

**January 2021**



**COVID-19  
UPDATE FOR  
ALL SCHOOLS  
AND EARLY  
YEARS  
SETTINGS  
MEMBERS**

# Your Derbyshire UNISON contacts in schools and early years settings



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# KEEPING US ALL SAFE

Firstly, a huge thank you from all Derbyshire UNISON officers and activists to each and every school worker. By your efforts at the very beginning of term, you forced the government into another U-turn and changed their policy on school opening.

None of us like schools being closed or only partially open but in the current pandemic, like nothing we have ever faced before, we must prioritise. We believe school workers and their unions got it right and the government got it wrong.

School workers can now proudly stand alongside Marcus Rashford as forcing political re-thinks on behalf of the people they look after on a daily basis!

It would, though, have stretched belief if this particularly incompetent government had got

everything right in their change of mind. The decision on early years settings was, and remains, wrong. This is of particular concern to UNISON, both locally and nationally. There is a separate section in this document for early years. We are expecting more news from UNISON nationally very soon.

## **Credit school workers!**

It is time proper credit was given to everyone who works in schools and early years settings, from teachers and teaching assistants to cleaners and catering staff. We are sick of social media 'experts', and indeed others in more professional/political positions, who continually harp on about how damaging school closures are to children ... because **we're the first people who understand that!**

We know how lockdowns can affect education, mental health and interaction between school students. We do our best to limit the damage. But future prospects are not going to be any better for children if the death rate continues to rocket, if their close families suf-







fer loss and heartache and if the virus lasts for years not months.

Sometimes, we have to take difficult decisions which are for the better in the long run. The government and political leaders should take them, but when they fail or refuse, we have a duty to stand up and be counted.

### **Is this fair?**

Of course, there is huge suspicion that the government through the Department for Education has tried to get its own back on the unions by seeking to drive a wedge between teachers (and their union, the NEU) and support staff (the vast majority of union members are organised in UNISON). We find schools are operating a system whereby teachers are not in school but delivering lessons remotely whilst support staff in huge numbers are in schools with the children. Is this fair, we have been asked all week? No, it's not! But the answer isn't to bring teachers into school, it's to have less support staff there!

The reason why 'so many' support staff are being rota'd for school is that the government has refused to implement measures for other workplaces that were in situ for the first lock-

down in 2020. They talk the talk but they're certainly not walking the walk. Far too many employers are being allowed to call their staff key workers and far too many workplaces are open for business as usual. At the national UNISON schools committee last week, it was, for instance, reported that a pawnbrokers had been able to class themselves as critical workers!

### **More than a quarter of students in Derbyshire schools**

In Derbyshire schools for the first week of term, over 25% of primary school students were at school. We simply do not believe these are all the children of truly 'critical' workers or vulnerable children. If you think your school is accepting, or being forced to accept, more students than necessary, then you should challenge your head teacher. The main head teachers' union is on our side; most heads will have their own union backing not to put UNISON members at risk. And – don't forget – the use of the Employment Rights Act is still very much relevant to ensure your safety and that of the wider community.

Things change at such a pace and at such short notice that updates are not always possible every time an announcement is made by government, local authorities or even our own unions. We have put together this document so you have the things as they stand (on Sunday, 17 January 2021). If there are urgent updates which we can't immediately circulate to our several thousand members in education, we will always post them on our website [derbyshireunison.com](http://derbyshireunison.com) (new items are most easily accessed via the home page slideshow) and our Facebook page (search Derbyshire UNISON).

I want to thank those involved in its production and who are our leaders in schools and early years, whether it be your local council-run primary school or the private special school. Their contact details are on Page 2. I also want to add Dave Wood to this, our longest standing activist who still sits on the body which negotiates schools issues with Derbyshire County Council and whose help is invaluable to the convenors.

### **You are in control!**

We want to say one further thing in closing this introduction. Sometimes it feels like eve-

rything is in turmoil and you have no control over affairs. It's an understandable feeling when you're juggling work and home lives in such times. But we want you to rethink that – at school, **you are in control**. You are in control of your own safety, that of the children, that of their families and wider society in general. The use of Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act which protects you from unsafe working conditions puts you very much in control. If your school puts you in untenable positions or you believe is operating in an unsafe fashion, then you have the right – supported by UNISON – to remove yourself from that situation unless it is changed. **That is your control. You should use it if necessary.**

Jeanette

**Jeanette Lloyd**  
Branch Secretary

You can download the model ERA44 letter via the slideshow on our home page [here](#).



# SAFETY, THE LAW AND YOU

## The health and safety responsibilities owed by school and college employers

Schools have legal responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of all employees and to ensure other persons, not in their employment, are not exposed to a risk to their health and safety.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to undertake a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks to health and safety of employees and others, such as pupils and parents, affected by the conduct of the employer's undertaking.

The Regulations also require the risk assessment to identify the measures necessary to comply with the statutory duties owed by the employer. Where the employer implements

such measures, the primary duty is to avoid risks or combat the risks at source. The duties also include having appropriate procedures in place in the event of a serious and imminent danger.

Further, the relevant statutory provisions include the following:

- Under the 1999 Regulations, any risk assessment shall be reviewed by the employer or self-employed person who made it if there has been a significant change in the matters to which it relates;
- Every employer shall enable persons who are exposed to serious, imminent and unavoidable danger to stop work and, save in exceptional cases for reasons duly substantiated (which cases and reasons shall be specified in those procedures), require the persons concerned to be prevented from







resuming work in any situation where there is still a serious and imminent danger.

- In addition, the employer owes duty to inform and consult with safety representatives. Under the Safety Representative and Safety Committee Regulations 1977 (recognised unions) and the similar regulations applying where unions are not recognised, every employer shall consult safety representatives in good time with regard to the introduction of any measure at the workplace which may substantially affect the health and safety of the employees the safety representatives concerned represent.
- Employers must ensure that employees who are exposed to risk to their health and safety which have not been adequately controlled by other means are provided with suitable personal protective equipment.

Finally, employers owe duties to assess risks and to protect employees against exposure to harmful biological agents under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002.

#### **Sections 44/100 Employment Rights Act 1996**

Under sections 44 and 100 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, employees are protected from detriment or dismissal where there exist circumstances of danger which they reasonably believe to be serious and imminent, and they leave or propose to leave, or otherwise refuse to return to their place of work (or any dangerous part of the workplace). There are also protections under these provisions for those who take appropriate steps to protect themselves or others in circumstances which the employee reasonably believes amounts to a serious and imminent danger.

# NEW JOINT UNION RISK ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

Schools and early years settings must update their risk assessments in light of the new COVID strain.

To assist we have updated our joint union risk assessment checklist. Derbyshire UNISON is in the process of sending this to all schools.

One of the issues the checklist deals with is the concern that, as a result of government guidance, larger numbers of pupils are attending schools compared to last March, which risks undermining the effectiveness of this lockdown.

We know head teachers are also very concerned about this and we are working very closely with their unions on this issue.

You can download the checklist [here](#).

## Joint union safety checklist for schools

Checklist for partial opening  
period to February

Coronavirus crisis  
Workplace checklist





# SCHOOLS AND CLINICALLY VULNERABLE STAFF

The government have advised clinically extremely vulnerable people to shield during this lockdown. If you are clinically extremely vulnerable you should work from home or stay at home on full pay where you cannot work from home.

The Local Government Association (LGA) has advised employers to follow the same guidance they circulated during the March lockdown for clinically vulnerable staff.

NJC 17 March circular – [Coronavirus and working at home](#)

NJC 23 March circular – [COVID-19: critical workers](#)

UNISON believes that working from home will also be the safest option for other employees with underlying vulnerabilities or who live with people who are clinically vulnerable.

We have produced a [model letter](#) for you to send to your employer should you need it. We will also publish new guidance for vulnerable employees soon.



# WHO SHOULD BE ACCESSING SCHOOLS?

The Department for Education's new guidance for schools on restricting attendance during the national lockdown does not adequately address concerns that UNISON and other unions have raised about the impact new definitions of vulnerable and critical workers' children will have on attendance and the ability to prevent viral transmission in schools.

The widening of the definition of vulnerable category is being partly driven by the government's complete failure to roll out IT equipment to all children in need, despite having nine months to sort this.

We are also very uncomfortable there appears to be a much less restrictive interpretation of what is a key or critical worker than during the first lockdown in 2020.

We are therefore urging school leaders and headteachers to implement the following measures to protect pupils and staff from the new Covid strain:

- **Limit bubble sizes to a maximum of 15 pupils per class or**





**50% of the school's usual class size, whichever is smaller and will ensure 2m social distancing**

- **Staff should remain within their bubble at all times with no crossover working**

In special schools and alternative provision it will not be possible, or even appropriate, for every child to receive face-to-face provision every day. Schools must be allowed the flexibility to establish which vulnerable learners could be offered time in schools. (Please see the separate section on special schools).

As we have said earlier in this document, we believe the figures of over 25% of primary school students in Derbyshire schools last week are too high. (The corresponding figure for special schools was over 41%).

If you think your school is accepting, or being forced to accept, more students than necessary, discuss this as a group with your head teacher. They will probably be sympathetic to your views! And, if that's the case, there's more chance of finding a workable solution. If there isn't, then more pressure may need to be put on the government by school workers, including head teachers.

The DfE guidance on accessing schools can be found [here](#).

The government have now stated (on 8 January)

“We are aware of reports of schools and colleges having more pupils in attendance this week than during the last period when schools were only open to vulnerable and key worker pupils. **The national restrictions mean all children who can stay at home should stay at home.**”

Members should use this statement if necessary when discussing with head teachers.



# PLEASE!!

PLEASE MAKE SURE YOU PROVIDE US WITH YOUR UP-TO-DATE EMAIL ADDRESS.

IF YOU HAVE A PERSONAL ONE, LET US HAVE THAT RATHER THAN A SCHOOL ONE, SO YOU CAN BE SURE OF RECEIVING UPDATES WHEN SCHOOLS ARE CLOSED OR YOU'RE NOT AT WORK.



# SPECIFIC ADVICE FOR SPECIAL SCHOOLS' MEMBERS

**UNISON believes that the safety of staff and pupils working in special schools is paramount.**

The advice from the Department for Education states that most, if not all, students attending special schools/colleges and alternative provision are classed as vulnerable and should therefore be receiving a face-to-face education, if appropriate.

UNISON does not believe that it is either possible or appropriate for a special school, college or alternative provision to be able to remain open to all pupils whilst ensuring the health and safety of students, carers and staff during the lockdown.

The DfE's later statement has says the national restrictions mean that all children who can stay at home should stay at home. How this is interpreted may differ from area to area or school to school. Members should seek advice from UNISON in the first instance if they believe there are too many students in their school.

With the new variant of the virus shown to being considerably more transmissible than the version prevalent in 2020 the previous risk assessment will no longer be fit for purpose.

As a matter of priority, special schools and colleges should focus on:

- **Revisiting and improving the previous risk assessments and building time into the beginning of term for this to take place**
- **Risk assessments should be updated for the premises as a whole and for individual children and young people with more complex needs**
- **Time must be built in for extra training of staff in adopting the new measures identified.**
- **Allowing time for pupils and their parents/carers to be inducted into the new processes.**

The DfE has published their [definition of vulnerable children and young people who should continue to attend schools and colleges](#), even in areas subject to the most stringent restrictions. This definition includes the vast majority of pupils in special schools and colleges and alternative education settings.

However a pupil with an EHC plan would not automatically be required to attend school – some pupils may have significant health



needs that would mean they would be put at risk by attending.

We agree to send the same advice to staff in special schools that was sent to those in primary schools and early years settings. We accept that special schools should be open only to those children identified as particularly vulnerable in their COVID assessed EHC plan.

Leaders in special education settings must follow public health advice including:

- **A revised and updated setting-based risk assessment**
- **Revised and updated risk assessments for individual pupils**
- **Revised and updated risk assessments for staff members with characteristics that result in them being more vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19**

UNISON advice is that members should agree to support vulnerable pupils **on a rota basis** provided the following conditions have been met:

- **The necessary risk assessments have been consulted on with your union rep**
- **The risk assessments have been reviewed and appropriate measures taken to ensure safety**
- **You are clear what additional mitigations have been put in place to ensure the safety of both yourself and others**
- **You have received training on the new measures**
- **A system is in place to feedback on how well the new measures are working**

If you have concerns regarding the health and safety procedures in your school or college, please refer to the advice on Pages 6/7.

### **Lateral flow testing**

It is recognised that many pupils in special schools and colleges will not be able to self-administer the lateral flow tests. UNISON guidance on administering medical proce-

dures (in local authority schools) has been negotiated with the government and remains the same:

- **Any member of school staff may be asked to provide support to pupils with medical conditions, including the administering of medicines, although they cannot be required to do so.**
- **School staff should receive sufficient and suitable training and achieve the necessary level of competency before they take on responsibility to support children with medical conditions.**

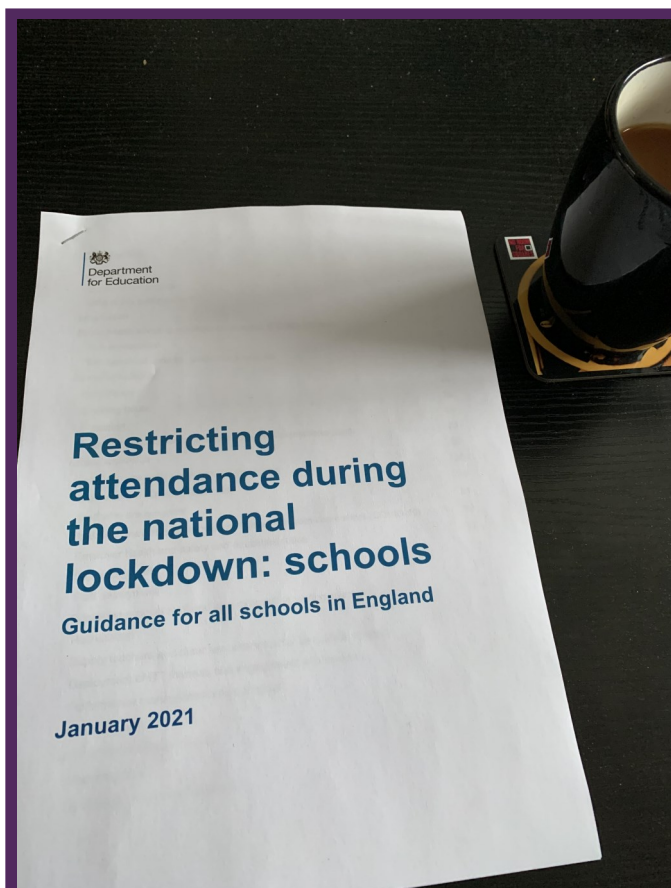
Remember, helping pupils with administering a lateral flow test is voluntary if your contract of employment does not explicitly state you must administer medical procedures.

If your contract does state that you have responsibility for administering medicines then you must receive full training and only take on the task once you are fully competent to do so.

If you are in a non-local authority special school and need further advice on lateral flow testing, please contact Derbyshire UNISON.

Government advice:

England - The [government guidance for special schools and other specialist settings](#) states that settings work closely with staff and unions to agree best approaches for their circumstances.



MAKE SURE  
YOUR  
MEMBERS  
HAVE ACCESS  
TO THIS  
DOCUMENT.  
DOWNLOAD IT  
HERE



# SPECIFIC ADVICE FOR MEMBERS IN EARLY YEARS SETTINGS

Early years settings, including nurseries, will remain open to all children during the lockdown.

UNISON believes that early years settings must be treated in the same way as primary schools and should be closed except to vulnerable and key workers' children. Where schools have the option of closing school based nurseries we would strongly recommend that they do so.

We are urging the government to reconsider its decision to keep early year establishments open, especially in the light of concerns over a new COVID strain.

## Why is early years being treated differently to schools?

The DfE has failed to provide any scientific advice for the different treatment of early years settings. If the Department for Education is to advise early years providers to continue to provide care while instructing other



education providers to close, it must provide a clear and unequivocal scientific basis for doing so. If this evidence doesn't exist, then the government cannot and must not put the safety of staff and local communities at risk.

UNISON is calling on the government to provide this evidence and further review guidance and increase support for the early years sector.

The DfE has stated that it believes, 'Early years settings remain low risk environments for children and staff. 0-5 year olds continue to have the lowest confirmed rates of coronavirus of all age groups, and there is no evidence that the new variant of coronavirus disproportionately affects young children. Evidence shows that pre-school children are less susceptible to infection and are not playing a driving role in transmission.'

However, speaking on the BBC, Calum Semple, professor of child health and a member of the government's own scientific advisory committee said that the decision to keep early years settings was a political one and not one based on scientific advice. He states that any mixing is a risk and that there is no basis for treating early years differently from schools.

Early years settings in Northern Ireland and Scotland have closed to help prevent the spread of the virus, yet the DfE in England has said that it will withdraw funding from any nursery in England that closes, leaving many in an impossible position.

UNISON has received many messages from early years workers expressing their fear and anger at the way they are being treated as somehow less important than other education workers. We are taking these messages to the DfE and continue to urge them to change their position on keeping early years settings open.

We are campaigning for early years to be treated in the same way as schools. This would mean that all early years settings

should be open only to vulnerable children and the children of key workers and they should be fully funded as though the attendance was at pre-pandemic levels.

If settings do remain open, we believe that they must;

- **Undertake revised risk assessments, taking into account the increased transmissibility of new variant and the move to Covid alert level 5.**
- **Restrict numbers of children and 'bubble' sizes to eight children as was the case when settings re-opened in June after the first wave of the pandemic.**

Not only are the DfE treating early years settings differently to schools when it comes to attendance of pupils, they are also treating them less favourably than schools when it comes to funding. Whilst schools remain fully funded as if all pupils are in attendance, early years settings will only be funded for those children actually in attendance.

This means that many settings will see a reduction in income as parents keep their children at home on safety grounds. We have had reports of settings ringing up parents to actively encourage their children to come to nursery which completely defeats the point of lockdown.

The DfE guidance states that early years is the most crucial stage of development for children, yet they are treating it like an afterthought.

Early years staff must have the same rights and protections as other education staff. We know that staff are unable to apply social distancing within early years settings, which already places them at increased risk. We need to know more about the risk to staff and children about the impact of the new variant of the virus among young children before plac-

ing staff and communities at greater risk by re-opening all nurseries while infection rates are so high.

We are calling on the government to include early years staff as a priority group for both testing and vaccination along with all other education staff.

### **Can I refuse to attend work if I believe that my workplace is unsafe?**

UNISON remains clear that members who work in early years have a right to a safe working environment. We will continue to place pressure on the Government and employers to ensure this. In addition, individuals shouldn't have to work where they reasonably believe that they (or others) face serious and imminent danger.

Please contact Derbyshire UNISON for further advice and support.

### **Can early years staff still qualify for furlough?**

If staff meet the qualifying criteria then they can still be placed on furlough. This applies if the setting either closes, or remains open but at reduced capacity.

### **What happens to clinically vulnerable staff?**

The government have advised clinically extremely vulnerable people to shield during this lockdown. If you are clinically extremely vulnerable you should work from home or stay at home on full pay where you cannot work from home.

UNISON believes that working from home will also be the safest option for other employees with underlying vulnerabilities or who live with people who are clinically vulnerable.



**Sign the petition [here](#) now!**



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

There is a full list of FAQs on the national UNISON website [here](#). We have prioritised those Derbyshire members have been asking us. Please note that not all have necessarily been updated (nor had to be) in January 2021.

## BUBBLES / SOCIAL DISTANCING

### What about the size of groups and bubbles?

DfE guidance is that bubbles should be as small as possible and that further bubbles should not mix and social distancing between individuals should be maximised within bubbles. However, it does not specify a maximum bubble size and still says staff can work across bubbles where necessary.

UNISON does not believe in light of the rapid transmission of the new strain that government guidance is sufficient to protect pupils, staff and their families. We are therefore urging school leaders and headteachers to implement the following measures:

- **Limit bubble sizes to a maximum of 15 pupils per class or 50% of the school's usual class size, whichever is smaller and will ensure 2m social distancing (see FAQs on early years for our**

**position on maximum bubble sizes in these settings)**

- **Staff should remain within their bubble at all times with no crossover working**

UNISON is clear that smaller bubbles that are fully contained are best to restrict possible viral transmission.

### What is UNISON's advice on social distancing?

The DfE guidance states staff should maintain 2m distancing from each other and from pupils where possible, But it goes on to state that the DfE recognises that this not always possible and that you should avoid close face to face contact and minimise time spent within 1 metre of anyone. The guidance states classrooms should be rearranged to maximise social distancing and that there should be no assemblies etc. Further, it states when staff or children cannot maintain distancing, particularly with younger children in primary schools, the risk can be reduced by keeping pupils in smaller groups.

This does not in UNISON's view go far enough – a view shared by the governments own scientific advisory body (Sage) who on 23 December strongly highlighted the dangers to the government of social distancing less than 2m. Therefore; UNISON is calling on schools to

- **Limit bubble sizes to a maximum of 15 pupils per class or 50% of the school's usual class size, whichever is smaller and will ensure 2m social distancing**

for pupils and staff (see FAQs on early years for our position on maximum bubble sizes in these settings)

- **Ensure staff remain within their bubble at all times with no crossover working except in exceptional circumstances**

We are also concerned at the potential increased risk to school staff whose roles mean social distancing will be extremely difficult, (if not impossible) for example those supporting pupils with medical needs, or carrying out one-to-ones or group work. That is why we are calling on schools to carry out role-based risk assessments and provide PPE – please see the FAQ on PPE for more details.

UNISON and the joint unions have produced a [checklist](#) which sets out what employers should demonstrate they have considered in establishing their arrangements for social distancing or minimising contacts and mixing. Please ensure your school has a copy.

Your school should review, update and consult you on its risk assessment in light of the new strain and any further changing circumstances.

## MANAGING AIRBORNE TRANSMISSION

### What is the government's guidance on airborne transmission?

Significantly the government and Public Health England now recognise the role of airborne transmission, particularly in poorly ventilated places where groups of people spend long periods of time together (this crucial new information is particularly important for schools). See section 8, 'keeping occupied

spaces well ventilated' of the DfE guidance for more information.

Schools should seek to achieve both ventilation and thermal comfort by opening windows and doors (where fire regulations permit it), keeping heating on and taking other steps to ensure constant flow of fresh air throughout the building. Schools should not use rooms which lack adequate ventilation, for example where windows cannot open. See our advice on face coverings in the FAQ below.

### How do I identify poorly ventilated areas?

Where your school (or parts of it) are poorly ventilated, employers need to improve ventilation in those areas to reduce the risk of airborne transmission.

There are some simple ways to identify poorly ventilated areas:

- **Look for areas where there is no mechanical ventilation or no natural ventilation, such as opening windows and vents etc, unless doors are opened very frequently**
- **Check that mechanical systems provide outdoor air, temperature control or both. If a system (eg a local air conditioner) is recirculating only and doesn't have an outdoor air supply, or a separate source of outdoor air, the area is likely to be poorly ventilated**
- **Identify areas that feel stuffy or smell badly**
- **Use carbon dioxide (CO2) monitors to identify the CO2 levels to help decide if ventilation is poor. CO2 monitors are most effective for areas that are regularly attended by the same group of people. They are less effective in areas with low numbers of people.**

# MASS TESTING IN SCHOOLS

## What does mass testing mean for my school?

Before the lockdown, the government announced that it wanted secondary schools and colleges to roll out the mass testing for staff and pupils in secondary schools in January using the fast turn-around lateral flow tests. The government wanted to use the tests in three ways:

- **Mass testing pupils and staff before returning to schools after the holidays – though not being tested was not a barrier to attending schools**
- **For weekly testing of staff**
- **Serial testing (every day for 7 days) for ‘close contacts’ of confirmed Covid-19 cases, with a negative result allowing contacts to still attend schools instead of self-isolating if they so wish (UNISON has serious concerns about this aspect of the testing plan – see FAQ below). They would self isolate and go for a PCR test if at any point they tested positive.**

The government is also now rolling out home testing kits for staff in primary schools.

Whilst government is strongly encouraging schools to roll out the testing it is not mandatory for schools take part. Neither is it mandatory for pupils and staff to be tested.

## What is UNISON’s position on mass testing in schools?

UNISON supports mass testing in schools as an ‘additional’ measure to try and identify asymptomatic cases. However, due to the reported number of false negatives generated by the lateral flow test (some reports suggest that self testing can miss over 50% of positive

cases) we are clear it should not be used as an alternative to self-isolation. Self isolation of whole bubbles should still take place until more assurance about the accuracy of this test can be provided.

Some schools are using partial closure to pilot testing and are asking staff and parents/guardians to sign consent forms. We will be providing wording for school staff that makes clear that if you choose to agree to be tested you do not agree to use the results as an alternative to self-isolation at this stage. This will be available shortly. We will also be calling on schools directly not to use the test as an alternative to self-isolation of close contacts

## Who should be undertaking the testing – do I have to do it?

The test will be self-administered by pupils and staff however some roles will be needed to oversee, manage and clean the testing centres in schools. UNISON has been clear that this must be on a voluntary basis, with full training, clinical oversight, appropriate PPE and clear guarantees around any potential liabilities. Additional staff time must be fully paid at the appropriate rate.

## I work in a secondary special school what is the guidance on mass testing?

Many pupils in special schools and colleges will not be able to self-administer the lateral flow tests. UNISON believes that testing falls under the statutory guidance Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions. This says:

- **Any member of school staff may be asked to provide support to pupils with medical conditions, including the administering of medicines, although they cannot be required to do so (our emphasis).**
- **School staff should receive sufficient and suitable training and**



achieve the necessary level of competency before they take on responsibility to support children with medical conditions. Helping pupils to administer a lateral flow test is voluntary. If your contract of employment does not explicitly state you must administer medical procedures. If your contract states that you have responsibility for administering medicines then

you must receive full training and only take on the task once you are fully competent to do so.

### What are the guidelines on the NHS Test and Trace App?

The Government introduced the NHS COVID-19 App in England and Wales to support the Test and Trace system. It uses Bluetooth technology to track contact between app users, alerting individuals when they have come into 'close contact' with someone who has subsequently tested positive for coronavirus. Close contact means within 2 metres of someone for 15 mins or more.

The app is available to anyone aged 16 or over, therefore some students in years 11 and 12 can use the app alongside staff. The DfE has provided guidance on using the app in schools. It recommends that the app be used and switched on where possible, unless phones are required by schools to be left in lockers or bags in communal areas at all times.

UNISON believes that schools should permit and encourage staff and eligible pupils to use the app. Schools should also follow alerts from the app to self-isolate when directed.

## CLEANING

### What is the government's guidance on school cleaning?

The government's advice on cleaning in a non-health care setting covers educational settings. There is additional advice published by the Department for Education on cleaning the environment, which includes toys and equipment. UNISON at a national level is continuously monitoring the situation.



## **Who should be cleaning the school given the heightened levels of risk and what provisions should be made for their safety?**

Schools should recognise that cleaning is a skilled role and should not expect staff who are not employed as cleaners to undertake cleaning roles apart from any spraying and general wiping down intended to help keep everyone as safe as possible.

Cleaners employed to clean the school should be provided with the correct equipment. This will include Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as gloves and appropriate cleaning solutions along with instructions. See our detailed advice on the national website.

Schools should ensure regular cleaning throughout the school day and support cleaning staff including via additional paid hours and hiring additional cleaning staff where necessary.

### **What about 'deep cleaning'?**

Although there is no clear definition of a deep clean it is accepted that a deep clean is more than a standard or regular clean. Only cleaning staff should be asked to carry out a deep clean of a school or particular area within the school. If you are instructed to carry out deep cleaning duties and you are not employed as a cleaner you should make clear to your manager that this is not your role. If your manager continues to insist then contact your local UNISON branch and seek support.

For cleaning staff, a risk assessment and training should be conducted and appropriate personal protective (PPE) equipment provided by the employer before any deep cleaning is carried out. Instructions should also be given on the use of any specialist equipment such as steamers for sanitising equipment, fixtures and fittings within the school.

Cleaning chemicals should conform to the Chemical Substances Hazardous to Health

Regulations (COSHH) and be provided by the employer. Staff should not be asked to provide their own cleaning materials, solutions or equipment at any time.

In conjunction with the above, schools should:

- **Contact the Local Health Protection Team for advice and support**
- **Ensure only those fully trained and equipped with the relevant protective equipment are involved in any deep clean. A specialist cleaning team may have to be established.**
- **Notify all staff of what is happening and keep them updated on any developments.**

### **What should happen in a deep clean situation when there has been a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19?**

In this situation the employer should do the following:

- **Conduct full risk assessments**
- **Contact the Local Health Protection Team for advice and support**
- **Ensure only those fully trained and equipped with the relevant protective equipment are involved in any deep clean. A specialist cleaning team may have to be established.**
- **Provide the correct Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) including appropriate face masks for those responsible for decontaminating the school**
- **Notify all staff and keep them updated on any development.**

# CATERING

## **If schools are shut why am I being asked to attend work?**

Schools will not completely close since they are being asked to stay open to look after the children of key workers and vulnerable children.

The government has expanded its definition of who it considers to be in both of these categories and therefore there may be more children on site than in previous lockdowns. Additionally all children who are entitled to Free School Meals will need to receive their entitlement. While some schools will choose to use the voucher system, you may be asked to provide packed lunches to be delivered or collected for this group of children.

## **I have been told to buy my own PPE**

If PPE is required for you to be able to do your job safely, then your employer is required, by law, to provide it for you.

There are some grey areas however over what is seen as PPE and what isn't.

Uniforms are not generally seen as PPE but a protective apron to prevent the spread of infection would be.

One area where there is currently confusion is "face-coverings" vs "face masks". A face mask (which is PPE) is provided on the basis

of risk assessment as necessary to minimise the risk of infection. This must be provided by the employer ensuring it meets the relevant certification requirements, is cleaned and maintained, and staff are trained in its use.

A face covering is not considered PPE, as although it may help in reducing the rate of transmission, it does not provide the level of protection necessary to minimise the risk of infection.

## **I am worried I am going to be made redundant or have my hours cut.**

UNISON believes that the school meals service is vital and we cannot lose valuable skilled members of staff who will be needed once the pandemic is over.

There are many government-backed schemes available to companies who provide school meals to help them through this time and reduce the effect on staffing. Unison will negotiate with providers who are struggling on how they can get the best from these schemes and save jobs.

You may be asked to be furloughed and in many cases we are working with catering contractors to use the furlough scheme on a rota basis between staff. Many catering roles cannot be fulfilled from home and there may be some staff may be asked if they wish to be redeployed into alternative roles – you should weigh up the pros and cons of this in light of

your own circumstances.

If you receive a notification from your employer that says your hours will be cut or you are in danger of losing your job, contact Derbyshire UNISON straight away for advice.





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