



# Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

## Education and Inclusion Service Directorate

### CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19): FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs) FOR PARENTS/CARERS

**VERSION 15 - 01/09/21**

Mae'r ddogfen yma ar gael yn y Gymraeg / This document is available in Welsh.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This guidance is intended to support parents and carers in relation to the operational arrangements of Rhondda Cynon Taf schools.

These FAQs are informed by Welsh Government guidance:

<https://gov.wales/schools-coronavirus-guidance>

<https://gov.wales/school-operations-coronavirus>

#### **GENERAL QUESTIONS**

##### **1. How are risks to children, teachers and families managed?**

All schools have undertaken risk assessments to directly address risks associated with coronavirus (COVID-19) so that sensible measures can be put in place to minimise those risks for children, young people and staff;

At alert level zero, there is more flexibility to determine what is required to manage risks. However, COVID-19 has not gone away, and the most important measure to take is to ensure symptomatic people waiting for PCR test results or those that have tested positive do not attend school. Reducing close interactions between individuals is still important in helping to control its spread, hence, to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), schools are using a range of protective measures to create safer environments in which the risk of spreading the virus is substantially reduced. Whilst such changes may look different in each setting, they are determined by individual circumstances and risk levels, and are all designed to minimise risks to children, staff and their families. They include:-

- Reminding all staff and learners to follow the Welsh Government guidance for self-isolation and household isolation as appropriate.
- Staff and learners not attending school if they have any of the classic COVID-19 symptoms (i.e. a new continuous cough, or a high temperature or loss of or change to their sense of taste or smell).



- Staff and learners who test positive for COVID-19 not attending school.
- Staff and learners who live with someone who has symptoms or has tested positive for COVID-19 not attending school - **unless** they are under the age of 18 years or have been fully vaccinated.
- Ensuring regular handwashing, social distancing and good respiratory hygiene by promoting the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach.
- Ensuring adequate ventilation by opening windows or adjusting ventilation systems.
- Ensuring that staff and learners who become symptomatic during the school day are sent home, self-isolate and take a test.
- Encouraging staff to maintain physical distance from other staff;
- Encouraging staff to maintain physical distancing from learners as much as possible (recognising that this may not be possible with younger learners or some learners with ALN);
- Supporting older learners to maintain physical distancing wherever possible;
- Ensuring cleaning regimes are appropriate.
- Active engagement with Test, Trace, Protect.

## 2. **Is it compulsory for my child to attend school?**

All children are required to attend school unless they are self-isolating or there are other reasons for absence.

You should notify your child's school as normal if your child is unable to attend so that staff are aware of any sickness absence and can discuss this with you.

## 3. **Should I keep my child at home if they have an underlying health condition, or live with someone in a clinically vulnerable group, or if I am anxious about my child returning to school?**

Any parent who has medical concerns about their child should seek and follow medical advice provided by their local GP or guidance from Public Health Wales.

Every school will continue to carry out risk assessments and put in place controls to minimise risks, such as frequent hand washing, surface hygiene and adequate ventilation.

Parents/carers of learners with significant risk factors who are concerned can discuss such concerns with the school and the school will explain the measures in place to reduce the risk and provide the required reassurance.

All pupils of compulsory school age **must** attend school unless a statutory reason applies (for example, the pupil has been granted a leave of absence, is unable to attend because of sickness, is self-isolating, is absent for a necessary religious observance, etc.).



**4. What are the arrangements for pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)**

Practical and flexible approaches are considered as part of the school's risk assessments to ensure individual needs are met in relation to learners with ALN.

Whilst schools are not advised to maintain contact groups from September onwards, some schools may wish to tailor provision for some pupils with ALN as a result of specific health needs identified as part of the risk assessment process.

Schools should continue to consult parents and carers about specific support needs, and agreeing the way forward for specific learners.

**5. Are remote learning opportunities provided for children who need to self-isolate?**

Remote learning opportunities will be provided for learners in all year groups who need to self-isolate.

**SCHOOL BUILDINGS**

**6. Are there adequate hand-washing facilities for staff and pupils?**

Pupils and staff are encouraged to wash or sanitise their hands upon arrival at school/when leaving school and regularly throughout the day, especially before and after handling food, when using the toilet facilities and when someone has sneezed or coughed.

Plentiful supplies of hand soap and hand sanitiser are available throughout all school buildings.

**7. How often are schools being cleaned?**

Cleaning regimes are appropriate and in line with standards to control COVID and other communicable diseases. If advice is received from the Test, Trace and Protect (TTP) Service that additional cleaning measures are required in any school, those arrangements are in place and will be undertaken to further reduce risk of transmission.

**8. What if a parent/carer wants to enter the school building to speak to a teacher?**

No parents/carers will be permitted within any school building unless they have a pre-arranged visit. Should teacher/parent contact be required, this should be by appointment and arrangements for audio and/or video communication explored as an alternative.



External visitors to the school will be admitted by pre-arranged appointment only and should follow the school's covid safety requirements.

## **THE SCHOOL DAY**

### **9. What are the contact group sizes?**

There is no longer a requirement for contact groups (bubbles). The Test, Trace, Protect (TTP) system will be used in order to identify close contacts of learners who have tested positive.

For learners testing positive, TTP will interview them (for those age under 16, this will be with a parent/carer) to establish their close friendship group, the locations they have visited, including social settings, sports and after school clubs and transport during their infectious period and who else they may have been in contact with. TTP may also need to contact the school for some contact details.

### **10. What are the requirements for the wearing of face coverings?**

From the start of the new term in September, Welsh Government are no longer recommending the routine wearing of face coverings in the school setting. Your child's school will advise you of their requirements which are subject to change dependent upon risk levels.

As part of a school's risk assessment process, supported by public health officials, and in discussion with local authorities, schools and settings will be able to decide whether the wearing of face coverings is appropriate anywhere on the school site based on the school's own circumstances and local context/risk level. If however an individual wishes to wear a face covering this should not be prevented.

Face coverings should continue to be worn by learners in secondary schools when travelling on dedicated school transport and must be worn by learners 11 years of age and above when using public transport.

### **11. Is there a requirement for learners in Years 7-13 to undertake lateral flow tests (LFTs)?**

Public Health Wales and Welsh Government are requesting that staff in primary schools, and staff and learners in secondary schools without symptoms take two lateral flow tests (LFTs), three days apart during the week leading up to their first day back to school. If any test is positive they should self-isolate, and book a PCR test.



The timing of the pre-return to school tests:-

The second test should be undertaken on the morning of the first day that an individual is due to return to school; and the first test should be undertaken three days prior to the second test.

Tests are available via:

<https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests>

<https://maps.test-and-trace.nhs.uk/>

Anyone who tests positive should self-isolate and get a PCR test, only returning to school if the PCR test is negative.

Once staff and learners have returned to school, staff in primary schools and staff and learners in secondary schools and colleges not showing symptoms should continue to take regular rapid lateral flow tests twice a week and report the results online. These tests should be taken on a Monday and a Thursday morning prior to attending school.

Schools will provide LFTs during term time for learners in Year 7 and above to use at home.

LFTs should be undertaken first thing in the morning whilst at home and ideally prior to having anything or eat or drink.

Further information regarding lateral flow testing is available via:

<https://gov.wales/lateral-flow-testing-people-without-symptoms>

## **12. How is school pick up and drop off managed?**

School start and end times are no longer staggered.

Parents/carers dropping off/collecting children should maintain distance from other families wherever possible and must leave the school site immediately and not congregate.

## **ILLNESSES AND POSITIVE TESTS FOR COVID-19**

### **13. What happens if there is a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) in my child's school or childcare setting?**

Where a child, young person or staff member tests **positive**, Test, Trace and Protect (TTP) will lead on identifying the close contacts of the member of staff/learner who has tested positive, supported by discussions with school with any further information the school may have available.



From the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 2021 Welsh Government removed the requirement for adults who have been fully vaccinated and are close contacts of someone who has tested positive, to self-isolate. This also applies to contacts who are under 18.

The majority of learners in the class/setting will not be identified as close contacts. Instead the school may be advised by TTP to take a '**warn and inform**' approach to update parents/carers and staff on the situation and what they need to do, based on TTP advice.

This 'warn and inform' approach will reinforce key messages about the risk to others from COVID-19 and what can be done to minimise this risk, e.g. by remaining vigilant for new symptoms, having a low threshold for seeking a test even with mild symptoms, and avoiding contact with vulnerable family and friends in the short-term (e.g. elderly relatives, or those who are unvaccinated, or those who are higher risk of severe COVID-19 infection).

There may be certain circumstances however where fully vaccinated and under 18s contacts may still be asked to self-isolate by the Test, Trace, Protect service but this decision will only be taken where it is necessary to protect public health.

Further details on self-isolation are available via: <https://gov.wales/self-isolation>

**14. If my child has been identified as a close contact and advised to take a PCR test, can they attend school?**

PCR tests will be offered to anyone who is identified as a close contact - these are not mandatory but are recommended.

If your child does not have symptoms and has not been advised to stay home/self-isolate by TTP then they can attend school even while they are waiting for the PCR test results recommended by TTP for close contacts.

If a child or member of staff tests positive for COVID-19 or has any of the COVID-19 symptoms they should self-isolate and not attend the school.

**15. When should I not send my child to school? For example, if they have a fever?**

Individuals should stay at home and get a PCR test if:

- they have any of the three symptoms of COVID-19 (new continuous cough, fever or high temperature, loss of, or change in, sense of smell or taste).

The Welsh Government have made COVID-19 PCR testing available to people with a wider range of symptoms such as fatigue, muscle ache or pain, a sore throat, a headache, a runny nose, nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea. This is because some variants and young children do not display the classic three COVID-19 symptoms initially.



For children displaying wider symptoms parents/carers can book a test online by selecting the 'book a test if advised by a Public Health adviser' option.

Parents/carers can also ring **01443 443151** to book a PCR test if their child has wider symptoms.

Individuals who take a test because of these other wider symptoms are not legally required to isolate while they await their test result.

However, if individuals receive a positive COVID-19 result, they and any household members who are aged 18 years and over and have not been fully vaccinated need to self-isolate. (Household members who are fully vaccinated or under 18 years of age do not need to self-isolate).

Children with a negative test result can return to school if they are feeling well enough (unless they are completing a required self-isolation period). Clearly, children with diarrhoea and/or vomiting should not attend their school/setting until they are symptom-free for 48 hours, even if their COVID-19 test result is negative.

If individuals receive a positive COVID-19 result, they must then isolate.

## **CATERING**

### **16. Are breakfast clubs operating?**

Breakfast clubs will operate as normal from the start of term in September 2021. If any change to the local or national risk levels require a change in the numbers which can be accommodated, this will be communicated at the earliest opportunity.

### **17. What are the arrangements for lunch time?**

Kitchens are fully open and food is available to all pupils who want it, including those eligible for free school meals.

### **18. Will BACS payments be made to pupils who are self-isolating?**

BACS payments will only be made for eligible learners who are self-isolating due to COVID-19. School registers are used to identify eligible pupils who are required to 'self-isolate' and a Free School Meal support payment of £3.90 per day will be paid into bank accounts via BACS.

## **School Holidays**

The Welsh Government has also made available funding at the rate of £19.50 per week (£3.90 per day) per eligible learner to make free school meal provision available during



school holidays until Easter 2022. Accordingly BACS payments will continue to be made throughout school holiday periods.

**If you receive a payment to which you are no longer eligible, you will be required to repay it to the Council.**

**19. Is water available during the day?**

All pupils should bring filled water bottles to school that can be refilled during the day. The refilling of water bottles will be managed and supervised by the school to ensure that the safe refilling of water bottles is available to pupils who need/or request it.

**TRANSPORT**

**20. Is school transport operating?**

Dedicated school transport services are running for all entitled learners, in line with the latest Welsh Government guidance:

<https://gov.wales/operational-guidance-schools-and-settings-html>

**21. My child is not entitled to free school transport, can I pay for a seat?**

**Applications to purchase a seat will be significantly limited, taking into consideration the need for social distancing on the vehicle between the driver / passenger assistant and the learners.** It is likely that there will be some schools where there are no seats available to be purchased.

Applications opened on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2021. You will need to apply to purchase a seat by completing an on-line application on the Council's website: [www.rctcbc.gov.uk/schoolbuspasses](http://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/schoolbuspasses) or by contacting Customer Services on 01443 425001.

**22. Is my child expected to wear a face covering on school transport?**

Secondary age learners travelling on dedicated Rhondda Cynon Taf school transport **must** wear a face covering, but they are not a substitute for good hygiene. Not only will this measure help reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 but also common colds and flu, which will also be a benefit.

Learners who travel to school or college on **public** transport must wear a three layer face covering as mandated by the Welsh Government.





Learners must not touch the front of their face covering during use or when removing them. They must wash their hands immediately on arrival at school or home, dispose of temporary face coverings in a covered bin or place re-usable face coverings in a plastic bag for washing.

**Please note that a refusal to comply with this requirement will result in your child's place on school transport being compromised. Your support in reinforcing this message with your child would be greatly appreciated. If your child has a medical or health condition, impairment or disability that would make it difficult to wear a face covering please advise school staff at the earliest opportunity.**

### **23. What further precautions must my child take when travelling?**

We ask that parents or carers help communicate to their children the importance of following good hygiene, as this will play a key role in keeping everyone safe.

This means taking the following precautions:

- **do not travel** if your child has any of the four identified COVID-19 symptoms (a new continuous cough, a high temperature or loss of taste or smell);
- **do not travel** if your child is required to self-isolate by Test, Trace, Protect (TTP) or is in quarantine having returned from a country specified by the Foreign Commonwealth Office;
- wash your hands for at least 20 seconds or sanitise your hands before leaving the house;
- use the hand sanitiser provided before accessing the vehicle;
- avoid physical contact with others;
- windows will be open for ventilation where possible;
- face away from other people when using school transport;
- minimise the number of surfaces you touch, and in particular avoid touching surfaces such as handrails and window ledges;
- do not touch your face;
- do not eat or drink whilst using transport;
- wash your hands for at least 20 seconds or sanitise your hands before leaving school.

**Please note that a refusal to comply with health and safety requirements, good hygiene and where possible social distancing could jeopardise your child's place on school transport. Your support in reinforcing this message with your child would be greatly appreciated.**

### **24. How will you ensure that transport services are not overcrowded?**

Only named passengers that have prior approval to travel, or those with secondary school bus passes for the route, are allowed to use transport. Drivers have lists of those



primary school learners that will be allocated to their vehicle each day. No pass, no travel will be strictly enforced on secondary school vehicles, and those not eligible to travel will be turned away from the vehicle.

## **EDUCATIONAL VISITS AND SPORTING ACTIVITIES**

### **25. Will off-site educational visits be taking place?**

Schools may consider undertaking educational visits where visiting locations outside of the school is integral to the learning experience.

Schools wishing to undertake any type of educational visit will continue to undertake the usual risk assessment process. This risk assessment will include arrangements for what will happen if a member of the group (a learner or staff member) develops COVID-19 symptoms during the visit.

### **26. Can inter school sports fixtures take place?**

Both indoor and outdoor regulated gatherings can now take place. This includes team sports fixtures.

Schools organising sports fixtures are to ensure these arrangements are addressed in the relevant risk assessments and that all reasonable measures to minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19 are taken.

### **27. Can practical PE lessons take place?**

Schools have flexibility to decide how physical education, sport and physical activity will be provided, working within the measures in place in the school. Outdoor activity should be prioritised wherever possible.