

Asymptomatic Testing in Secondary Schools and Colleges

Frequently asked questions

Aims and Objectives of Asymptomatic Testing in Secondary Schools and Colleges

What are the objectives of the Government's asymptomatic testing strategy in education settings?

The Government's asymptomatic testing strategy will help to break the chains of transmission of coronavirus in education settings. The asymptomatic testing programme in secondary schools and colleges for staff, pupils and students, will help to identify asymptomatic positive cases. Those who test positive will then self-isolate, helping to reduce transmission of the virus and keeping other pupils and students in face-to-face education.

This is a new technology to identify individuals who don't have any symptoms, but who may be asymptomatic carriers and therefore could still spread the virus to others.

The asymptomatic testing programme does not replace the Government's current testing policy for those with symptoms. If you have symptoms, you should continue to book a test via <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/> or by calling 119 in England and Wales, or 0300 303 2713 in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Why are you continuing with initial mass testing of students and pupils (2 tests, 3-5 days apart) despite the decision to close schools and colleges to most pupils from 5 January?

This asymptomatic testing programme is designed to identify positive asymptomatic cases upon return to education settings. During the period of national lockdown, schools and colleges remain open to children of critical workers and vulnerable children. The asymptomatic testing programme has successfully been established in secondary schools and colleges, where staff currently in school, vulnerable children, as well as children of critical workers have started to receive testing. Testing will continue to keep as many individuals as possible safely in these settings.

Asymptomatic testing and self-isolation of positive cases will avoid individuals carrying the infection unknowingly and potentially spreading it in the school/college setting or the wider community. It will also support the broader [coronavirus testing programme](#) that the Government is putting in place.

Why is asymptomatic testing being introduced?

As many as one in three people who contract the virus show no symptoms (they are asymptomatic), so could be spreading the virus unknowingly. Asymptomatic testing is a significant development that will help to identify positive cases more quickly, break the chains of transmission and reduce the disruption that so many education settings have experienced in recent months. Secondary schools and colleges will continue to put in place a range of protective measures to minimise the risk of infection spread, and twice weekly testing for staff will also increase their confidence in the workplace.

Children and young people that fall into the clinically extremely vulnerable group should continue to follow the [Guidance on shielding and protecting extremely vulnerable persons](#).

Why has daily contact testing been stopped?

NHS Test and Trace and Public Health England have reviewed their previous advice and have concluded that in light of the higher prevalence and rates of transmission of the new variant, further evaluation work is required to make sure daily contact testing is achieving its aim of breaking chains of transmission and reducing cases of the virus in the community. A statement from PHE can be found [here](#). We are therefore pausing daily contact testing in all but a small number of secondary schools and colleges, where it will continue alongside detailed evaluation.

Daily contact testing, used as an alternative to up to a whole bubble having to isolate if a positive case is detected, continues to have the potential to be a valuable tool to keep more children, young people and staff in school, which is the best place for pupils' development and wellbeing. We will continue pilots in a small number of schools to gather further data and to build the evidence base for the programme.

Why was daily contact testing introduced in the first place?

In December, prior to widespread dissemination of the new Covid-19 variant and rapidly rising case numbers across the country, the Government decided to roll out daily contact testing in educational settings with the support of Public Health England.

Daily contact testing allows those who are identified as being a close contact of a positive case from within the school or college to carry out a daily rapid test each day for seven days. Provided they test negative when they take the daily test, they can continue to come into school for that day.

The process for the design of daily contact testing has been comprehensive and successfully implemented in 12 pilot schools and colleges in England by DHSC and a further 2 schools in Northern Ireland. 14 additional pilots have been led by PHE/the City of Liverpool. The pilots have illustrated the potential benefit of a Daily Contact Testing (DCT) programme in schools.

However, in light of the higher prevalence and rates of transmission of the new variant, NHS Test and Trace and Public Health England have reviewed their previous advice and have concluded that further evaluation work is required to make sure daily contact testing is achieving its aim of breaking chains of transmission and

reducing cases of the virus in the community. A statement from PHE can be found [here](#).

Why has the Government withdrawn confirmatory PCR testing for staff, pupils or students in secondary schools and colleges?

Confirmatory PCR testing was introduced to minimise the chance of false positive results with lateral flow tests. When COVID-19 prevalence rates are high, however, Public Health England have advised that the performance of lateral flow devices and PCRs are broadly comparable when used at test sites, significantly reducing the need for routine confirmatory testing.

NHS Test and Trace and PHE have reviewed their initial advice in light of the current higher prevalence and rates of transmission of the new coronavirus variant. In response, the Government is removing the need for a confirmatory PCR test following a positive result with an LFD test taken at test sites such as those situated

allowing for more rapid isolation of infectious people. This is expected to be a temporary measure until the prevalence lowers again.

Pupils' Return to Schools and Colleges

Why have pupils' return to schools and colleges been delayed?

With growing infection rates and rising transmission among the general population, it is vital to do everything possible to tackle these trends whilst prioritising education. This testing programme will allow us to identify more asymptomatic cases and break transmission lines, so that vulnerable children and children of critical workers can continue to attend educational settings. Delaying most students and pupils' full return to face-to-face education will prevent further transmission of the virus and help provide educational settings with additional time to prepare and ensure asymptomatic testing is in place when all staff, pupils and students return.

What testing arrangements are in place for primary schools and maintained nursery schools?

From the week commencing 18 January we [announced](#) that the asymptomatic testing of the primary school and maintained nursery workforce has commenced with the delivery of testing kits to enable staff in these settings to take home kits to test twice weekly before coming into school. The children attending these settings are not currently in scope of the DfE's testing programme. We will provide more information about testing in due course.

Special Needs and Alternative Provision settings

All children and young people can return to face-to-face education in special schools. Alternative provision and special post 16 settings have the option of agreeing with parents that individual pupils can stay at home, if this is appropriate. More detail can be found here: [Mass asymptomatic testing in specialist settings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mass-asymptomatic-testing-in-specialist-settings)

Secondary and FE Colleges

In line with primary schools, all secondary schools and colleges should now follow the national lockdown guidance, and only allow children of critical workers and vulnerable children to attend onsite provisions.

From the week of 4th January, secondary schools and colleges received deliveries of antigen lateral flow device (LFD) test kits and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and began to prepare for the roll out of asymptomatic testing in their school or college.

During the current period of national restriction, secondary schools and colleges should offer twice weekly testing for staff. Schools and colleges should also carry out initial testing of vulnerable children and children of critical workers upon their first return to school/college sites (two tests, three to five days apart).

Why are you using antigen lateral flow tests instead of PCR tests?

Antigen lateral flow tests produce results much quicker than PCR tests. With antigen lateral flow tests, a result is available after 30 minutes rather than 1-2 days as is the case with PCR tests. The rapid turnaround has a significant impact on transmission reduction that might occur in the time gap.

My school is all-through. Should I test my primary aged children too?

No, the mass asymptomatic testing programme is prioritising secondary age pupils and students in schools and colleges; test kits and PPE will be provided on this basis. Separate home-test kits will be provided for staff for primary aged children. The asymptomatic testing programme does not replace the Government's current testing policy for those with symptoms. If you have symptoms, you should continue to book a test via <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/> or by calling 119 in England and Wales, or 0300 303 2713 in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Who will be doing the asymptomatic testing in schools and colleges?

In most cases the staff, students and pupils will self-swab in order to provide a test sample. There are a number of related roles in the testing process, which are set out in published guidance.

Schools and colleges will need to establish a testing workforce which could be made up of existing staff, agency staff or volunteers. If a school or college is experiencing difficulties putting testing arrangements in place, further support may be requested under exceptional circumstances to address logistical and planning

issues. Schools and colleges will not be guaranteed this provision - educational settings will be assessed on a case-by-case basis

Will we have to opt in to receive the test kit supplies?

As part of its operational guidance, DHSC will set out a legal agreement with terms and conditions that schools and colleges. No specific steps need to be taken to sign-up to receive the first delivery of test kits. Schools and colleges will have received their initial test kit supplies from w/c 4 January. Further information will be provided about replenishment of these supplies.

What happens if the school/college operates across multiple sites?

It will be for such schools/colleges to determine whether to test on one site or provide on-site testing on each of their sites. We would encourage testing to take place on each site to make it as easy as possible for pupils/students to get tested.

Getting tested

Now daily contact testing has been paused, what testing should continue in secondary schools and colleges?

There is no change to the main rollout of regular testing using rapid lateral flow tests in schools and colleges which is already proving beneficial in finding teachers and students with coronavirus who do not have symptoms. Whilst we are pausing daily contact testing in all but a small number of institutions, secondary schools and colleges should continue to test their staff regularly (twice-weekly as further reassurance and to break chains of transmission during this period) and test pupils twice upon return to school, as set out in [guidance](#) issued at the beginning of January.

Will the existing testing service remain open?

The Government's normal testing service for symptomatic individuals will continue. This is the foundation of our testing strategy. It is the most effective way to know if you are positive and need to self-isolate. If you have symptoms, you should continue to book a test via the [NHS Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) service](#) or by calling 119 in England and Wales, or 0300 303 2713 in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

How will you avoid a stigma on those who choose not to take part or who test positive in school/college in front of their peers?

Test results should be communicated to students/pupils and staff in private wherever possible.

Can my family get tested too?

No, this testing is aimed at staff and pupils/students in schools and colleges. Family members of staff and pupils/students taking part are not eligible. If family members

experience COVID-19 symptoms, they must follow standard Government guidance, including self-isolating immediately and booking a test through the [NHS Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) service](#) or by calling 119 (England and Wales).

Can my secondary school/college test pupils receiving face-to-face education on a weekly or twice-weekly basis?

Schools and colleges should continue to test their staff regularly, twice weekly where possible, and test pupils twice (3-5 days apart) upon their first return to school. Under the testing policy, pupils and students are not being tested on a weekly basis. Schools have recently been invited to volunteer to participate in a Daily Contact Testing evaluation, which would involve regular testing of students. The evaluation has not started yet.

Why should I (the pupil/student/staff member) get tested if I (the pupil/student/staff member) have (has) no symptoms?

Antigen lateral flow tests are designed to detect the level of virus in individuals who do not experience and show any symptoms, but who could still be infectious and pass the virus to others. By taking a test, you will help to stop the spread of the virus, protect other people, and save lives.

Why would I (the pupil/student/staff member) take the test? If positive, I will have to self-isolate. Why would I take the risk?

Antigen lateral flow tests are designed to detect the level of virus in individuals who do not experience and show any symptoms, but who could still be infectious and pass the virus to others. By taking a test, you will help to stop the spread of the virus, protect other people, and save lives. This will also mean that staff can continue going to work, schools and colleges can avoid unnecessary staff shortages, and pupils and students can continue in face-to-face education with their peers.

Consent

What happens if a school cannot get the consent to test a child who is in school?

Participation in the programme requires active consent from the person being tested, or, if they are under 16, their parent or /legal guardian. Any staff member, student, or pupil who does not take part in testing will still be able to attend school or college unless they develop symptoms or have been in close contact with a positive result.

Do you need consent to process the personal data required for testing?

Secondary schools and colleges will need to satisfy themselves that they have a lawful basis for processing personal data. The duties prescribed in education legislation for secondary schools and FE institutions require them to plan for safeguarding needs and promote pupils, and students' welfare may provide sufficient legal basis without having to rely on consent. Schools and colleges will provide staff,

pupils and parents with a privacy notice explaining what personal data is required to participate in the programme.

Workforce

Will volunteers require a DBS check?

Schools and colleges must comply with their legal duties regarding pre-appointment checks when utilising agency staff, contractors, and volunteers to support testing. Usually, if you are involved in the testing procedure, or if you are at any time with children unsupervised, then you will require a DBS check. If you are volunteering but not assisting with swabbing (for instance, if you are already trained to provide support for a child who cannot self-administer), and you will not be unsupervised with children/ young people at any time, then you will not need a DBS check.

It is essential that agency staff, contractors and volunteers are appropriately supported and given appropriate roles. The school or college should minimise the mixing of volunteers, agency staff and contractors across groups, and they should remain 2 metres from pupils and staff where possible.

Can you say more about what military support will be available and how they will assist?

A cohort of military personnel have been committed to providing flexible support to schools and colleges. The nature of support will depend on the requirements of individual secondary schools and colleges but may include remote support to schools and colleges with strategic planning or assisting with practical elements of delivering asymptomatic testing. Schools and colleges can request this additional help through the [DfE helpline](#).

What further workforce support may be available to my school or college?

As well as accessing workforce funding and military support, there are other options available to schools and colleges to support their testing workforce.

Commercial routes for hiring external temporary and non-clinical routes can be accessed via a range of existing frameworks. More detail on 'How to Buy' from each of these frameworks will be published on the schools' resources Google Drive.

Schools and colleges can use volunteers that are either already available to them (parent volunteers, school governors, those volunteering in other areas of the school/college) or by engaging with volunteers via one of the national networks such as Do.it.org or Reach Volunteering. Volunteer Centres can also be used as a way of engaging with volunteers, and schools and colleges can find their local centre by using the postcode search function on the National Centre for Voluntary Organisations website.

The Department recognise that some schools and colleges may be unable to identify

sufficient staff/volunteers to cover the seven testing roles. In such scenarios, the school or college should contact the DfE Helpline to request additional support, where the Department will assess the specific needs of the school or college. Where additional support is required, the Department will agree on what appropriate assistance is needed on a case-by-case basis. It will reserve extra resources for those schools and colleges that are in greatest need.

Will my school or college have costs reimbursed?

Schools and colleges will receive funding to support them with testing costs incurred. We will fund school and colleges which have remained open for costs relating to testing. We have provided a [Workforce Planning Tool](#) which illustrates workforce requirements and associated funding.

What can the funding be used for?

Funding will be paid to schools and colleges who have conducted testing in respect of workforce costs and other incidental costs relating to testing such as waste disposal. Funding will be paid for as long as testing is required.

What about funding for independent schools?

Independent schools are still able to access and utilise the guidance provided online and through webinars by the Department. We are not able to extend funding to independent schools and colleges with fee-paying individuals. Non-maintained special schools and independent special schools are eligible for funding.

Have the insurance companies who work with schools and colleges, including the Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) scheme, confirmed that they would cover all the activities related to the asymptomatic testing programme?

The RPA will indemnify members if a claim is brought by a third party (including pupils) or employees. It will cover death, injury, or damage to third-party property, due to the school or colleges undertaking the asymptomatic tests.

It would be advisable that these establishments and all other schools and colleges which are not members of the RPA, should contact their individual commercial insurance provider, for definitive clarification on cover.

RPA cover is subject to the usual RPA Membership Rules and its terms, conditions, and limitations. It will include defence costs and any damages/compensation that the Member is legally liable to pay to the claimant. The RPA will not provide an indemnity to any other party (e.g., the machine manufacturer) if the other party incurs a legal liability.

It is a requirement that risk assessments are undertaken, recorded, and adhered to. In the event of loss or damage to any equipment that is owned by or the Member's responsibility (e.g., through a lease or hire agreement) used in the provision of the testing, the RPA will provide an indemnity to the Member for the cost of repair or

replacement. The cover is subject to the usual RPA Membership Rules (including all limitations, conditions, and exclusions).

How are schools and colleges expected to deliver remote education alongside administering asymptomatic testing?

From 5 January, secondary schools and colleges will only be delivering face-to-face education for pupils and students who are classed as vulnerable, or who have parents that are critical workers. Primary schools, special and alternative provision settings will also remain open for these groups of children and young people. All other pupils will be provided with a remote learning offer. Guidance and resources on remote education can be found here – [Get Help with Remote Education – GOV.UK](#).

To deliver testing at the required scale schools and colleges will be responsible for establishing their testing workforce, which could be made up of existing staff, agency staff or volunteers, to cover the seven testing roles as set out in the School and Colleges Handbook.

The Department recognise that teachers' priority should be delivering education and confirms that the testing workforce does not necessarily need to include teaching staff. The testing workforce may be a mixture of volunteers and agency staff, identified by the school or college, such as non-teaching staff or exam invigilators. Schools and colleges are responsible for ensuring volunteers and other test support staff have accessed and passed the NHS Test and Trace assessments before testing begins. It is also the responsibility of the schools or college to ensure all staff and volunteers on their site meet the appropriate safeguarding requirements, including DBS in accordance with the existing DfE guidance. More information on how schools and colleges can hire temporary and non-clinical workers can be found in the 'how to buy' workforce guide. The Department will reimburse state-funded schools and colleges, and independent and non-maintained special schools, for reasonable testing costs incurred.

The Department understands that school and college leaders are in the best position to secure the necessary resource for testing, which is from within their own school and local communities. The Department recognise that some schools and colleges may be unable to identify sufficient staff/volunteers to cover the seven testing roles. In such scenarios, the school or college should contact the DfE Helpline to request additional support, where the Department will assess the specific needs of the school or college. Where additional support is required, the Department will agree on what appropriate assistance is needed on a case-by-case basis. It will reserve extra resources for those schools and colleges that are in greatest need.

Training

How much time does a school or college require to plan the test area, set up the area, and undertake staff training?

Secondary schools and colleges can find detailed information on the number of staff

and estimated time and space needed for each asymptomatic testing site, and training needs in the following [Guidance for asymptomatic testing in schools and colleges](#) and the [Schools and Colleges Handbook](#).

Test process

I have taken an LFD test in school and it is positive. What should I do now?

Following a positive LFD test result taken at a secondary school or college, an individual will need to self-isolate in line with government [guidance](#), and contact tracing will need to commence. It will also be the trigger for self-isolation payments.

Can I still take a confirmatory PCR test? I would find it reassuring.

Lateral flow tests (LFD tests) used by the UK government go through a rigorous evaluation by the country's leading scientists. Public Health England and the University of Oxford research shows they are accurate, reliable and successful in identifying those with coronavirus. Crucially, LFD tests identify individuals in the early stages of infectiousness and with the highest infectivity. These individuals tend to spread the virus to many people and so identifying by lateral flow tests remains important.

Due to the high prevalence of coronavirus infections in England, the Government is temporarily removing confirmatory PCR testing for LFD tests taken at test sites, such as those situated in some workplaces, universities, secondary schools and colleges. This follows advice from Public Health England that, when COVID-19 prevalence rates are high, the performance of lateral flow devices and PCRs are broadly comparable when used at test sites, significantly reducing the need for routine confirmatory testing.

Primary school staff who are taking LFD tests at home will continue to take a confirmatory PCR test if the LFD test is positive.

What about close contacts of staff/pupils/students who have tested positive in school/college? Given the prevalence of the virus, should schools close a bubble on the basis of one positive LFD test result?

Anyone that has been identified as a close contact of a person who has received a positive LFD test result should isolate in line with [Public Health Guidelines](#).

I teach primary-aged pupils in an all-through/middle school and I have tested positive following an LFD test. Will I still be required to take a confirmatory PCR test?

Any schools with a mix of primary- and secondary-aged pupils should follow the secondary school testing procedures for staff outlined in the Government's [guidance](#). All staff in all-through/middle schools, including those working solely with primary-

aged pupils, should therefore be tested twice a week in school. Any individuals who test positive during an in-school LFD test must isolate in line with [Public Health Guidelines](#).

Should I still take part in the asymptomatic testing programme if I have recently tested positive for COVID-19?

If you have recently (within 90 days) tested positive for COVID-19, you are likely to have developed some immunity. However, given the current prevalence of the virus and the pressing need to reduce transmission, we encourage staff and students to take an antigen LFD test regardless of whether they have tested positive previously as this is a good indicator of high viral load, and therefore infectiousness. If you have recently tested positive for COVID-19, please complete your period of isolation before returning to school or colleges. If symptoms (other than cough or a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell) persist, this could be longer than the normal 10-day self-isolation period for confirmed cases. This is described in Stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection.

Test area

What happens if a school or college does not have an appropriate space to do this?

In exceptional circumstances we will consider claims for additional funding needed to cover costs incurred by schools / colleges that have had to hire additional premises to conduct asymptomatic testing after every other alternative option has been exhausted. Further details on this will be made available in due course.

SEND

How will asymptomatic testing be administered in a SEND context and will there be any additional support or resources for special schools or those with a high number of SEND pupils and students?

The Department for Education has provided [guidance on delivering asymptomatic testing in specialist settings](#).

What consideration is given to administering the test for SEND pupils and students or those with co-ordination issues who physically will not be able to manage this due to poor fine motor skills? Will the Test assistant be able to do the test for them?

Special schools and specialist colleges have a range of staff to meet pupils and students' health needs. These staff already have undertaken various training to support health needs and could provide support taking swabs for those who cannot self-administer. Support for pupils who are unable to self-swab may be available. Clinical support would be for children and young people whose physical and health

needs prevent them from administering their own test, and where parents and/or existing school staff cannot assist.

What about students with SEND who will not be able to manage a self-swab who are in a mainstream school?

Support for pupils who are unable to self-swab may be available if there are no suitable staff to administer tests. Clinical support would be for children and young people whose physical and health needs prevent them from administering their own test, and parents or existing school staff cannot assist.

In some cases, the individual may wish to have a trusted adult from the setting to supervise the self-swab of the test. The setting may also wish to consider whether it would agree in exceptional circumstances to a parent coming into the setting to support their child to self-swab or to swab their child. This might be a reasonable adjustment for the testing of a child or young person with a disability, for example.

Is there to be priority testing for SEND pupils and students?

The asymptomatic testing programme will help to keep education settings open and ensure as many pupils as possible receive a high-quality face to face education by helping break the virus' transmission chains. The Department expects schools and colleges to prioritise testing the most vulnerable pupils and students, including those with additional needs.

How are staff defined in special schools?

The teaching workforce includes all staff who are school/college-based. Schools and colleges should also offer testing to other staff members, such as clinical practitioners, therapists, or other support staff. Some staff (particularly those employed through the NHS) may have separate arrangements for regular testing.

Equipment

What equipment or resources will a secondary school or college need to provide?

Detailed information on the materials schools and colleges will need to source and organise to support asymptomatic testing sites is provided in the operational [Guidance for asymptomatic testing in schools and colleges](#) and the [Schools and Colleges Handbook](#).

How and when will test kits/PPE be provided – what will be provided and how will stocks be replenished?

Schools and colleges will have received two deliveries of PPE and test kits. These test kits and PPE are for the initial mass testing of students/pupils (2 tests, 3-5 days apart). In the second delivery, schools and colleges will receive test kits and PPE for

the weekly testing of staff. You will be able to order additional test kits and PPE throughout the testing period as required, and the Department for Education will issue further guidance on this shortly. You should receive enough test kits and PPE for a minimum of at least two weeks. The number of test kits that each school will receive has been estimated based on the number of teachers and students. The calculation will also consider the prevalence of the virus in the local community.

What specific storage arrangements are required for the test kits?

The temperature for storing antigen LFD devices and reagents is between 2°C and 30°C. The antigen LFD devices and reagents must be between 15°C and 30°C during use.

What are the PPE requirements for staff?

The PPE requirements for staff vary depending on the role. All staff must wear a fluid-resistant (Type 11R) surgical mask. Processors must also wear disposable gloves (which will require changing after each session), a disposable plastic apron, and eye protection (goggles or a visor). The test assistant and results recorder will both need disposable gloves. The cleaner will need disposable gloves and disposable apron (to be changed in cleaning a spillage) and eye protection (goggles or a visor). PPE should be changed whenever staff members leave and re-enter the test site area (including during a session) or if protective properties are compromised or contaminated. Further information can be found in the [how to guide](#).

Transport

What happens if, in exceptional circumstances, the parent is unable to collect a child who has tested positive?

Parents or carers should arrange for their child to be collected as quickly as possible following a positive test. The pupil or student should wear a face covering and keep a safe distance from others in a designated waiting area within the education setting. If possible, the child should walk, cycle or scoot home. Pupils and students who have tested positive must not travel home using public transport. Exceptionally the local authority may be able to help source a suitable vehicle which would provide appropriate protection.