational visits where visiting locations outside of the school is integral to the learning experience.

Schools wishing to undertake any type of educational visit will continue to undertake the usual risk assessment process. This risk assessment will include arrangements for what will happen if a member of the group (a learner or staff member) develops COVID-19 symptoms during the visit.

26. Can inter school sports fixtures take place?

Both indoor and outdoor regulated gatherings can now take place. This includes team sports fixtures.

Schools organising sports fixtures are to ensure these arrangements are addressed in the relevant risk assessments and that all reasonable measures to minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19 are taken.

27. Can practical PE lessons take place?



Schools have flexibility to decide how physical education, sport and physical activity will be provided, working within the measures in place in the school. Outdoor activity should be prioritised wherever possible.

28. Christmas concerts

Schools are strongly encouraged to adopt a cautious approach in light of COVID-19 case rates still being high and to hold such events virtually.

Local authorities, employers and schools must protect people from harm. This includes taking **reasonable measures** to protect staff, learners and others from COVID-19 within the setting.

Should schools consider holding such events for parents/carers to attend in person, a full risk assessment must be undertaken with consideration given to additional risks and control measures to be put in place and information on the relevant arrangements being communicated to those attending or taking part in these events in advance.

The risk assessment and mitigating measures must take into account the type of event and the size of the venue, and these events should only take place where there is a high degree of confidence that these can be held safely for the protection of all learners, staff and any visitors to the school.