

# Returning to school safely

## Information for parents and carers

### Is school safe?

Schools have been working hard to make sure children, teaching staff and families will be safe when they return to school.

The ways each school decides to do this may look slightly different but they will all include these four key actions to slow the spread of COVID-19:

1. Frequent hand washing, good hygiene and regular cleaning
2. Ensuring children and staff only come to school if they are well
3. A clear understanding of what to do if a child or staff show symptoms at school
4. Using bubble groups to make sure that the same teachers and children learn and play together throughout the school week. Keeping children within the same bubble is similar to keeping them with their family. It means they spend less time with lots of different people and will help reduce the spread of the virus.

Some schools may have introduced staggered start and end times so it is important to check with your school about any changes. If you haven't heard from them already, your school will be in touch soon to outline what to expect when it's time to return to school.

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### What happens if someone has symptoms of COVID-19?

1. If your child or anyone in your household has symptoms (a high temperature, a new, continuous cough, or loss of/change in your sense of taste or smell) please let your school know, and keep your child and the rest of your household at home. **It's important you get tested immediately if you have symptoms (see three below).**
2. If a child or member of staff develops these symptoms in school, they will be sent home with advice about what to do. Unless COVID-19 is confirmed by a positive test, there will be no need for other children, teachers or staff in the bubble group to go home or self-isolate.
3. Anyone with symptoms must stay at home (self-isolate) along with all of their household and get tested immediately. Get a test at [nhs.uk/coronavirus](https://nhs.uk/coronavirus) or call 119.
4. If the test is negative, and if they feel well enough, the child or member of staff and their household can stop self-isolating and return to school.
5. If a child or member of staff tests positive, then the rest of their bubble group will be sent home to self-isolate for 14 days. The households of these other children do not need to isolate, unless their child also develops symptoms. Anyone who develops symptoms, should get tested immediately.

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## **What does self-isolate mean?**

If you or your child are asked to self-isolate, this means staying at home and not leaving your home for 14 days (unless a test confirms you do not have COVID-19).

- Do not go to work, school or public places – work from home if you can
- Do not go on public transport or use taxis
- Do not go out to get food and medicine – order it online or by phone, or ask someone to bring it to your home
- Do not have visitors in your home, including friends and family – except for people providing essential care
- Do not go out to exercise – exercise at home or in your garden, if you have one

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## **Will my child need to wear a face covering at school?**

The current government guidance is that some schools may require pupils to wear face coverings in certain situations. However, please check for updates from your school in case this changes.

If you take public transport to or from school, you will be required to wear a face covering unless you are exempt. Children under the age of 11 are not required to wear face coverings and they are not recommended for those under three years old.

[Read more about face coverings in schools and when they are required.](#)

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## **What is the risk to my child or family if they catch COVID-19?**

It is understandable that people are worried about COVID-19 and how it may affect them. For most people who do catch COVID-19 the virus will be mild, especially children. The current number of infections across Lewisham remain low, so the risk of your child catching COVID-19 at school is also low.

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## **What if I don't want to send my child back to school?**

Attendance will be mandatory from September, making it a legal requirement to send your child to their school.

Some people, for example those from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups may be at higher risk from COVID-19; this risk may not just be about ethnicity, but also if you have other health conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure. If you are concerned about the risk for anyone in your family, and whether or not your child should return to school, talk through your concerns with your GP or your school.

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## **What can I do to keep everyone safe?**

Help protect yourself, your family and everyone in your community:

- Check everyone at home is well before your child goes to school and stay at home if anyone has symptoms of COVID-19.
- Make sure children wash their hands when they leave school and arrive home.
- Handwashing is vital. Wash hands regularly for 20 seconds, with soap and running water, especially before and after school, before and after eating, and after using a tissue or the toilet.
- Only one parent or carer should take your child to school. Do not stay and chat at the school gates at drop off and pick up times. Remember to keep a safe distance from other people outside your household or your child's bubble group.
- Use face coverings on public transport (where appropriate).

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## **What changes have been made to public transport?**

Where possible, walk or cycle to your school and avoid public transport. Lewisham Council is working closely with TFL in introducing measures across the borough to encourage walking and cycling and improving air quality for residents.

A number of schools have been selected to take part in the **School Streets** initiative and **Anti Idling campaign** starting in September. Your school will contact you directly about this if they are one of the selected schools.

[Read more about active travel choices for school journeys.](#)

Children over 11 years old will need to wear a face covering on all public transport.

There will be reduced capacity operating on buses and trains, so it might be worth practising the journey with them, and setting off for school a bit earlier at the start of term, to get used to the changes. Some busy school routes will be putting on extra buses during busy times – please check the [TFL website](#) for more information on this.

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## **My financial situation has changed due to COVID-19.**

### **What support is available?**

If you are a family who did not previously qualify for free school meals but whose income has reduced or stopped due to the impact of COVID-19, you may now qualify based on your new financial circumstances.

We encourage all parents and carers who have not yet applied for free school meals to apply if you think you may qualify. [Find out if you are eligible for free school meals](#) – registering is not only important for your family, it also brings extra funding to your school to improve children's education.

