

The latest news and announcements from Derbyshire UNISON

COVID-19 updates

Education unions issue
joint statement



Bring back face coverings to limit school Covid disruption

Four education unions representing teachers and support staff are calling on the government to reinstate face coverings in schools to limit coronavirus spread.

With infections on the rise once more, the unions have issued a joint statement demanding a range of safety measures to keep education on track and reduce the risk of further closures.

The unions that have signed are UNISON, GMB, Unite and NEU. The joint statement says:

“Education unions are deeply concerned that secondary school age students now have the highest rates of Covid-19 infection of all age groups,

according to Public Health England (PHE) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) data, and those rates are rising.

“At the weekend, the Health Secretary acknowledged that ‘a huge proportion of the latest cases are in children’, that they pass on the virus to the local community and face risks from long Covid.

“That means over the next few weeks more children and young people are likely to be off self-

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isolating and missing out on face-to-face education.

“PHE has advised that the Delta variant is more transmissible, can lead to more serious infections and vaccines may be less effective against it.

“Action must be taken now to make face-to-face learning safer over the remainder of the school term. Outbreaks mean bubbles, classes or entire year groups must be sent home. The priority must be to avoid any further loss of education.

“This includes the rollout of vaccinations for pupils, following the Medicine and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) view that these are safe for those aged 12 and over. This will help reduce transmission, school disruption and the risks of long Covid.

“Pupils should be offered the vaccine, as is already happening in many other countries, as soon as the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) gives its approval. Schools and colleges must be given the right support and resources to enable pupils to be vaccinated on site.

“In addition, the government should minimise the loss of face-to-face education by:

- Reintroducing with immediate effect the requirement for students and staff to wear face coverings in all areas of secondary schools and colleges, including classrooms.
- Making resources available to schools with poor ventilation to purchase carbon dioxide monitors and air filters. Outdoor lessons should be encouraged wherever possible.
- Undertaking an urgent review of the guidance on bubbles and the isolation of contacts given the increased transmissibility of the Delta variant.
- Releasing the data on the number of cases of the Delta variant in education settings, not just figures concerning outbreaks. The longer this data is withheld, the more it

looks like ministers have something to hide.”