

North Yorkshire Council Public Health advice for educational settings on COVID-19 and other infectious diseases

North Yorkshire Public Health Team **January 2024 update**

At this time of year, we can expect to see an uptick in seasonal viruses and infections such as COVID-19, flu and norovirus. Community flu levels are currently increasing, with high levels of COVID-19 seen over the Christmas period and above average levels of norovirus circulating too.

Under current national guidance parents are encouraged to send children to school if they exhibit mild respiratory symptoms, in order to maintain attendance. Such mild symptoms encompass a runny nose, sore throat, or a slight cough, which unfortunately in some cases may also be indicative of COVID-19 infection.

To support interpretation of the national guidance we have produced a 'quick interpretation' box within this document to support decision making.

Although the acute respiratory symptoms of COVID-19 may be mild for some people, each infection brings the potential for longer-term health consequences, such as Long COVID, which may further impact a child's ability to learn and develop. We therefore continue to recommend that appropriate steps are taken to minimise the spread of infectious diseases in educational settings.

Maintaining good indoor air quality is key to preventing the spread of airborne infections such as COVID-19 and flu (please see guidance below, particularly on ventilation). External support resources for schools are also available, for example through [CoSchools](#) and [SAMHE](#). Practicing good respiratory hygiene (i.e. 'Catch it, Bin it, Kill it') will also help reduce transmission.

We would like to thank settings for their support to Vaccinations UK (the new School Age Immunisations Service provider) during the autumn flu campaign; vaccinations continue to be a vital component to preventing many infectious diseases. Any staff who are eligible for flu vaccinations can continue to access these through local pharmacies until the end of March.

Handwashing remains important, particularly around norovirus, although note that hand sanitiser is ineffective against norovirus (handwashing with soap and water is required).

Please see our guidance below under 'Key Prevention Measures' for more information.

Links to key national guidance documents can also be found in the box below, including information on managing specific infectious diseases.

Some children returning to school following a period of illness may require additional support, particularly around more strenuous activities. Guidance for schools can be found in the Long Covid Kids educational toolkit: [Educational Toolkit | Long Covid Kids](#).

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Key national guidance documents

There is [national guidance](#) on COVID-19 and other respiratory diseases, which includes guidance on children and young people (aged 18 years and under) who have symptoms of a respiratory infection, including COVID-19 (*please see our summary in the box below*).

For more information on the rules around COVID-19 in schools, please visit [What are the latest rules around COVID-19 in schools, colleges, nurseries and other education settings? - The Education Hub \(blog.gov.uk\)](#)

Guidance for living safely with respiratory infections, including coronavirus (COVID-19) can be found here: [Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

You should continue to consult UKHSA's guidance for advice on managing specific infectious diseases, including COVID-19: [Health protection in children and young people settings, including education - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Guidance on emergency planning and response for education, childcare, and children's social care settings is available here: [Emergency planning and response for education, childcare, and children's social care settings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Quick interpretation for COVID-19 advice

To support decision making we have produced a quick interpretation of the national guidance to improve clarity on advice for confirmed or suspected infections of individual COVID-19 settings:

- If a child or young person has a positive COVID-19 test result they should stay at home and avoid contact with other people for 3 days after the day they took the test. After 3 days, if they feel well and do not have a high temperature, the risk of passing the infection on to others is much lower. This is because children and young people tend to be infectious to other people for less time than adults. Please refer to the [A-Z Infectious Diseases guidance](#) for more clarification on this.
- Any staff member with a positive COVID-19 test result, should stay at home and avoid contact with other people for 5 days after the day of taking the test.
- Individuals with symptoms of a respiratory infection and have a high temperature or do not feel well enough to carry out normal activities, but have not taken a COVID-19 test should stay at home and avoid contact with other people until they no longer have a high temperature (if they had one) or until they no longer feel unwell.
 - This means excluding any affected individual who has a high temperature and are unwell until they no longer have a high temperature and are well enough to attend the setting.
 - This does not mean excluding individuals with mild symptoms such as a runny nose, sore throat, or mild cough, who are otherwise well.

National guidance for pupils and staff with symptoms of a respiratory infection including COVID-19, or a positive test result for COVID-19

The full national guidance on COVID-19 and respiratory infections is found below. We are aware that interpretation of this in practice can be challenging so please see the box above for support on what this means in practice.

Children or young people who have a positive COVID-19 test result

It is not recommended that children and young people are tested for COVID-19 unless directed to by a health professional.

If a child or young person has a positive COVID-19 test result they should stay at home and avoid contact with other people for 3 days after the day they took the test. After 3 days, if they feel well and do not have a high temperature, the risk of passing the infection on to others is much lower. This is because children and young people tend to be infectious to other people for less time than adults.

Children and young people who usually go to school, college or childcare and who live with someone who has a positive COVID-19 test result should continue to attend as normal.

When children and young people with symptoms should stay at home, and when they can return to education

Children and young people with mild symptoms such as a runny nose, sore throat, or slight cough, who are otherwise well, can continue to go to school, college or childcare.

However, those who are unwell and have a high temperature should stay at home and avoid contact with other people. They can go back to school, college or childcare, and resume normal activities when they no longer have a high temperature, and they are well enough to attend.

All children and young people with respiratory symptoms should be encouraged to cover their mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when coughing and/or sneezing and to wash their hands after using or disposing of tissues.

It can be difficult to know when to seek help if a child is unwell. If you are worried, especially if the child is aged under 2 years old, then you should seek medical help.

Staff who have a positive COVID-19 test result

If a staff member has a positive COVID-19 test result, it is very likely that they have COVID-19 even if they do not have any symptoms. They can pass on the infection to others, even with no symptoms.

Most people with COVID-19 will no longer be infectious to others after 5 days. Any staff member with a positive COVID-19 test result, should stay at home and avoid contact with other people for 5 days after the day of taking the test.

Staff who have symptoms of a respiratory infection, including COVID-19, and have not taken a COVID-19 test

Staff with symptoms of a respiratory infection, such as COVID-19, and who have a high temperature or do not feel well enough to go to work or carry out normal activities, should stay at home and avoid contact with other people, until they no longer have a high temperature (if they had one) or until they no longer feel unwell. For common symptoms please see below.

It is particularly important to avoid close contact with anyone who is at higher risk of becoming seriously unwell if they are infected with COVID-19 and other respiratory infections, especially those whose [immune system means that they are at higher risk of serious illness, despite vaccination](#).

Symptoms of COVID-19, flu and common respiratory infections

Common symptoms include:

- continuous cough
- high temperature, fever or chills
- loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell
- shortness of breath
- unexplained tiredness, lack of energy
- muscle aches or pains that are not due to exercise
- not wanting to eat or not feeling hungry
- headache that is unusual or longer lasting than usual
- sore throat, stuffy or runny nose
- diarrhoea, feeling sick or being sick

Guidance on other infectious diseases

You can find practical guidance on managing cases of other specific infectious diseases in children and young people settings (including COVID-19) here: [Managing specific infectious diseases: A to Z - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/managing-specific-infectious-diseases-a-to-z). This includes guidance on exclusion periods, key prevention measures, and when to contact UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) Health Protection Team.

Contact the UKHSA HPT (details below) for advice if you're concerned or have seen:

- a higher than previously experienced and/or rapidly increasing number of absences due to the same infection
- evidence of severe disease due to an infection, for example if an individual is admitted to hospital
- more than one infection circulating in the same group of people, for example chicken pox and scarlet fever
- an outbreak or serious or unusual illness for example:
 - [E.coli](#) 0157 or E. coli STEC infection
 - [food poisoning](#)
 - [hepatitis](#)
 - [measles](#), [mumps](#), [rubella](#) (rubella is also called German measles)
 - [meningococcal meningitis or septicemia](#)
 - [scarlet fever](#) (if an outbreak or co-circulating chicken pox)
 - [tuberculosis \(TB\)](#)
 - [typhoid](#)
 - [whooping cough](#) (also called pertussis)

UKHSA HPT contact details:

For some infections, public health measures to prevent onward spread of the disease need to be taken immediately. For urgent notifications please ring **0113 386 0300** in or out of hours. To check if a notification is urgent, click [here](#).

There is a [webform](#) for the following purposes only:

1. To request a call back regarding an outbreak of a notifiable disease in your setting which has already been notified to the Yorkshire and Humber Health Protection team. You will need the **HPZone reference** for this.
2. To inform the UKHSA Health Protection Team of a new outbreak* of a notifiable disease in your setting

*An outbreak or incident may be defined in epidemiological terms as:

- an incident in which 2 or more people experiencing a similar illness which are linked by time or place
- a greater than expected rate of infection compared with the usual background rate for the place and time where the outbreak has occurred

Key prevention measures

To help prevent transmission, please continue to follow key prevention measures, such as:

Hand hygiene

Ensure all individuals have access to liquid soap, warm water, and paper towels. Bar soap should not be used. Alcohol hand gel can be used if hands are not visibly dirty. Alcohol hand gel is not effective against organisms that cause gastroenteritis, such as [norovirus](#).

Advise all individuals to [clean their hands](#) after using the toilet, before eating or handling food, after playtime and after touching animals.

Cleaning

Keeping settings clean, including equipment, reduces the risk of transmission. Effective cleaning and disinfection are critical in any setting, particularly when food preparation is taking place.

Cleaning with detergent and water is normally all that is needed as it removes most germs that can cause diseases.

Ventilation

Ventilation is the process of introducing fresh air into indoor spaces while removing stale air. Letting fresh air into indoor spaces can help dilute air that contains viral particles and reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections.

All spaces should be risk-assessed to ensure ventilation is adequate. Where schools have access to CO2 monitors, these should be used to identify areas of poor ventilation.

All settings should keep occupied spaces well ventilated to help reduce the number of respiratory germs. Open windows and doors as much as possible to let fresh air in (unless it is unsafe to do so, for example, do not keep fire doors open).

Try and open higher-level windows to reduce draughts, where it is safe to do. During the colder months, you may consider opening windows more when the room is unoccupied in between lessons, or only by a small amount.

Where an area of poor ventilation has been identified, there are several simple measures that can be taken to resolve this. Further help and guidance can be found here [Infection, Prevention and Control \(IPC\) | CYPsinfo \(northyorks.gov.uk\)](#). This includes a recording of a training session for schools on ventilation and how to improve indoor air quality, along with accompanying guidance.

National guidance is available here: [Ventilation to reduce the spread of respiratory infections, including COVID-19](#).

Seasonal vaccinations

Ensure all eligible groups are enabled and supported to take up the [offer of national vaccination programmes including COVID-19 and flu](#)

For more detailed advice please visit [Preventing and controlling infections - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Useful contact details

Yorkshire and the Humber HPT

Telephone: 0113 386 0300 in or out of hours. Email: yorkshirehumberhpt@ukhsa.gov.uk - UKHSA [Webform](#)

- If after consulting this guidance you still have queries, please contact North Yorkshire Council Public Health Team at dph@northyorks.gov.uk