**Coronavirus (COVID-19) – FAQs for School Staff Employees**

For more information regarding what to do during these unprecedented times, please visit the “[Working together through COVID – 19” staff support page](https://cyps.northyorks.gov.uk/covid-19-working-together-through-covid-19) under the COVID - 19 tab on the cyps.info website.   
  
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**Planning for the Autumn Term**

**I need to stagger my start and finish times due to childcare; will this be possible?**

The Government have suggested staggering start and finish times as one way to keep children apart as much as possible as they enter and leave the school. This may have a knock on effect for staff who have children and would usually drop them off at school and/or pick them up. Every effort should be made on your part to minimise disruption to the school and where possible to secure alternative childcare. If this is not possible, the situation should be explained the Headteacher and compromises such as changing start and finish times or a temporarily reduction in hours could be discussed. Please note, a temporary reduction in hours may result in a temporary reduction in pay until you are able to complete your contracted hours again.

**I am classed as clinically extremely vulnerable (shielding) and my colleague is clinically vulnerable we do not want to return to school in September, what are our options?**

Where schools apply the full range of measures in the [government guidance for full opening](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools) of schools the risk to all staff will be significantly mitigated. The expectation is that all staff will return to work in September however, there might be a very small number of people who are advised by their healthcare professional to continue to shield. If you are one of these people, please provide confirmation of this in writing to your Headteacher so they can continue to provide you with work to complete from home.

If you are apprehensive about your return to school, please speak to either the Headteacher or your line a manager about your concerns. These concerns will be looked at as part of a risk assessed approach and a risk assessment based on your own individual health and circumstances will be completed with you.

Public Health England and Dept of Health and Social Care advise that schools are not currently considered high risk settings when compared to other workplace environments. It is therefore appropriate for teachers and other school staff to return to their workplace setting. Accordingly, the DfE expect that staff who need to will attend school.

Many schools buy into a 24/7 counselling service through Health Assured Services. If you require further support with your return to work, and your school buys into this service, then you will be able to access this support via the telephone or online. Please ask your Headteacher or line manager for further details.

**Can Teaching Assistants be asked to lead groups?**

Yes, [Planning guide for Primary Schools](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings) suggests when there are shortages of teachers schools can “*ask suitably experienced teaching assistants, who are willing to do so, to work with groups under the supervision of a teacher”.* If this is something which you are willing to do please inform the Headteacher as this may help with the planning arrangements for the new term.

**Can teachers be asked cover other subjects or year groups that they don’t normally teach?**

Yes, Headteachers may need to juggle timetables around to find the best fit for subject and year group coverage. We would ask staff to be as flexible as possible during these unprecedented times and discuss any concerns you may have with the Headteacher.

**Do I need PPE to work in a school?**

The scientific advice indicates that the majority of educational staff do not require personal protective equipment, however there are some circumstances outlined below where it is advised. The crucial advice for schools, colleges and childcare settings is to follow steps on social distancing, handwashing and other hygiene measures, and cleaning of surfaces.

Some children, and young people with special educational needs, may be unable to follow social distancing guidelines, or require personal care support. In these circumstances PPE should be used. It should also be used if a learner or young person is displaying COVID-19 symptoms.

**I have recently booked a holiday and due to changes in Government advice when I return I will need to quarantine/ self-isolate for 14 days. This will be during term time; will I be paid for the time I can’t be in school?**

This is decision for each individual school to make and Schools are under no obligation to agree leave to cover quarantine time if it runs over into term time. Employee will not be entitled to sick pay or any other pay for the period.  Some employees may be able to work from home whilst they isolate, for example, employees who work in administration roles may be able to complete tasks easier at home than others. If you do work from home, you will be paid for the time you need to isolate for.

However, for the vast majority of roles in school it will not be possible to work from home and you will be required to return when school opens,Therefore, if you do decide to travel and quarantine requirements are in place, it is likely that you will be required to take unpaid leave for the working time that you need to isolate. .

Staff may be able to cancel or reclaim the cost of their holiday from their travel insurance.

We are mindful that all school staff need a break following a very challenging term but we would encourage you to look at “staycation” options where possible

**I have been furloughed for months, what will I need to do when I return to work?**

When your return to work is needed your Headteacher or line manager will give you as much notice as possible. You might not return to your full contracted hours straight away and instead you may only complete part of them. However, your headteacher or line manager will have a conversation with you, about your hours, based on the individual needs of your school.

They will also discuss with you the key health and safety measures which are in place to keep staff safe and give you an opportunity to raise any concerns you may have about returning.

**Dealing with cases/symptoms**

**Can I be tested for coronavirus?**

All school staff are included in the Government’s list of essential workers who can access testing for COVID 19 symptoms. Members of your household who are displaying symptoms can also be tested.

Testing is more accurate if undertaken within 72 hours of the onset of symptoms and should be completed within the first 5 days, therefore, it is vital that you report their sickness or self-isolation as soon as possible to your Headteacher.

See [NYCC guidance on staff covid 19 testing](#Testing) if you work in a NYCC locally maintained schools for information regarding how to access testing.

For other schools and academies refer to Government guidance here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested>

**If I am tested, when will I receive the results?**

The aim is for test results to be issued within 48 hours of the test being undertaken. This will either be back to your phone by text or by email.

It is your responsibility to communicate the results of your test, or your household member’s test result to the school.

Where it is confirmed that you or your household members have Coronavirus then you must not attend work and ensure you observe the 10 and/or 14 day self-isolation periods (see Self-isolation section below). If you are in self-isolation and you are not sick or you are only experiencing mild symptoms and have not reported as sick, then you may be asked to undertake work at home during the self-isolation period.

Where it has been confirmed that you or your household members do **not** have the virus, you will be able to return to work either in line with normal procedures, or when you are fit to do so.

If you are unable to attend for a test you must discuss the reasons for this to your Headteacher.

**Who can I call if I need additional help and support with a coronavirus query?**

The need to provide employees with more hands on and practical advice and support has been identified to help them get through COVID-19. Therefore, a team of staff, with a range of knowledge and skills, has been brought together to provide a Staff Advice Line, #askSAL. The team is also supported by a wider network of internal specialists and partners.

The advice line can:

* Help you to navigate and understand the information which is continually being updated, amended and published relating to all things Covid-19
* Efficiently signpost you to the right services / resources depending on your particular needs including in relation to topics from wellbeing to finances
* Provide a ‘listening ear and a helping hand’ by providing practical support where needed including in relation to difficult experiences and challenges being faced over this period

The team can be contacted by email on [SAL@northyorks.gov.uk](mailto:SAL@northyorks.gov.uk) or by phone on 01609 797973.

**When should I self-isolate?**

See [guidance on self-isolation due to coronavirus](https://cyps.northyorks.gov.uk/covid-19-working-together-through-covid-19) for the appropriate periods of self-isolation and the impact of test results.

If you experience symptoms or have to self-isolate, you should contact your Headteacher or line manager to inform them and discuss the situation. If you are well, or only have mild symptoms and you feel able to work, then where possible you will be asked to undertake work from home. At the point that you become unfit to work at home then you should report your absence in the normal manner.

**What if someone else within my family has symptoms?**

You should contact your Headteacher to discuss your situation if you live with others and another person in your household has symptoms of coronavirus. The Government guidance is that all members of the household must stay at home and not leave the house for 14 days. However, if you do not have symptoms at this point your manager will ask you to work from home if this is possible. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill.

If you are well or only experiencing mild symptoms and have not reported that you are sick, then the expectation is that you will work from home, if at all possible, during the isolation period. At the point that you feel too unwell to work then you should report your sickness absence in the usual way.

**If I am required to self-isolate is this counted as sickness absence?**

No, sickness absence and isolation should be recorded separately, the following categories may be used by your school:

• Isolation not working 10 days

• Isolation not working 14 days

• Isolation not working open ended

• Isolation working from home 10 days

• Isolation working from home 14 days

• Isolation working from home open ended

The open ended categories are for those staff identified as being more vulnerable who have been directed to work from home. Absence recorded as ‘Isolation’ will be with normal pay and is, therefore, not sickness absence.

However, any employee who becomes unwell enough to attend work, or continue working from home, should report their sickness absence in the usual way. Sickness absence resulting from Coronavirus will be recorded as ‘Covid-19’.

For NYCC maintained schools, this will not be included for the increments process for support staff, or for teaching staff where the school has adopted absence as a criterion for pay progression. Academies will need to decide whether they will exclude this absence for these purposes.

Normally, employees are required to provide a medical certificate for any sickness absence exceeding 10 calendar days. This is not possible at the current time but a facility has been set up to enable people to obtain an **isolation certificate** from [online NHS 111](https://111.nhs.uk/service/COVID-19/). NYCC has decided that it will not require employees to obtain an isolation note and will accept a longer period of self-certification on the employee’s return to work. Other settings will need to determine what certification they will require from employees.

**How can we prevent the spread of the virus?**

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19 so the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus. The general principles everyone can follow to help prevent the spread are below.

* Washing hands often, with soap and water, or use alcohol sanitiser (containing at least 60% alcohol) if handwashing facilities are not available, particularly after taking public transport.
* Covering your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throwing the tissue in a bin.
* You should wash your hands:
* before leaving home and on arrival at work;
* after using the toilet;
* after breaks and sporting activities;
* before food preparation;
* before eating any food, including snacks; and
* before leaving work and on arrival at home.
* Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
* Clean and disinfect frequently-touched objects and surfaces.

Particular care should be taken when hot-desking arrangements are in place and, when possible, desks, keyboards and phones should be cleaned regularly.

**What should I do if I am concerned about exposure to the virus and/or the impact on my health?**

You should discuss this with your Headteacher who will be able to provide support and reassurance as appropriate. If you are in a vulnerable group as described above, your Headteacher will undertake an individual risk assessment with you based on your individual needs.

**What should I do if I am concerned about exposure and the impact this may have on those I live with or care for who are vulnerable?**

This is an extremely anxious time for everyone, especially for those living in a household where an extremely vulnerable individual has been identified. If you have concerns please speak to your Headteacher so they can do everything they can try and help.

The public health guidance for the rest of the household, even for those in the most vulnerable groups, is that you are **not** required to adopt the protective shielding measures for yourself. You would be expected to do what you can to support the individual and to stringently follow the guidance on [social distancing](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults) within the household and hand hygiene. Employees should also be encouraged to observe social distancing measures within school where possible.

Employees may wish to consider applying for extended unpaid leave and managers will need to consider whether they are able to approve requests, in the context of their service and the demands they are facing.

**Employment Queries**

**I'm worried about my own mental health and well-being, how can I look after myself?**

We realise that this is a stressful and anxious time for many staff members. Although for many of you your first thoughts will be for your family and community, it is vitally important that you take care of your own mental health and well-being as well. Some top tips about how you can do this can be found [here](https://cyps.northyorks.gov.uk/covid-19-working-together-through-covid-19).

**What impact will any absence have on my incremental progression?**

For NYCC maintained schools, sickness due to COVID -19 will not be included for the increments process for support staff, or for teaching staff where the school has adopted absence as a criterion for pay progression. Academies will need to decide whether they will exclude this absence for these purposes.

With regards to performance management, DfE guidance is that schools should continue to operate the usual performance management processes under the School Teachers Pay & Conditions Document for teachers and under the normal appraisal arrangements for support staff. This may mean your Headteacher has to make some adjustments to your performance targets etc to take account of the current circumstances e.g. by basing performance assessment on the period schools were open, adjusting if necessary for the expected trajectory had there been no Covid-19 related changes.

**What will be the impact if I have to self-isolate or contract the virus during my probationary period?**

The need to self-isolate or absence due to the virus should not negatively affect the outcome of your probationary period. If any absence is not for an extended period, your line manager should be able to reach a decision regarding your probationary performance based on the period you have been at work. In the event that this is not possible, probationary periods could be extended.

**I would like to help my local community; please can you tell me how I might be able to do this?**

North Yorkshire is a place where looking out for friends and neighbours is part of daily life and kindness comes naturally. These values are what helps make the county such a special place to live, work and visit. More information about how you can help your friends, your family, voluntary organisations, charities and community groups can be found [here](https://cyps.northyorks.gov.uk/covid-19-working-together-through-covid-19).

**I am an NQT and I’m worried about how COVID -19 will affect my NQT year, will it be extended so I can complete it?**

The DfE are trying to reduce disruption caused by the COVID-19 outbreak on NQT induction. They are encouraging normal assessments to take place if possible. Subject to parliamentary agreement, they are planning to make regulatory changes to mitigate this. Whilst the length of the induction period should ordinarily be 3 full terms and any absences totalling 30 days or more usually automatically extends this, they plan to change the secondary legislation so that any absence related to COVID-19 (such as school closures, sickness or self-isolation), will not count towards this limit.

More information regarding NQT’s can be found [here.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-induction-for-newly-qualified-teachers/covid-19-induction-for-newly-qualified-teachers-guidance)

**Where can I go to access specialist bereavement support?**

It is never easy to talk about death but this is a subject that few people will be able to avoid over the past weeks and months. Whether this is in relation to their own family and friends, supporting others who have suffered a bereavement, the possibility of the death of a work colleague or just thinking about their own mortality, everyone is likely to have been affected.

The ‘[Looking after you](https://cyps.northyorks.gov.uk/covid-19-working-together-through-covid-19)’ section on the CYPS website has links to a range of information about the support available for you, advice on supporting others and information about dealing with the practical arrangements associated with a bereavement. Specific guidance is also being added to reflect any changes to usual arrangements and processes as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak.

Many schools buy into a 24/7 counselling service through Health Assured Services. If you require further support with bereavement, and your school buys into this service, then you will be able to access this support via the telephone or online. Please ask your Headteacher or line manager for further details.

You can also contact the #askSAL team for practical helpful advice. The team can be contacted by email on [SAL@northyorks.gov.uk](mailto:SAL@northyorks.gov.uk) or by phone on 01609 797973.

**Can I claim homeworking tax relief?**

Employees who are now required to work at home may be eligible to claim tax relief on additional expenses incurred as a result of homeworking. Tax relief isn’t allowed on household expenses employees would be paying anyway, such as rent or mortgage payments or those that relate to both business and private use, like broadband and telephone rental.

Further information is available on the [Gov.uk website](https://www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home).