

School Opening Q&A

This document is intended to provide parents in Wigan with information in relation to some of the questions they will, understandably, have ahead of the reopening of schools in September. Please note that this document was updated on 2nd September 2020, following the release of revised guidance for schools on the 28th August.

The information in the below answers comes from a range of sources, which are linked to where available on the Internet:

- [Statement from the UK Chief Medical Officers on schools and childcare re-opening, 23rd August 2020](#)
- [Guidance for full opening: schools, 28th August 2020](#)
- [What parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak, 21st August 2020](#)
- [COVID-19: guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection, 13th August 2020](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): safer travel guidance for passengers, 21st August 2020](#)
- Advice to schools from Public Health England North West on identifying COVID-19 symptoms
- [Update on face coverings in school, 25th August 2020](#)
- [Face Coverings: when to wear one, exemptions, and how to make your own, 27th August 2020](#)
- [COVID-19 contain framework: a guide for local decision makers, 28th August 2020](#)

This information is correct as of 26th August 2020

Q. Is it safe to open schools again?

The circumstances now are very different to when schools were closed in the first place; the prevalence of COVID-19 in the community has decreased, the national Test and Trace system has been developed, and there is now greater understanding of the virus and how it behaves, as well as the measures that need to be in place to keep everyone as safe as possible.

This week, the Chief and Deputy Medical Officers of all UK countries put out a [statement](#) on the reopening of schools. As part of the statement, there was a summary of the evidence that:

- There is an exceptionally small risk of children of primary or secondary school age dying from COVID-19 (less than for most seasonal flu infections). Almost all deaths are in children with significant pre-existing health conditions.
- There is a very low rate of severe disease in children of primary and secondary school ages compared to adults, even if they catch COVID-19 (the hospitalisation rate for children is 0.1 or 0.3% depending on age, compared to 4% hospitalisation rate in the general population).
- The great majority of children and teenagers who catch COVID-19 have mild symptoms or no symptoms at all.
- Although it is not conclusive yet, primary school age children are less likely to catch COVID 19. The evidence around older children and teenagers is mixed (they are either less likely to catch COVID-19 than adults or to have the same risk as adults).

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- There is some transmission of COVID-19 in schools, but on the current evidence it is probably not a common route of transmission. It may be lower in primary age children than secondary age children.

Very few, if any, children or teenagers will come to long-term harm from COVID-19 due solely to attending school. There is no risk-free option, and the risks from opening schools up again have to be balanced against the impacts on children from not attending school.

The guidance from the Government outlines to schools what measures can be taken to reduce the risk to children.

Q. Why is the Government opening schools again?

We know that there are significant impacts on children from not being able to access school, with negative effects on cognitive and academic development, emotional and mental health and wellbeing, and in some cases, obesity and physical development. We know that the impact of these can be life-long and significantly affect some individual children's life chances.

There is no-risk free option, but the position of the Government is that the risk from children from missing education now outweighs the risk to children from opening up schools.

Q. Will re-opening schools lead to an increase in the R rate?

It is likely that opening schools will lead to an increase in the R rate because schools are a connection between different households, however the current evidence suggests that schools are much less important in the transmission of COVID-19 than for influenza or some other respiratory infections. Other work and social environments also increase risk and are likely to be more important for transmission of COVID-19.

The evidence from other countries suggests that reopening of schools has usually not been followed by a surge of COVID-19 in a timescale that implies schools are the principal reason for the surge, however not enough time has passed for us to say this with confidence.

It is possible that opening schools will provide enough upward pressure on R that it goes above 1 having previously been below it, at least in some local areas. This will require local action and therefore early identification and quickly managing outbreaks of COVID-19 in schools is essential as part of a local response to COVID-19, as is giving pupils and staff clear advice not to attend schools with symptoms.

Q. What happens if my child falls ill?

Anyone who develops symptoms of COVID-19, or whose household member develops symptoms, should immediately self-isolate. They should not attend school.

You should let the school know of your absence by phone. The school will record this information and direct you to the Stay at Home guidance, which currently advises that the person with symptoms should isolate for 10 days starting from the first day of their symptoms and the rest of their household for 14 days. If your child is in school when they start showing COVID-19 symptoms, the school will isolate them in a safe place and contact you immediately.

You must then arrange for your child to have a COVID 19 test. You can do this via nhs.uk or by contacting NHS 119 via telephone. If the test is negative, and your child feels well and no longer has symptoms similar to COVID-19, they can stop self-isolating. However, they could still have another virus, such as a cold or flu, in which case it is still best to avoid contact with other people until they are better.

If your child tests positive for COVID-19, they should still follow the Stay at Home guidance, which states that they must continue to self-isolate for at least 10 days from the onset of their symptoms, and then return to school only if they do not have symptoms other than cough or loss of smell/taste. Other members of the household should continue isolating for the full 14 days.

Q. What happens if I or another family member falls ill. Should my child attend school?

Anyone who develops symptoms of COVID-19, or whose household member develops symptoms, should immediately self-isolate. They should not attend school. If a test on the member displaying COVID 19 symptoms is negative, then your child will be able to return to school.

Q. What happens if another child in my child's bubble falls ill?

If a child who attends or staff member who works at a school tests positive for COVID-19 then the school will be contacted by a contact tracer.

The school will then work with the contact tracer to identify direct and close contacts of the case during the 48 hours prior to the child or staff member falling ill. This is likely to be the classmates and teacher of that class.

The social distancing measures put in place by educational settings outside the classroom should reduce the number of other direct/close contacts.

If your child is identified as a direct or close contact, they will be asked to stay away from the school/setting and advised to self-isolate for 14 days starting from the day they were last in contact with the case.

Anyone else in your child's household does not need to self-isolate unless your child develops symptoms. Your child does not need testing for COVID-19 unless they develop symptoms.

Q. Will I be fined if I don't send my child back to school?

In March, the Government made it clear no parent would be sanctioned for their child's non-attendance at school. However, the circumstances have now changed, and it is vital for all children to return to school to minimise as far as possible the longer-term impact of the pandemic on children's education, wellbeing and wider development. Parents have a legal duty as a parent to send your child (if they are of compulsory school age) to school regularly.

School attendance will therefore be mandatory again from the beginning of the autumn term, and schools' responsibilities to record attendance and follow up absence apply again. This could potentially lead to the issuing of fixed penalty notices, in line with Wigan's code of conduct. It is therefore critical that parents and carers have open and honest conversations with school staff about the barriers to attendance so support can be put in place at the earliest opportunity.

Q. What measures will my child's school have in place to make it safe for my child?

The guidance the Government has given schools provides a framework and principles for schools to follow, particularly around the PHE-endorsed 'system of controls'. The Government's position is that if schools follow the guidance and maximise the use of control measures, they will effectively minimise risks. However, the way different schools implement some of the requirements will be different based on their individual circumstances, and parents should ask their school where they are unsure what measures are being taken in the school.

Q. How does the advice on preventative infection control measures from Public Health England differ for special schools?

The measures in the guidance for special schools is, as in the guidance for mainstream schools, intended to provide a framework for education leaders to put in place proportionate protective measures for children, young people and staff. The guidance from Public Health England regarding infection control measures is broadly the same as for the guidance on mainstream schools, albeit there are a number of additional considerations that will need to be taken into place in order to ensure that children and young people with disabilities and special education needs are protected. However, the way different schools implement some of the requirements will be different based on their individual circumstances, and parents should ask their school where they are unsure what measures are being taken in the school.

Q. Are children going to have to keep 2 metres apart?

It is clear that minimising contacts and the mixing between people reduces transmission of COVID-19. The guidance from Government is clear that schools must do everything possible to minimise contacts and mixing whilst delivering a broad and balanced curriculum.

Children in schools will be kept in 'bubbles' and these groups will be kept separate as much as possible and for the distance between individuals within bubbles to be maintained. The guidance

does recognise that there will be a range of factors that affect how this works in practice, including the age of children, layout of the school, and the feasibility of keeping groups separate whilst offering a broad curriculum, particularly at secondary school. Each school's planning and measures will therefore be different.

The guidance acknowledges for younger children, schools' emphasis will be on keeping groups separate, whilst for older children, it will be on distancing.

Q. I am a parent who works in a school. Is it safe for me to go back to work again?

The statement from the Chief and Deputy Medical Officers also summarises the evidence that:

- Teachers are not at increased risk of dying from COVID-19 compared to the general working-age population. ONS data identifies teaching as a lower risk profession (no profession is zero risk). International data also supports this.
- Transmission of COVID-19 to staff members in school does occur, and data from UK and international studies suggest it may largely be staff to staff (like other workplaces) rather than pupil to staff.
- If teachers, other school staff, parents or wider family catch COVID-19 their risks of severe illness are similar to those of other adults of the same age, ethnicity and health status.

The guidance from the Government outlines to schools what measures can be taken to reduce the risk to staff, including social distancing and good infection control measures.

Q. How do I get my child to school safely?

It is possible that your child's start and finish time will be changed, depending on the bubble they are in. This helps keep groups of people apart as they arrive and leave the premises.

Wigan Council is currently working with Transport for Greater Manchester and our schools to provide additional capacity. Schools will be informed of the outcome of this as soon as possible. However there may be reduced capacity on both public transport and dedicated school transport as a result of social distancing measures. Therefore, parents and children may want to consider walking or cycling to school if at all possible, and some families will also have the option of driving their child to school. Wigan Council acknowledges the challenges this delay in confirmation places on families who need to plan for how they will get their children to school, however this is linked to the funding allocation we are due to receive from the Government, and is not unique to Wigan.

If you and/or your child is using public transport to get to school, they will need to adhere to the rules around public transport, including social distancing and the wearing of face coverings. If they are using dedicated school transport, they may have to wear face coverings, depending on the safety measures that have been put into place to protect them.

For children and young people with SEND who use dedicated transport, the situation is similar, in that there is likely to be reduced capacity on some forms of transport, and that Wigan Council is

working with Transport for Greater Manchester and schools to provide additional capacity where needed. Due to the variety of approaches there are to dedicated school transport for pupils with SEND it may be the case that, for some pupils who are transported solely or in small groups, there may be no change in arrangements, for others there may need to be some amended arrangements. The precise approach taken will need to reflect the range of preventative measures that are reasonable in individual circumstances. Parents of children and young people with SEND should therefore discuss any queries they may have around transport with our Transport Team.

Q. Should my child be wearing a mask at school? Will the teachers be wearing a mask when teaching my child?

As of the 25th August, the Government has changed its position on face coverings. Schools that teach children in years 7 and above and which are not under specific local restriction measures will have the discretion to require face coverings for pupils, staff and visitors in areas outside the classroom where social distancing cannot easily be maintained, such as corridors and communal areas and it has been deemed appropriate in those circumstances. Primary school children will not need to wear a face covering. Government guidance states that the use of face coverings in the classroom should be avoided.

In the same way that some members of the public are exempt from the rules on the use of face coverings in those settings that require them, such as shops and supermarkets, these exemptions also apply to some pupils. This applies to those who:

- cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment or disability
- speak to or provide assistance to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate.

Full information on exemptions can be found in the Government [guidance](#) on face coverings. Where parents are not certain if their child is exempt from wearing a face covering in school, they should discuss this with their school.

Wigan Council is presently looking for ways of supporting schools and pupils to access masks and will be in touch with schools around this as soon as possible.

Please note that face coverings will still be required when travelling to school on public transport or on school transport.

PPE will be used in all schools in some specific circumstances, such as if a child is showing symptoms of COVID-19.

Q. Do I have to wear a mask when picking up my child?

The guidance from Government does not require parents to wear a mask when picking up their child. If parents are travelling with their child on public transport, they will need to comply with the rules around face coverings whilst travelling on public transport.

Schools should have a process for removing face coverings when pupils and staff who use them arrive at school. This will include washing their hands, disposal of temporary face coverings, or placing reusable face coverings in a plastic bag they can take home with them, and washing their hands again before going to their classroom.

Q. My child is in the clinically vulnerable list, should they go back to school?

Shielding advice for all adults and children was paused from 1 August. This means that children and young people can return to school or college if they are on the shielded patient list, or have family members who are shielding. The Government guidance states: *since shielding advice has paused nationally...all previously affected children should be able to return to school except where individual clinical advice not to do so has been provided.*

The Government recognise that a small number of children under paediatric care (such as recent transplant or very immunosuppressed children) may need to discuss their care with their health professional before returning to school or college. This should usually be at their next planned clinical appointment.

Patients can only be removed from the shielding patient list by their GP or specialist, following consultation with the child and their family, and other clinicians where appropriate.

If children are not able to attend school because they are following clinical and/or public health advice, you will not be penalised. Schools should also immediately offer remote education to your child.

Parents may wish to review the shielding [guidance](#) from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health for children and young people, as well as the Government [guidance](#) on shielding for more information.

Q. If my child falls ill or tests positive for COVID 19, will Social Care take them away for two weeks?

No, this will not happen. The Staying at Home guidance outlines the measures households should take where a member of the household starts displaying COVID 19 symptoms or has tested positive for COVID 19.

Q. If there is a local outbreak, will schools be closed again?

If there are more confirmed cases linked to the school, Wigan Council's Health Protection Team will investigate and will advise the school on any other actions that may be required.

In the event of a local outbreak, the PHE health protection team or local authority may advise a school or number of schools to close temporarily to help control transmission.

However, schools are now being asked to undertake contingency planning for this eventuality. This includes planning for the delivery of remote education provision, and schools are expected to have plan for delivery in place by the end of September. This expectation that remote education is provided also covers where an individual child or a small group of children is self-isolating.

On the 28th August, the Government published a revised COVID-19 [control framework](#). This outlines the Government expectation that where local lockdown restrictions have been put into place by the national Government, education and childcare will usually remain fully open to all, albeit with some additional protective measures, namely requiring secondary school pupils to wear face coverings. However, the Government has stated that there may be exceptional circumstances in which some level of restriction to education or childcare is required in a local area.

If this happens, restrictions will be implemented in a phased manner, and decisions will be made on a case by case basis, taking into account local circumstances, including information about the incidence and transmission of coronavirus.

The tiers are as follows:

Tier 1	There are no changes to childcare, and the only difference in education settings is that where pupils in year 7 and above are educated, face coverings should be worn by adults and pupils when moving around the premises, outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained.
Tier 2	<p>Secondary schools move to a rota model, combining on-site provision with remote education. They continue to allow full-time attendance on site to vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers.</p> <p>All other pupils should not attend on site except for their rota time.</p> <p>Further education (FE) providers should adopt similar principles, however have more discretion to select a model that works for them.</p>
Tier 3	Secondary schools and FE colleges allow full-time on-site provision only to vulnerable children, the children of critical workers and selected year groups.
Tier 4	<p>All nurseries, childminders, mainstream schools, colleges and other educational establishments allow full-time attendance on site only to our priority groups: vulnerable children and the children of critical workers.</p> <p>All other pupils should not attend on site.</p> <p>Alternative Provision, special schools and other specialist settings will allow for full-time on-site attendance of all pupils.</p>

Please note: this table provides a crude summary of the main changes in each tier. For full text, parents should consult the control framework. Where any child is unable to attend an education setting, the expectation on providing remote education applies.

Q. What if my child only has one of the symptoms, for example only a temperature, and we really think this because of something else than COVID-19, for example teething?

Naturally the symptoms of fever (high temperature) or new continuous cough can be caused by many other things than COVID-19, and will become more common in the winter months.

The Public Health England advice around responding to possible COVID-19 symptoms still applies, as it is a precautionary approach based on what we know of the COVID 19 virus and how it spreads, and takes into account the risk and impact of a symptomatic person spreading COVID 19 to other members of the community.

The only possible exception is where a person has a fever (and no other of the three COVID-19 symptoms) following receiving a vaccine.

Q. Should my child wear a school uniform? How often should I wash it?

The Government is encouraging all schools to return to their usual uniform policies from September. You do not need to clean uniforms differently or any more often than usual because of COVID 19.

Q. Will school dinners be available as they were before schools were closed?

School and college kitchens should be fully open from the start of the autumn term. They will provide food to all pupils who want it, including free school meals and universal infant free school meals as usual for those who are eligible.

Q. Will I be able to put my child in a breakfast club or after school club?

The Government has advised schools to work to resume any breakfast and after-school provision, where possible, from the start of the autumn term, and has provided guidance in doing so. However, the Government does recognise that schools may need to respond flexibly, and build this provision up over time. Parents should therefore discuss the plan for wrap around care with their school should they need further information on their school's plan.