



INFORMATION SHEET

Education during the pandemic: Return to school Spring 2021

Introduction

Educational settings are now planning to allow all pupils to return.

This information sheet is for families of children with severe learning disabilities whose behaviour challenges. The situation is ever changing so we will update this page when we receive further updates.

If you have any concerns about these plans and what it means for your child with severe learning disabilities, please do contact the CBF Family Support Line on 0300 666 0126 or email support@theCBF.org.uk. The CBF has produced a range of new Covid-19 resources which you may find useful, all resources are available on our [Covid-19 Information and Resources Page](#).

All our information sheets are available to download free of charge.

To enable us to continue our work [please support us](#) or donate £3 by texting CBF to 70450.

Is this resource helpful? Please spend a few minutes giving us some feedback: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/cbfresources

Key points

- The Government says children should return to schools when they re-open unless they are clinically extremely vulnerable
- Reasonable adjustments should be made for children with SEND
- Facemasks are encouraged in classroom settings for older children but they are not required and exemptions remain in place for those who cannot wear them due to illness or disability
- Lateral flow tests are encouraged but reasonable adjustments should be made for disabled students and children do not have to take the lateral flow tests in order to attend school
- Children cannot have lateral flow tests without parental consent and parents do not have to consent if it is not appropriate for their child



- Provision specified in EHC plans should be back in place, including all therapies and support (whether children are back at school or at home shielding or self-isolating)



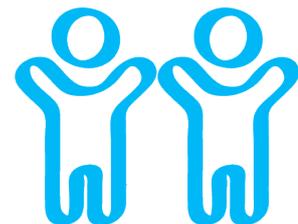
This information sheet is based on the government guidance for England. It contains quotes from the guidance in case these are useful when discussing your child's return to school with your school or local authority.

Guidance for other parts of the United Kingdom can be found here:

- **Scottish guidance**
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-school-age-childcare-services/pages/overview/>
- **Welsh guidance**
<https://gov.wales/schools-coronavirus-guidance#section-59658>
- **Northern Irish guidance**
<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/guidance-schools-and-educational-settings-northern-ireland-january-2021>
and
<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/supplementary-guidance-special-schools>

When do pupils go back to school?

In England, all pupils will return to school on Monday 8th March. Secondary schools can stagger this return over a week. In Scotland, all primary school children will return on Monday 15th March. All pupils are expected to return full time on the 19th April.



In Wales, older primary pupils and secondary pupils in exam years should return to school on the 15th March.

In Northern Ireland, children in years 1-3 and some attending pre-school settings will return on the 8th March. Pupils in years 12-14 will return on the 22nd March. Pupils in years 4-11 will not return to school before the Easter break.



What are the rules on attending school?

Clinically extremely vulnerable children should not attend education settings and should stay at home.

For all other children, the pre-pandemic rules on school attendance apply again. If your child is of compulsory school age, the Government states that it is your duty ensure that they attend school regularly.

Should my child be shielding?

Your child should shield if they are:

- clinically extremely vulnerable
- 16 - 18 year olds with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease,

This means they should not attend education settings.

In light of new evidence, some children are being removed from the shielding patient list (SPL). This should only be done following review by a clinician.

Schools may request a copy of the shielding letter sent to clinically extremely vulnerable children.

Families who have to self-isolate or are shielding may wish to see our information sheets: [activities 1](#) and [activities 2](#).



Reasonable adjustments for attendance

“Some pupils with SEND (whether with EHC plans or on SEN support) will need specific help and preparation for the changes to routine that these measures will involve. Staff should plan to meet these needs, for example using social stories”^[1]

The CBF recommends that schools should work together with families to use personalised strategies to support young people to return to school.

“Additionally, provision for pupils who have SEND may have been disrupted during the period of restrictions on attendance and there may be an impact on their behaviour. Work with local services (such as health and the local authority) to ensure the services and support are in place for a smooth return to schools for pupils.”^[1]

Will my child be tested at school?



Lateral Flow tests have been introduced within schools. Testing is strongly encouraged by the Government in order to break the chain of transmission. *“Pupils and students of secondary school age and those aged 19 to 25 with Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans should be offered testing.”*^[4]

Consent

Testing is encouraged but it is voluntary. It can only take place if you give informed consent. Not being tested is not a reason to prevent a child from attending school.

“If a pupil or student is unable to tolerate a swab-based test at all no testing should take place. Settings should not make it a requirement for a child or young person to have been tested in order to attend their setting.”^[4]

To give informed consent the person (e.g. the parent, guardian or young person) *needs* to understand the risks and benefits of testing. Young people should be given the opportunity to express their views and preferences to the extent that they are able.

“It is important that the willingness of the child or young person and the risk posed to them and the staff or parent assisting the test is always considered. The setting should exercise due care and judgement and, in appropriate circumstances, may choose not to test a child or young person, even when consent has been given.”^[4]

Even with consent, *“if the individual at any point is not willing to participate in testing then that choice should be respected.”*^[4]

Reasonable adjustments for testing

These questions should be considered by staff and parents to help ensure reasonable adjustments are made:

1. How can staff help ensure that the child or young person knows what is involved and the reasons for it? What methods of communication work best for them?
2. How does the child demonstrate distress? What should be done if these behaviours occur (e.g. stop attempting to test)?
3. How can parents help their child know what testing will involve and what advice can they provide to the setting as to what might work best?

4. Would it be helpful by exception for a parent, with appropriate measures in place to manage infection risk, to accompany the pupil or student as they self-swab when taking the test, or to assist their swabbing during the test? For more information, see [What if a pupil or student can't self-swab](#)
5. Would it be helpful to have someone on the staff who has a good relationship with the child or young person present during the testing?
6. Would it be helpful for the child or young person to be familiarised with the site to be used for testing and how it will be set up?
7. How can the site being used for testing be made as calm an environment as possible?
8. Will it help to offer the child or young person a relaxing activity after testing or refreshments to help make it as positive an experience as possible?
9. If the child or young person stims to relieve their anxiety, then will it help to allow them to have their stimming toy with them throughout the test?
10. If the child or young person would be more comfortable with testing being done at home, would that be the better approach from the outset? ^[4]

Who does the test?

“We recognise that self-swabbing may not be possible for a wide range of children and young people with SEND”^[4]

Children who cannot self-swab can be assisted by staff or their parent. Assisted swabbing requires voluntary, informed consent, and only if the child is willing, a swab is feasible, and the swab is risk assessed each time.

“There are a number of options that settings and families have if a pupil or student is unable to self-swab. These include:

- *having a parent, carer or suitably trained member of staff assist with swabbing on-site*
- *having a parent or carer assist with swabbing at home*
- *whether at home or on-site, doing a nasal only or throat only swab if a combined nasal and throat swab is not possible”^[4]*

Where will testing take place?

If your child would not be able to be tested on site but could be tested at home, your child’s school should provide home testing kits from the start for the parent/carer to administer the swab.





“Ahead of testing the parent or carer should ensure they have undertaken appropriate training, including watching the approved video package which demonstrates how physical tests are conducted”^[4]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xaw8DsF2lqc>

For some students, home testing may not be appropriate *“In these instances, on-site testing should be offered if that is a viable alternative.”^[4]*

Do I need to wear PPE to test my child?

When testing in a residential setting, parents should wear PPE. This is not necessary at home, but parents are encouraged to take precautions (for example, wash your hands).

Nose and throat swabbing

Ideally children will be testing by a nose and throat swab. Some children may find it difficult to take a throat swab (e.g. if they have a strong gag reflex or struggle to understand the instructions, or struggle to hold their mouth open). For those children, a nose swab from both nostrils can be taken instead. Some children cannot tolerate a nose swab, for them a throat swab alone will suffice.

“Where possible a combined nose and throat swab should be taken. However, a ‘person centred approach’ should be used to assess which sample to take from each child or young person. A child or young person may find it difficult to take a throat swab due, for example, to their having difficulty in understanding instructions, needing to keep their mouth open during the period of swabbing or they are having a strong gag reflex. In such cases, where a combined nose and throat swab is not possible, a nose swab from both nostrils can be taken. Similarly, if for some reason a nasal swab is not feasible, a throat swab alone will suffice.”^[4]

Test results

If the lateral flow test shows a positive result, you need to self-isolate in line with the [stay at home guidance for households](#), and arrange a lab-based PCR test to confirm the test result.

Symptoms

If your child has covid-19 symptoms they should self-isolate immediately (even if the lateral flow test result is negative) in line with the [stay at home guidance for households](#).

“Where a child or young person has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) on-site, they need to be sent home. The setting should contact the parent or carer who should make arrangements for the child or young person to journey home as soon as possible. In exceptional circumstances, where it is not





possible for the parent or carer to make arrangements for the child's or young person's journey home, home to school transport may be provided." [4]

"Settings should work with their pupils and students and their families to agree the most appropriate route for testing for each individual. This may be having twice-weekly testing on-site via ATS or moving to twice-weekly home testing." [4]

Desensitisation for testing

If you want your child to have the lateral flow tests, or to get used to the process of testing in case they develop symptoms, you can try some desensitisation. There is an example of how to do this below.

1. Child sits on chair.
2. Sit beside / stand to the side of your child. If you are at school, wear PPE (mask, gloves, plastic apron, glasses). You do not have to wear PPE at home but remember to wash your hands after testing.
3. Ask your child to blow their nose into tissue. (discard tissue into black bag).
4. Ask your child to lean their head back.
5. Ask your child to say "AHHH" / "open mouth".
6. Hold a cotton bud in front of your child.
7. Place cotton bud on lips of child's open mouth. (note: do not place cotton bud into mouth).

How to practice:

- Have a preferred item ready that your child can have when they have tolerated the step.
- Place a picture of the preferred item on the 'then' section of the first/then visual.
- Start at step 1, when your child has tolerated the step provide praise and the preferred item.
- If your child is successful after one trial, move on to the next step.
- If your child is unsuccessful tolerating the step, try again later in the day.
- Practice two steps each day.
- You do not need to record the process; this is just to practice and helps your child's awareness of what to expect if they need to be tested.

These desensitisation steps are based on a resource by the Health Service Executive (HSE), the public health service in Ireland. The full resource can be found [here: https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/covid-19-guide-for-community-residence.pdf](https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/covid-19-guide-for-community-residence.pdf)



What support should my child be receiving?

In line with the 2014 Children and Families act, schools are required *“to use their best endeavours to secure the special educational provision called for by the pupils’ special educational needs remains in place.”*^[3]

“Specialists, therapists, clinicians and other support staff for pupils with SEND should provide interventions as usual”^[3]

If there are staff shortages *“Any redeployments should not be at the expense of supporting pupils with SEND”*.^[3]

Schools should not use risk assessments previously drawn up to filter attendance but may use them to prioritise support.

If your child has an Education and Health Care Plan, then they should be receiving all therapies and support they would normally receive, as specified in their EHC plan.

“Where a pupil or student has an EHC plan, it remains the duty of the local authority and health commissioning body to secure or arrange the provision specified in the plan.”^[1]

Children with an EHC plan are expected to be in school where possible to receive this education and care.

If children cannot attend because they are self-isolating or shielding, schools should adapt the EHC plan to still provide support. For examples schools could offer teaching and therapy sessions online. Reasonable adjustments should be in place so that pupils with SEND can access remote education. *“These decisions should be considered on a case by case basis, which takes account of the needs and circumstances of the child or young person, avoiding a one size fits all approach.”*^[1]

Other information

For more information on these and other aspects of education, please see our information sheet on *Education during the pandemic* which covers:

- Shielding/Self isolation
- Remote provision
- Legal duties of schools and local authorities
- Support & Care (e.g. respite)
- Travel
- Free school meals & wraparound provision
- Health
- Face coverings





- Reasonable Adjustments
- Behaviour Policies
- School Transport

<https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/learning-disability-assets/cv017educationduringthepandemic1.pdf>

Concerns and complaints

For concerns about safeguarding, or the amount/quality of face to face or remote education, family carers should speak to their child's teacher or headteacher. If you still have concerns you can raise these with Ofsted. In post-16 settings, families should speak to the college or provider first, and follow this up with a formal complaint to the Education and Skills Funding Agency if the complaint remains unresolved.

Local SEND Information and Advice Services (SENDIASS) may be able to support families in conversations with the Local Authority or the school. You can find your local service [here](#). There is an introductory film on how a local IASS team can be contacted [here](#). An additional film tells you more about what an information, advice and support service will do for you, find it [here](#).

The Department for Education has set up a dedicated helpline for COVID-19 related education issues. Lines are open Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm, and 10am to 4pm on Saturday and Sunday, and can be contacted on 0800 046 8687.

Barnardo's See, Hear, Respond service, provides support to children, young people and their families who are not currently seeing a social worker or other agency, and who are struggling to cope with the emotional impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19). You can access via the 'See, Hear, Respond' service self-referral webpage or Freephone 0800 151 7015."

Guidance

This information sheet is based on the following guidance and resources:

1. **Additional operational guidance for special schools, special post-16 institutions and alternative provision**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-full-opening-special-schools-and-other-specialist-settings/send-and-specialist-settings-additional-operational-guidance-coronavirus-covid-19>



2. Open letter from Minister for Children and Families

<https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/learning-disability-assets/openlettertosendchildrenandfamiliesmarch2021.pdf>

3. Schools coronavirus operational guidance

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/schools-coronavirus-covid-19-operational-guidance>

4. Rapid Asymptomatic Testing in Specialist Settings

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-full-opening-special-schools-and-other-specialist-settings/rapid-asymptomatic-testing-in-specialist-settings>

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The Challenging Behaviour Foundation

We are a registered UK charity specifically focussed on the needs of children, young people and adults with severe learning disabilities whose behaviour challenges, and their families.

We will make a difference to the lives of people with severe learning disabilities, whose behaviour challenges, and their families by:

- Championing their rights
- Ensuring timely information and support
- Raising awareness and understanding
- Promoting and sharing best practice

To access our information and support, call 01634 838739, email info@theCBF.org.uk or visit our website: <https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk>