**Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Staffing Guidance for Schools & FAQs**

**Updated 27th August 2021**

The DfE has issued detailed guidance to assist schools and other educational settings in providing advice for pupils, students, staff and parents around the issues relating to Coronavirus. The latest guidance is available [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools).

The guidance below is aimed at school leaders and reflects the employment decisions being made by NYCC taking into account both statutory and local pay arrangements and terms and conditions of service.

Academy Trusts and other employers will need to ensure that they consider the impact that any changes to normal working arrangements will have on their own policies and terms and conditions, and undertake any necessary consultation or negotiation in line with local agreements.

Maintained schools outside North Yorkshire should ensure they maintain appropriate links with their Local Authority and follow any employment guidance, which they issue.

National guidance is developing and changing at an unprecedented rate and this document will be kept under review to ensure these changes are reflected and to respond to queries NYHR has received from schools.

Additions and amendments made in the latest version are highlighted in purple for ease of identification.

School employees are advised to contact their line manager or Headteacher regarding any employment concerns or queries they may have as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. However, there is also a staff guidance document with the answers to many frequently asked questions on the CYPS website and available [here](https://cyps.northyorks.gov.uk/covid-19-human-resources).

**Further information**

School leaders can contact NYHR on (01609) 798343 or [NYHR@northyorks.gov.uk](mailto:NYHR@northyorks.gov.uk) for further information and management advice regarding the employment implications of Coronavirus.

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# Dealing with cases/symptoms of COVID-19

## When should employees self-isolate?

Staff should follow public health advice on when to self-isolate. They should not come into school if they have symptoms of COVID-19, have had a positive test, or other reason requiring them to stay at home due to risk of them passing on COVID-19 (for example, they are required to quarantine).

If an employee develops symptoms in school, they should be sent home and advised to follow public health advice.

There are changes to the rules covering when self-isolation is required when an employee has been a close contact or a member of their household has COVID-19. See further [Guidance on Self-Isolation & Quarantine due to COVID-19](#_Guidance_on_Self-Isolation).

## How should absence be recorded?

Absence resulting from periods of self-isolation should be reported on monthly summary sheets under the following categories:

* Isolation not working 10 days
* Isolation working from home 10 days

Absence recorded as ‘**Isolation**’ will be with normal pay and is, therefore, not sickness absence.

There are also **Isolation (not working/working) -** **open ended** categories for those staff that are not able to attend work because of their clinical vulnerability. The number of staff this applies to will now be minimal as guidance is that CEV staff should be supported to return to work.

Any employee who becomes too unwell to attend work, or continue working from home, should report their sickness absence in the usual way. Sickness absence resulting from an initial infection from coronavirus should be recorded as ‘Covid-19’. The NHS and GPs have in place processes to provide electronic medical certificates, including for coronavirus. Employees should request a certificate from their medical advisor to cover them from the 8th day of sickness absence. For covid-19 related isolation, an isolation note can be obtained through [NHS111](https://111.nhs.uk/isolation-note/).

Any sickness absence arising from an initial COVID-19 infection will **not be included** for the increments process or sickness absence triggers under the Attendance Management Policy.

## A member of staff who tested positive is now signed off with ‘Long Covid’

Most of the employees who are off due to Covid recover well and are fit to return to work within 2 weeks or so. However, based on the national picture we are aware that a small minority of people may suffer longer term symptoms. After 7 days of absence due to sickness, a GP fit note is required. Where staff are off for over 4 weeks due to covid, they should be managed according to the schools ‘Managing Attendance Policy’. This will generally mean setting up an ‘attendance consultation meeting’ with them to discuss their health, look at what support they need, and consider whether a referral to Occupational Health may be helpful.

# Staff COVID-19 Testing in Schools

## Do staff need to continue to take covid lateral flow tests?

Yes. Government guidance is that all staff should continue with twice weekly home testing kits whenever they are on site until at least the end of September 2021.

## I have a member of staff who refuses to be tested weekly – can I insist they comply?

The short answer is no. The tests are not mandatory for staff. You may wish to encourage them to participate for the benefit of all (but cannot insist that they do).

## A member of staff has had a positive LFD test

Staff with a positive lateral flow test should isolate and obtain a PCR test via the NHS. They should continue to self-isolate whilst awaiting the result. If the PCR test is taken within 2 days of the positive lateral flow test and is negative, it overrides the self-test and they can return to work (assuming they have no COVID-19 symptoms). In all other cases, the employee must complete the full period of self-isolation.

## A member of staff has been identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive

Individuals are now not required to self-isolate if they live in the same household as someone with COVID-19, or are a close contact of someone with COVID-19, are not experiencing any symptoms themselves, and any of the following apply:-

* They are fully vaccinated (2 vaccines and it is at least 14 days since the last vaccination)
* They are below the age of 18 yrs and 6 months
* They have taken part in or are currently part of an approved COVID-19 vaccine trial
* They are not able to get vaccinated for medical reasons

Instead they will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace, informed they have been in close contact with a positive case and advised to take a PCR test. Staff should be encouraged to take a PCR test if advised to do so. Staff should continue to attend school as normal whilst awaiting the test result. If the test is positive they should self-isolate immediately even if they have no symptoms.

## Should staff still take part in the asymptomatic testing programme if they have recently tested positive for COVID-19? (in the last 90 days)

If they have tested positive by PCR for COVID-19, they will probably have developed some immunity to the disease. However, it cannot be guaranteed that everyone will develop immunity, or how long it will last. It is possible for PCR tests to remain positive for some time after COVID-19 infection.

Anyone who has previously received a positive COVID-19 PCR test result should not be re-tested within 90 days of that test, unless they develop any new symptoms of COVID-19.

# Covid Vaccination Queries

## Staff going off sick following vaccination

Occasionally people who have received the vaccine may develop some symptoms (e.g. sore arm, feverishness, aches) for up to 48 hours following vaccination. If they feel too unwell to work, they should report in sick in the normal way.

For NYCC maintained schools; it has been agreed that up to 2 days absence following vaccination (for each of the 2 doses of vaccine, if necessary) will be disregarded for increment and attendance management purposes. Such absence should be recorded against the ‘Infectious Disease – Coronavirus’ code.

## Should I grant paid time off work to go to a vaccination appointment?

Many individuals are being offered the opportunity to make a vaccination appointment via a link and will have a choice of dates and times. Where possible they should secure an appointment outside of their working time or with the minimum possible impact on work. However, it is advised that where they do not have this flexibility, an employee is allowed reasonable time off to attend a vaccination appointment. All employees now have the opportunity to be vaccinated and should be strongly encouraged to do so as soon as possible.

## Should employees who have recently had covid get the vaccine?

Where an employee has recently had coronavirus, they should wait 28 days from either the date of their positive test or the onset of symptoms, whichever is later, before having the vaccination. There are also some individuals who are advised not to be vaccinated due to a health condition.

## Should pregnant employees get the vaccine?

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) issued advice that pregnant women should be offered the covid-19 vaccine at the same time as the rest of the population, based on their age and clinical risk group. Pregnant women are encouraged to discuss the risks and benefits with their GP, obstetrician or midwife, including which brand of vaccine is more preferable for them, in order that they can make an informed choice about vaccination during their pregnancy.

## Can I require staff to declare whether they have been vaccinated?

An employee’s vaccination status is medical information and is therefore considered sensitive personal information. As a result, it is important to ensure you are complying with legal requirements under GDPR about collecting and retaining this information. Under no circumstances should you consider disclosing it to third parties including colleagues, parents etc.

As it currently stands, there is nothing legally to prevent you asking staff to disclose their vaccination status, providing there is a sound rationale to do so based on what you are trying to achieve by collating this data. Whilst it may seem relevant to know vaccine status as part of conducting a risk assessment to ensure health and safety, currently vaccine status does not form part of Government guidance on workplace safety and so it is unlikely that an employer will be able to rely on health and safety arguments to force colleagues to disclose whether or not they have been vaccinated.

This area is subject to change depending on Government advice and any developments on vaccination certification etc.

## Can I instruct my staff to take up the vaccine to minimise any risk of infection?

No, vaccination is not mandatory for staff working within schools and you cannot require employees to receive the covid vaccination. Whilst from November 2021 vaccination will become mandatory for some jobs in NHS and the elderly care sector, there are no plans to do the same for education or other care settings for children and young people.

Also, you should proceed with care if you are contemplating making any adjustments to staff deployment or job roles on the basis of vaccination status, as there is the potential for such action to be discriminatory, particularly as there may well be a medical reason why the person is unable to have the vaccination. We would encourage you to contact your HR advisor to discuss any issues of this nature.

# Clinically Extremely Vulnerable staff and those with other special circumstances

## Who are in the clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) group?

See [Guidance for Staff with Special Circumstances](#Special).

## What is the current advice regarding CEV staff being in school?

Shielding for clinically extremely vulnerable employees was suspended with effect from 1st April 2021 and the position moved to CEV staff working from home wherever possible. The current advice is that CEV staff are advised to follow the same guidance as everyone else but to consider additional precautions, which may involve continuing with the measures that have generally been stood down e.g. social distancing, wearing face coverings etc. This means that they can work in school subject to the completion or review of a COVID-19 individual risk assessment, which takes account of:

* The individual’s vaccination status
* Ensuring the working environment is as ‘covid-safe’ as possible.
* Risk of coming into contact with covid cases
* Whether some adjustments to duties may be appropriate
* Regular review to take account of the levels of covid cases in the community

## What if an employee lives with someone who is extremely clinically vulnerable?

Household members of someone who is extremely clinically vulnerable should attend work as normal.

## My CEV member of staff has a letter from a medical professional stating that they should not attend the workplace because the risk of covid-19 is too high. What is the advice from the Local Authority in this situation?

Where a certified medical professional advises that a Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) person should not attend the workplace on account of their specific condition and the risk of covid-19 we suggest that this should be given significant weight in undertaking an Individual Risk Assessment. In this situation, the Local Authority encourages schools to facilitate a means of ensuring that individual is not required to attend the workplace and can work from home wherever possible.

## What do I need to consider for pregnant members of staff?

The public health advice is that the chances of pregnant women getting COVID-19 are no higher than anyone else and it is very unlikely to cause serious illness. Pregnant employees should follow the same guidelines as everyone else. However if they are more than 27 weeks pregnant or are pregnant and have an underlying health condition that puts them at greater risk of severe illness from COVID-19, additional controls should be considered and schools are advised to undertake a covid individual risk assessment in consultation with the employee, (– see [Covid Individual Risk Assessment template](#IRAform) and [Guidance](#IRAguide)). Schools must also ensure the usual New & Expectant Mother risk assessment is completed.

The NYCC position for maintained schools is that they should treat pregnant employees from more than 27 weeks or with an underlying health condition as they would treat CEV employees. This means that consideration can be given for employees to carry out their normal duties in school but with the completion of a COVID-19 individual risk assessment, which takes account of:

* The individual’s vaccination status
* Ensuring the working environment is as ‘covid-safe’ as possible.
* Risk of coming into contact with covid cases
* Whether some adjustments to duties may be appropriate
* Regular review to take account of the levels of covid cases in the community

## What other groups of staff are at more risk from COVID-19?

Some people with particular characteristics may be at comparatively increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19), as set out in the [COVID-19: review of disparities in risks and outcomes report](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-review-of-disparities-in-risks-and-outcomes), which looked at different factors including age and sex, where people live, deprivation, ethnicity, people’s occupation and care home residence. The reasons for the disparities are complex and there is ongoing research to understand and translate these findings for individuals in the future.

People who live with those who have comparatively increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19) can attend the workplace.

Also emerging UK and international data suggests that Covid19 is also disproportionately affecting people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. This concerning evidence suggests that the impact may also be higher among men, those in the higher age brackets and those with an existing underlying health condition.

Public Health England have been asked to investigate this, but in advance of their guidance it has been recommended, on a precautionary basis, that employers should risk-assess staff at potentially greater risk and make appropriate arrangements accordingly.

On this basis, we recommend that Heads undertake **new risk assessments** for those with BAME backgrounds or **revisit existing risk assessments** for those with other vulnerabilities. The risk assessment template has been revised to take account of this new advice – see [Covid Individual Risk Assessment template](#IRAform) and [Guidance](#IRAguide).

## An employee needs time off because their child has tested positive and has to isolate (including CEV children)

It is important to recognise that the employee is not absent from work on account of having to self-isolate but to undertake childcare, assuming they are exempted from isolating and their own PCR test is negative.

Where an employee requires time off to look after a child who has tested positive for COVID-19 and is therefore required to self-isolate, a discussion should take place with the Headteacher to explore how many of the (up to) 10 working days the employee requires off work due to childcare, taking into consideration if there is someone else who can share the childcare responsibilities. Depending upon the role the individual undertakes in school, it may be possible for School to accommodate some or all the time working from home. Where this is not possible, the leave policy adopted by the school will have provision for compassionate leave, which can be used in a ‘challenging life event’ such as this, which affords up to 5 days paid leave. For the remainder of the period of self-isolation for the child, if the employee is unable to work due to childcare, this would usually be unpaid. Therefore, the time away from school site is likely to be a combination of working from home, paid and unpaid leave.

# Employee support

## How do I engage with my staff to understand their personal situations and anxieties and provide suitable support?

If staff are expressing particular concerns and anxieties over being in work, you may find the following sheet of tips helpful [Constructive conversations to support staff attendance and wellbeing](#Constructive).

If employees have personal health issues or risk factors such as age, ethnicity, which they are concerned about, an individual COVID-19 risk assessment should be undertaken in discussion with the employee. This will help identify any measures required to minimise the risk to the individual. It will also reassure the employee about the actions the school will be taking – see [Covid Individual Risk Assessment template](#IRAform) and [Guidance](#IRAguide).

Appropriate support will vary depending on an individual’s circumstances but it is important to remember that in most schools, staff will have access to an employee assistance programme and they should be directed to make contact with that service. For example, many schools will use Health Assured, who can be contacted on 0800 030 5182; this is free at the point of use, providing confidential life management and personal support services to the employee and their immediate family who live with them.

If an employee is a member of a union, school leaders may also wish to encourage them to contact their union representative to discuss their concerns and access additional support.

## What is the advice where a member of staff is refusing to return to work in school?

It is natural that some staff will be worried about coming into school even if the risks for them are very low. You will know your staff best and so will be in the best position to work out how to proceed in individual cases. We are working in an unprecedented context, and more reassurance and discussion than usual may be required. It is always best, if at all possible, to work out a sensible way forward in individual cases that acknowledges any specific anxieties but which also enables the school’s responsibilities to be effectively discharged.

Circumstances for this refusal will vary, so consider these matters sensitively on a case by case basis.

For further detail see [Guidance for Staff with Special Circumstances](#Special)

## Are there any resources we can access to support staff wellbeing?

All employers have a duty of care to their employees, and this extends to their mental health. Schools already have mechanisms to support staff wellbeing and these will be particularly important, as some staff may be particularly anxious about returning to school. The Department for Education is providing additional support for both pupil and staff wellbeing in the current situation. Information about the [extra mental health support for pupils and teachers](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/extra-mental-health-support-for-pupils-and-teachers) is available.

NEOST have developed a wellbeing guide for staff working in schools and trusts which cover psychological wellbeing tips, building resilience and also the importance of self-care. You can access this [here](#NEOST).

MindEd have also developed a [coronavirus (COVID-19) staff resilience hub](https://covid.minded.org.uk/) with advice and tips for frontline staff.

Updated 10/08/20

## Where else can staff go to access help and advice?

A number of resources are available for staff [here](https://cyps.northyorks.gov.uk/covid-19-human-resources).  These continue to be updated and added to on a regular basis.

## Where can staff access specialist bereavement support?

It is never easy to talk about death but this is a subject that many people have had to deal with over the past 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 be affected.

The [HR Covid 19 section](https://cyps.northyorks.gov.uk/covid-19-human-resources) of the CYPS website has links to a range of information about the support available for individuals, advice on supporting others and information about dealing with the practical arrangements associated with a bereavement.

For most NYCC school employees or MATs who purchase the NY Health and Wellbeing Service, the *Health Assured* Employee Assistance Programme is also available by accessing the [Health Assured](https://healthassuredeap.co.uk/home/) website or by phone on **0800 030 5182. The user name is Northyorkshire and the password is Council.**

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# Other Staffing Queries, Terms and Conditions etc

## What is the impact of the quarantine rules on booking foreign holidays?

The rules on foreign travel have been subject to regular change and this appears likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

Currently the need to quarantine is dependent on where the employee has travelled to. Countries are listed as red, amber or green. Arriving in England from a red list country involves mandatory quarantine in a managed hotel for 10 days. Arriving in England from an amber list country involves quarantine at home for 10 days unless fully vaccinated or 5 days if a test is taken under the ‘Test to Release’ scheme and the test result is negative.

Employees working in schools are required to take their holidays during school closure periods and this includes any required quarantine period before or following a foreign holiday, where applicable.  Schools are under no obligation to agree leave to cover quarantine time if it runs over into term time.  The employee will not be entitled to sick pay or any other pay for the period.

Headteachers should use their discretion to agree individual arrangements with employees if, for example, the foreign travel is to attend the funeral of a close relative or if it will be possible for the employee to work from home during the quarantine period. With any discussion about an employee’s travel plans, *agreement must be reached around how the quarantine period will be covered* ***before*** *the leave takes place.*

## What is the impact of national school closures due to COVID-19 on NQTs induction period?

Ordinarily, NQT (called Early Career Teachers (ECTs) from 1st September 2021) induction arrangements state that ad hoc absences totalling 30 days or more automatically extend induction by the aggregate number of days absent.

The latest Government guidance ([link](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-induction-for-newly-qualified-teachers/covid-19-induction-for-newly-qualified-teachers-guidance)) which was updated on 21st June 2021, states that NQTs who are absent for reasons related to the current coronavirus outbreak, including school closures, sickness or self-isolation, before 1 September 2021, would not count towards this limit.

This means that NQTs who are currently undertaking statutory induction can complete their induction as expected, provided they meet the [Teachers’ Standards](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-standards).

Absences totalling 30 days or more that are not related to coronavirus will continue to extend the induction period. Please access the Government guidance for further details ([link](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-induction-for-newly-qualified-teachers/covid-19-induction-for-newly-qualified-teachers-guidance)).

# Linked Documents

## Guidance on Staff with Special Circumstances

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## Guidance on Self-Isolation and Quarantine due to COVID-19

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## NYHR Constructive Conversations to Support



## NEOST Staff Wellbeing Guide for Schools & Trusts



## School Covid Individual Risk Assessment Template (currently being updated)



## School Covid Individual Risk Assessment Guidance (currently being updated)

