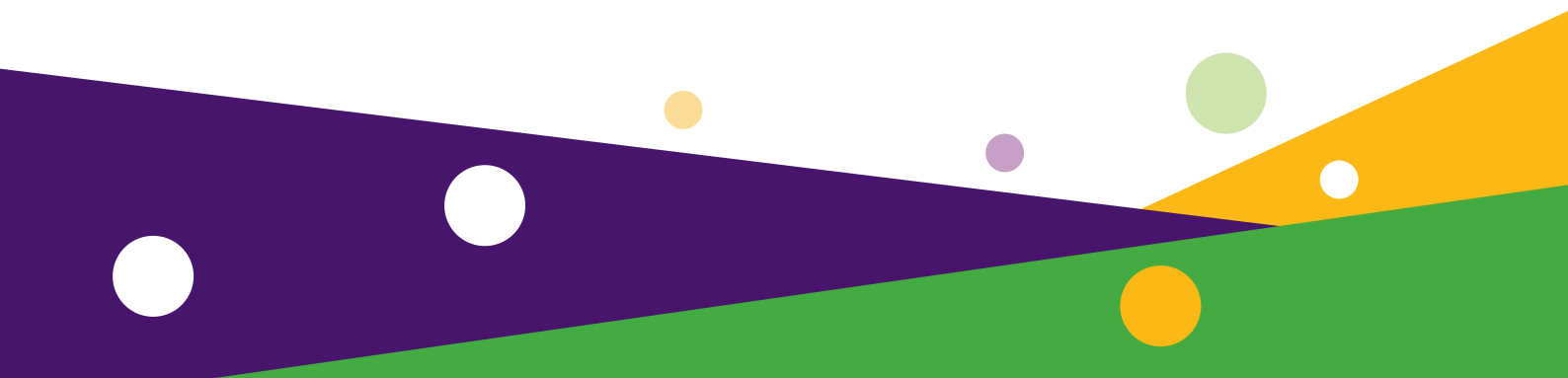


25 August 2020



Updated advice for
Derbyshire UNISON
members in
education settings



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FOREWORD

With the intended complete reopening of schools and colleges in England to all students, Derbyshire UNISON is releasing this guide to all members working in education. We are fully aware that many education members have been working throughout the pandemic, barring some leave/holidays, but, for many, the experience of 'reopening' will be new.



It is an opportune moment to pass on the thanks of your Derbyshire UNISON leadership team to all members working in education settings for the unstinting efforts you have made over the past few months, trying to maintain as much normality for children as possible in such trying circumstances. Your efforts have not gone unnoticed by UNISON.

The coming weeks and months will throw up new challenges and, no doubt, some problems we collectively need to overcome. I would urge you not only to read this guide and act on any immediate advice but also to show it to fellow colleagues who may not yet be UNISON members. Every one of your colleagues who is not in a union makes it more difficult for us to protect you!

Just as importantly, challenge your managers and employers should they try and cut corners or seek to get you to do things you know are wrong or dangerous. It is not for them - or us - to decide on what is effective or not in combating coronavirus. There are government guidelines (even if they are often confusing) in place and we must abide by them.

As always, should you have difficulties with your employers, contact us without delay. We will try and provide solutions to all issues.

Jeanette Lloyd

Branch Secretary
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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The general advice in this guide is applicable to all members - even if some appears under the heading of Schools FAQs. We would urge you to read it all, whatever sector of the education field you work in.

SCHOOLS

The guide covers our advice and agreements for all workers in local authority schools (ie Derbyshire County Council), voluntary aided or foundation schools and academy trusts. It covers all forms of work undertaken by school support staff.

Although the agreements made for the above school staff will not be applicable for private and independent schools, we believe the advice certainly is. The key to safe returns to work or reopening is risk assessments and these must be carried out by all employers.

This is also the case for those school staff working in establishments that deal with students with specific social, learning and behavioural difficulties.

FE COLLEGES

There is a specific FE College FAQ being rewritten now by our UNISON nationally but we didn't want to delay publication of this guide because much of the general advice (in the schools FAQs) applies equally to college staff.

As soon as the new FAQs are complete, we will reissue the guide to Chesterfield college members.

NURSERIES / EARLY YEARS

There are obviously different considerations which nurseries, both in the public sector and those independent and privately run, may have to put into place, based on the young age of the children in attendance. However, nothing should stand in the way of maximising protection and minimising risk for all involved.

Therefore, much of the general advice contained in the Schools FAQs can be transferred across and/or adapted for nurseries.

As always, should you have difficulties with your employers, contact Derbyshire UNISON without delay. We will try and provide solutions to all issues.



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SCHOOLS: Introduction

SCHOOL REOPENING

UNISON has always been clear that we want to see a full return to schools as soon as possible but the safety of staff, students, parents and our communities must come first.

In July the government issued its guidance for schools on planning for a full return of students in England at the beginning of the autumn term.

We believe the guidance falls short. We've told the government that test and trace must improve; that vulnerable students should be a priority; that we need more cleaners; that teaching assistants mustn't become substitute teachers; that high risk staff need to be safe; and that schools need more funding.

RISK ASSESSMENTS

UNISON, along with the other unions in schools, has produced a comprehensive checklist covering all school settings, including special schools (see back page). It will help school staff and reps have discussions with school leaders about their plans for safe reopening and assist them in completing a thorough risk assessment.

Here are the top 3 things members can do to help make schools safer for September:

- Ask your school for a copy of its updated risk assessment and for

a commitment it will use the joint union checklist in planning for reopening.

- Ask your school to confirm its timeline for consulting staff on the risk assessment – it should be reviewed immediately prior to reopening.
- Ask your school what plans it has for training staff on the measures identified in the risk assessment – some schools are looking at staggering the start to the school year or using the first few days as training days for staff.

STAFF AT HIGHER RISK

Your employer should carry out an individual risk assessment for any member of staff who requests one, for example if they are in a vulnerable group or live with someone who is at higher risk.

Along with the other education unions we have produced an advice guide for vulnerable staff (see back page) and a model letter for you to send to your employer. This asks them to take your situation into account when deciding whether it is safe for you to come into the workplace, or whether additional safety measures are required.

Please get in touch with Derbyshire UNISON if your school's response concerns you.



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SCHOOLS: FAQs

BUBBLES AND SOCIAL DISTANCING

What about the size of groups and bubbles?

The point of a bubble is to minimise the risk of infection by minimising contact and mixing and to allow easier identification of contacts. For this to work, groups need to be as consistent and as small as possible. UNISON is concerned that DfE advice for September states bubbles can potentially be as large as entire year groups and staff can move between classes and year groups.

UNISON's advice is that employers should instead seek to maintain smaller groups – preferably no larger than a normal class in primary and KS3 and half a year group in KS4.

UNISON is clear that smaller bubbles are best to restrict possible infection spreading and so the use of larger bubbles must be rigorously risk-assessed. Employers must set out how they will manage and reduce any resulting increased risk. Please see the joint union checklist for more information.

What is UNISON's advice on social distancing and September opening?

The arrangements adopted by schools for minimising contact and maintaining social distancing are vital for staff and student safety. DfE advice assumes a continuing decrease in the prevalence of COVID-19 into the autumn term but we are concerned this may not be the case.

The DfE guidance is confusing and provides too many caveats (i.e. whole year bubbles, staff working across bubbles) and places too many burdens on schools, without providing them with necessary additional resources to reduce risks, for example increased cleaning.

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 students with medical needs, or carrying out 1:1s or group work or working in small kitchens and serveries. That is why we are calling on schools to carry out role-based risk assessments.

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 must review, update and consult you on its risk assessment before reopening in September. Some schools have done this by setting aside several days for staff consultation and training.



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VULNERABLE AND HIGHER RISK GROUPS

What should my employer be doing to protect me?

While the government recognises that a wider group of people continues to be more clinically vulnerable to COVID-19 than the general population due to their medical circumstances, the Department for Education expects that most staff will go to work at their workplace from September.

UNISON is concerned that the very limited measures in the DfE guidance mean social distancing in schools will realistically be very difficult and very little PPE will be provided. As a result, schools will have fewer protective measures in place to reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19 than most other workplaces.

The joint unions, including UNISON, continue to believe staff should only attend the workplace when it is sufficiently safe for them as individuals to do so.

Please read the detailed advice we have produced for

vulnerable employees (see back page). This sets out our specific advice for each group so it is important you read this carefully. There is also a model letter for you to send to your employer should you need it.

It covers:

- Extremely clinically vulnerable staff
- Clinically vulnerable staff
- Pregnant staff or new mothers
- Older or male staff
- Overweight staff
- Black staff (the government uses the term BAME)
- Disabled staff
- Staff living with or caring for a family member who is medically vulnerable at higher risk
- Staff who are otherwise anxious about returning to work



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LOCAL OUTBREAKS

What is the guidance in cases of local outbreaks?

The DfE has produced guidance on local outbreaks – see section 5 ‘contingency planning for outbreaks’ in the main guidance.

UNISON has also produced questions for you to ask your school on local outbreaks in our joint union checklist – see sections 7, 8 and 9 and ‘contingency planning’ on page 20.

UNISON is concerned that the government is placing a heavy responsibility on schools without additional support and resources to deal with local outbreaks. We are calling on the government to produce a nationally resourced

Plan B in case of a second wave or more local lockdowns. We are especially concerned about the number of students who have not received IT and internet provision from the government. We continue to push hard on all these issues.

UNISON is also calling on school employers to require contractors to pay full sick pay and the real Living Wage as a minimum as part of our Clean Schools, Safer Schools campaign. This is so financial barriers are removed to enable outsourced staff to self-isolate in cases of local COVID outbreaks. The importance of these measures cannot be overstated. Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that those care homes which offered full contractual sick pay to their staff carried lower risk of infection to their residents.



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TEST AND TRACE

What should my school be doing on test and trace?

UNISON is very concerned that the government's outsourced testing and tracing system is not currently fit for purpose. Maximum efforts need to be made to ensure there is a fully integrated system nationally and locally. UNISON is working with others to apply maximum pressure on the government to change the system. Fast turnaround testing is vital and it is important that staff, parents and unions are alerted to any positive tests as early as possible to look out for others who might show symptoms.

UNISON believes that when there is a 'suspected' case within a bubble the rest of the bubble should move to studying from home until the test result is confirmed. With the promised speeding up of test results this would be a sensible measure to reduce the potential spread of the virus across the school, hopefully preventing the need for a full closure of the school.

The DfE guidance has specific advice on test and trace – see 'Section 1: Public health advice to minimise coronavirus (COVID-19) risks' – point 7.

We have produced questions for you to ask your school on test and trace in sections 7, 8 and 9 of the joint union checklist.



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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?

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.

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 Derbyshire UNISON for 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



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- 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.

See our detailed advice. Also see the government advice on COVID-19: cleaning in non-healthcare settings.

1. more cleaners
2. proper training & PPE
3. decent sick pay



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POST-HOLIDAY QUARANTINE

Will I be in breach of my contract if the government imposes a 14-day quarantine/self-isolation period whilst I'm away on holiday, resulting in me not being able to return to school at the start of September?

No. The DfE guidance for full opening contains the following statement under the 'staff taking leave' section:

"We recognise that school staff have been working extremely hard throughout the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and will be working hard to prepare for all pupils to return from the start of the autumn term. Many staff will want to take a holiday over the summer period, which may involve travelling abroad.

The government has set a requirement for people returning from some countries to quarantine for 14 days on their return. The latest guidance on quarantine can be accessed at [coronavirus \(COVID-19\): how to self-isolate when you travel to the UK](#).

As would usually be the case, staff will need to be available to work in school from the start of the autumn term. We recommend that school leaders discuss leave arrangements with staff before the end of the summer term to inform planning for the autumn term.

There is a risk that where staff travel abroad, their return travel arrangements could be disrupted due to factors arising beyond their control in relation to coronavirus (COVID-19), such as the potential for reinstatement of lockdown measures in the place they are visiting.

Where it is not possible to avoid a member of staff having to quarantine during term time, school leaders should consider if it is possible to temporarily amend working arrangements to enable them to work from home."



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PPE

Should my school be providing PPE?

The DfE guidance says most staff in education settings don't need Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) beyond what is required for their normal work and that it is only needed in a small number of cases. In their view such cases only include: where a student becomes ill with coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms while at school, and if 2 metres cannot be maintained; or where a student already has routine intimate care needs that involve the use of PPE. Their advice recommends that schools refer to safe working in education, childcare and children's social care for more information about infection and PPE.

UNISON strongly disagrees with this guidance. Risk assessments should decide whether PPE is necessary. We do not think that the DfE should make this blanket statement. Schools must ensure that they always have adequate supplies of PPE available. PPE such as disposable gloves, aprons and face masks must be made available following a risk assessment and where it is not possible to implement government guidance on social distancing.

The PPE required will depend on the nature of your role and should be issued where the risks you are exposed to make it necessary. Any staff who require it must be trained in its use.



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SPECIAL SCHOOLS

What are the guidelines for special schools?

The DfE has published separate guidance for special schools for September.

As part of our joint union risk assessment checklist we have produced a specific set of questions to raise with your employer – these can be found on page 21 under ‘Additional checklist for special schools’. Please ensure your school is aware of this checklist.

The rest of these FAQs apply to all school settings, including special schools.



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TEACHING ASSISTANTS, PPA TIME AND COVER SUPERVISION

Should teaching assistants/ learning support assistants be leading classes?

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis school staff have gone above and beyond to keep schools running and support children and young people. During this time many staff have stretched the boundaries of their job roles to help schools out while vulnerable colleagues were forced to stay away from work or while other colleagues were re-assigned to other areas.

UNISON has concerns that in schools with staff shortages or where school layout or social distancing means that there is a need for additional classes or bubbles, teaching assistants will be asked to lead full classes and cover full teaching duties. This would not be fair on staff or students.

In July 2020 the DfE issued its guidance for full opening, which has a specific section on school staff:

“Where support staff capacity is available, schools may consider using this to support catch-up provision or targeted interventions. Teaching assistants may also be deployed to lead groups or cover lessons, under the direction and supervision of a qualified, or nominated, teacher (under the Education (Specified Work) (England) Regulations 2012

for maintained schools and non-maintained special schools and in accordance with the freedoms provided under the funding agreement for academies). Any redeployments should not be at the expense of supporting pupils with SEND. Headteachers should be satisfied that the person has the appropriate skills, expertise and experience to carry out the work, and discuss and agree any proposed changes in role or responsibility with the member of staff. This includes ensuring that safe ratios are met, and/or specific training undertaken, for any interventions or care for pupils with complex needs where specific training or specific ratios are required.”

A key sentence in the DfE guidance is: ‘... discuss and agree any proposed changes in role or responsibility with the member of staff.’ Schools should not impose new roles or duties on staff. We expect that changes which impact on others should be discussed with all those affected, and that the local UNISON reps/ contact should be involved. If there are no school-based reps then schools should contact Derbyshire UNISON. Members who are unhappy with proposals or are aware that their school has not talked to the union should contact us.

Our clear position is that only suitably experienced teaching assistants should be asked to lead classes and then only in situations known about in advance, for example where a teacher is working from home due to being in a vulnerable group, and where another teacher is unavailable. Suitably experienced teaching assistants should only be those whose job description already includes this occasional responsibility, usually Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs, working at levels 4 and 5 according to the [NJC model job profiles](#)), and who are paid at the appropriate grade.



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Where HLTAs are deployed to lead classes, they should be provided with enough time, within their contracted hours, in which to plan and prepare, including opportunities to liaise with class teachers. They too should be supported by a teaching assistant. UNISON is clear that HLTAs should not be expected to lead classes on an indefinite basis, although we are also aware of the importance of protecting the integrity of any classes/bubbles as much as possible in current circumstances. Any arrangement for a HLTA to lead a class should be reviewed and agreed with the staff member on at least a fortnightly basis.

UNISON is producing further guidance on the deployment of teaching assistants.

What about cover for teacher PPA time?

Under normal circumstances, schools are required to put additional staff into their timetable to ensure that teaching continues during PPA time. During the spring/summer lockdown it was expected that small classes/bubbles would be kept intact to restrict movement. In order to maintain PPA time, many schools operated an adjusted timetable, for example closing classrooms to students for a day or afternoon a week, using that time for staff to take PPA and for the school to be deep cleaned.

In many schools September re-opening should see a return to previous practice. Where bubbles/small classes remain, the school must do a risk assessment to ensure that any adjustment to 'normal' routine and/or staff moving between classes/bubbles does not increase risks. Some schools are operating an adjusted timetable to maintain smaller bubbles and facilitate PPA time. For example, closing

classrooms to students for an afternoon a week and using this time for staff to take PPA and for the school to be deep cleaned. Educational provision is maintained for children during this time away from the classroom e.g. online and other home learning resources.

What about cover supervision?

Cover supervision should only be for a teacher's short-term absence from the classroom where the absence was not known about in advance (for example to cover short-term sickness). If small classes/bubbles continue, then ideally the allocated teaching assistant should provide this cover. To undertake cover supervision, TAs should have skills and knowledge of at least level 3 and be paid at the appropriate grade for this level (see the [NJC model job profiles](#)). In this situation there is no expectation that active teaching takes place. Rather, students should carry out a pre-prepared exercise under supervision. For more information see our [factsheet on cover supervision](#).

Schools should consider contingency arrangements for appropriate cover supervision in their planning.

What should members do if the use of teaching assistants in school is inappropriate?

Please contact Derbyshire UNISON to discuss your concerns. As much as UNISON understands the challenging circumstances in which schools are operating, it is not fair to staff or students if staff are being deployed inappropriately.



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FACE COVERINGS

Can I wear a face covering at work?

The government's advice on face coverings is constantly changing and has recently been updated to include the following advice: 'Face coverings are required at all times on public transport (except children under the age of 11), when attending a hospital as a visitor or outpatient, or when in a shop or a supermarket.'

The DfE and Public Health England do not (based on current evidence) recommend the use of face coverings in schools.

UNISON believes that school staff **should** be allowed to wear suitable face coverings if they wish to do so. The Health and Safety Executive has stated that employers should support employees who wish to wear face coverings as added protection. It is important that face coverings are used in addition to other protective measures and that wearing them does not lead to the relaxation of social distancing and regular hand washing, etc. These practices should be adhered to at all times.

Face coverings may provide extra protection and some schools are now providing face coverings for employees especially where 2-metre social distancing cannot be applied. If a risk assessment identifies that face 'masks' are needed as PPE the employer must source and provide these and put in place training on its correct use.

Following a joint statement by UK chief medical officers about school reopening, UNISON believes the acknowledgement of the

transmission risk between staff in schools underlines why it's vital staff should be able to wear face coverings.

It's not clear why government guidance won't allow them, when they're recommended for other workplaces. We are following closely the shifting advice for Scotland's schools and will update members when possible.

UNISON continues to monitor and review the advice on face coverings. In the meantime if you wish to wear a face covering and your employer is refusing to allow you to, please draw their attention to the HSE advice. If your employer still refuses, contact Derbyshire UNISON.



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MENTAL HEALTH

Where can I get emotional support?

The pandemic has affected everyone in different ways, and you might need support with anxiety about being in the workplace, stress from juggling caring responsibilities or coping with bereavement or isolation. If your mental health has been affected, or if you just want to talk to someone, there are lots of options.

UNISON's own charity for members, There for You, can help you to find relevant sources of emotional support. For more information contact them on 020 7121 5620, email thereforyou@unison.co.uk or contact Derbyshire UNISON. Note you may also be able to access financial support from the charity if you need it.

You can also contact [Education Support](#), which offers a free 24/7 helpline with fully trained counsellors on hand to listen.

UNISON continues to urge employers to take real action to support staff with their mental health.

IN THE WORKPLACE
EMPLOYEES STILL STRUGGLE
TO TALK ABOUT MENTAL
HEALTH ISSUES



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CHILDCARE

I have childcare responsibilities which will make it difficult for me to arrive at work for the usual start time or to attend as normal in September. What are my rights?

The DfE has not issued specific advice to schools about employees whose children are unable to return to school. UNISON continues to raise this with government.

UNISON's advice is that you should explain your situation to your employer, and we would expect your employer to be reasonable in accommodating your circumstances. This is in line with the NJC Green Book (guidance which covers the overwhelming majority of schools) which states that employers should be fully supportive of employees with childcare responsibilities and consider flexible working arrangements including working from home; adapting working patterns to care for children or dependants; or taking time off, whether this is special leave, annual leave or flexible working.

In addition Boris Johnson said during Prime Minister's Questions on 11 May that he expects employers to be reasonable and take account of employees' childcare difficulties: "We will count on employers to be reasonable if people can't go to work because they can't get the childcare that they need...plainly they are impeded from going to work and they must be defended and protected on that basis".

Many UNISON members will be entitled to paid dependant leave due to agreements negotiated with their employer, so please seek

a copy of any related policy. Talk to Derbyshire UNISON if you are unsure what your rights are.

In the worst-case scenario, there are legal rights to unpaid leave in some cases. But we don't believe this should be necessary and the employer should facilitate your request for flexible working to facilitate your childcare responsibilities.

Good employers will recognise the benefits of retaining experienced and committed staff and should consider the childcare needs of all staff when planning for September and beyond. If women are disadvantaged because their employer does not agree to reasonable flexible working arrangements to allow them to balance work and childcare, they may be able to claim indirect sex discrimination if reasonable attempts to resolve the matter individually or collectively do not resolve the issue. Again, you should seek advice from Derbyshire UNISON first.

I am a first aider and have been asked to look after children who display symptoms of COVID-19 at school until their parent/carer picks them up. What protection should my school provide with me to do this role?

The DfE's guidance has a section called 'Prevention' which specifically deals with this. This guidance says that PPE is only needed if the staff members looking after the child can't keep two metres away.

UNISON strongly believes that the DfE guidance is not sufficient and that full PPE must be available for anyone supervising someone with symptoms as staff cannot



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predict if they will need to get closer to students. Any member of staff volunteering for this duty must be given full training and an individual risk assessment – see the joint union guide for vulnerable employees.

The DfE guidance also states that any members of staff who have helped someone with symptoms, or students who have been in close contact with them, do not need to self-isolate unless: they develop symptoms themselves; if the symptomatic person subsequently tests positive; or if they have been requested to do so by NHS Test and Trace.

UNISON believes that all staff should be allowed to test as early as possible after suspected contamination, as this will limit potential cross infection. Please raise this with your school.

Should my school keep open its windows to reduce the risk of infection spreading?

All evidence to date suggests that ventilation is hugely important in helping reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading (risk decreases outdoors).

Please see page 5 of the joint union checklist. The section called 'Ensuring good respiratory hygiene' sets out the measures your school should be taking in this regard. If your school is not following these measures, please contact Derbyshire UNISON.



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PAY

If I have to self-isolate or my school is closed as a result of a local lockdown will I still be paid?

The overwhelming majority of school members, including in academies, are covered by protections under the NJC 'Green Book' terms and conditions. The Green Book is negotiated by UNISON and the other support staff unions and contains the following clause:

"An employee who is prevented from attending work because of contact with infectious disease shall be entitled to receive normal pay. The period of absence on this account shall not be reckoned against the employee's entitlements under this scheme"



This means that if you are employed under Green Book terms and conditions and are required to self-isolate you will continue to receive your normal pay. In addition, this period should not be recorded as sickness absence and **should not** therefore be counted against your sickness absence entitlement or used as part of any other procedure i.e. capability etc.

Even if you are not covered by Green Book terms and conditions, your employer should observe this agreement during this emergency.

I work for a catering or cleaning contractor in the school. What will happen to my pay if I have to self-isolate or the school is closed due to a local lockdown?

Private outsourced catering, cleaning, IT companies etc. are still being paid by the school, so contracted staff should be fully paid. In addition, this period **should not** be recorded as sickness absence and **should not** therefore be counted against your sickness absence entitlement or be used in any other procedure i.e. capability etc.

UNISON believes that contractors should comply with the same procedures as the school in this emergency, otherwise this could undermine attempts to reduce the spread of virus. UNISON is therefore calling on school employers to require contractors to pay full sick pay and the real Living Wage as a minimum (as part of our Clean Schools, Safer Schools campaign). This would help to remove financial barriers to outsourced staff self-isolating in cases of local COVID outbreaks. The importance of these measures cannot be overstated. Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that those care homes which



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offered full contractual sick pay to their staff carried lower risk of infection to their residents.

**I am an agency staff member.
Will I still be paid during periods
of COVID-related absences/
closures period?**

The school should, at the minimum, pay you to the end date of your assignment. In addition, many schools have already committed to continue full pay for agency staff, in line with directly employed staff, during the entire health emergency. Agency staff will, alongside other school-employed staff, play a vital role and UNISON is arguing that you should be kept on full pay during this period.



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SCHOOL TRANSPORT

What is the government's advice on school transport?

The Department for Education (DfE) guidance on schools reopening makes a distinction between 'dedicated school transport; and wider public transport:

- by dedicated school transport, they mean services that are used only to carry students to school. This includes statutory home to school transport, but may also include some existing or new commercial travel routes, where they carry school students only
- by public transport services, they mean routes which are also used by the general public

What's the guidance on dedicated school transport, including statutory provision?

The advice for passengers on public transport to adopt a social distance of two metres from people outside their household or support bubble (or a 'one metre plus' approach where this is not possible) need **not** apply from the autumn term on dedicated transport.

UNISON does not agree with this. Students should wear face coverings on all transport as this will protect drivers and other transport users. Supplies of coverings should be available for students along with procedures

for disposal and storage of the coverings. We expect that it will be necessary to increase school transport in many areas. Staggered start times and transport schedules could cause problems for parents with children of different ages at the same or other schools.

For further details of the measures we want schools and local authorities to take to reduce the risk on dedicated school transport, see page 15 of the joint union risk assessment checklist.

What should schools consider when planning school transport services?

DfE guidance states that schools must consider the following when planning school transport services from September:

- how students are grouped together on transport, where possible this should reflect the bubbles that are adopted within school
- use of hand sanitiser upon boarding and/or disembarking is to be available
- additional cleaning of vehicles
- organised queuing and boarding where possible
- distancing within vehicles wherever possible
- the use of face coverings for children (except those under the age of 11), where appropriate, for example, if they are likely to come into very close contact with people outside of their group or who they do not normally meet



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- staff should also be allowed to wear masks or face coverings if they wish to do so

The above applies to coaches and minibuses picking up the same students each day, as well as services which are used by different students on different days, including students with SEND. Sufficient transport provision must be made available to avoid any overcrowding and allow safer travelling for staff and students.



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RISK ASSESSMENTS

What is a risk assessment?

Employers must protect people from harm in the workplace. This includes taking reasonable steps to protect staff, students and others from coronavirus (COVID-19) within schools. A risk assessment is the combined effort of identifying and analysing potential hazards and dangers that may negatively impact individuals.

School employers have a legal duty to make sure that a risk assessment has been undertaken to identify the measures needed to reduce the risks from coronavirus (COVID-19) so far as is reasonably practicable and make the school COVID-secure. All risk assessments should be periodically updated or as and when local and or individual circumstances change. Your school has a legal requirement to update its risk assessment to include additional/revised control measures needed for a full return to school in September and to consult with trade unions.

UNISON believes that schools should undertake an individual risk assessment for any staff member who requests one, for example if they or someone they live with is in a vulnerable group (please see separate FAQ on vulnerable and higher risk groups). Department for Education guidance does not mention schools carrying out individual risk assessments for vulnerable school staff – despite the fact that government advice for businesses reopening advises them to consider vulnerable groups. UNISON believes the DfE guidance for schools on carrying out risk assessments is inadequate.



The joint unions have produced a helpful checklist to help with carrying out risk assessments in a school setting, which you can send to your school to aid them in their planning.

I haven't seen my school's risk assessment. What should I do?

Your employer has a legal obligation to carry out a risk assessment. If you have not been spoken to about your risk assessment or had a risk assessment prior to your school opening in September, you should speak to your head teacher and request that a risk assessment is done before you return to work. A collective group risk assessment will not be sufficient in identifying individual risk. Contact Derbyshire UNISON immediately if you are required to work without a risk assessment being carried out.



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CATERING

I am a catering manager and I have not seen, or been spoken to, regarding a risk assessment.

The risk assessment for the return to work is a legal requirement and the school must have plans in place by September. It is a legal requirement that trade union representatives are consulted on the risk assessment. The School Food Plan Alliance have produced a helpful checklist to assist schools in their risk assessment, which your school may find useful along with the wider joint union checklist. If you do not know what measures are being undertaken in your place of work then contact Derbyshire UNISON who will be able to let you know the situation.

I am being asked to change my hours to cover staggered lunch breaks but I have responsibilities outside of work that make this impossible.

Many schools are choosing to operate a staggered lunch and/or break service to keep 'bubbles' separate and this does show that the school is putting safety of staff and students as a high priority when they do this. However, changing your hours of work is a change to the terms and conditions that you agreed to when you took the job and must not be done without your consent. There should be enough staff working to ensure that a rota can be covered without affecting anyone detrimentally and management should communicate with all staff concerned to find a solution that suits everyone.



I am worried about how different my job is going to be when I return.

The government expects schools to provide a full hot meals service and UNISON is proud of the healthy hot meals provided by school meals workers. However, social distancing does mean that many schools will struggle and are making temporary changes. We are working to ensure that any changes are communicated to you in a timely manner, full training is provided in any new systems and most importantly that any changes made are temporary and an appropriate response to the pandemic. These changes must not be used to undermine the vitally important school meals service.

It is important to register that social distancing is applicable to catering staff. Being told to work back-to-back, for instance, is not good enough. Do not break the national guidelines - challenge your employer and contact Derbyshire UNISON for assistance if they refuse to comply.



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FE COLLEGES

Reopening colleges

The Department for Education has updated its guidance and have suggested colleges should plan for a full high-quality education programme for all from September 2020.

UNISON has worked with other FE unions and the employers (the Association of Colleges) to produce a new planning guide (see back page) to assist those working in colleges when they revisit their plans for wider opening in consultation with unions, staff and learners. It is intended to help ensure that colleges meet their duties to assess risks and take steps to remove or control them

UNISON worked with the other college unions to set out five tests that must be met by the government and colleges before more students in England can be welcomed back.

The five tests

1: Much lower numbers of COVID-19 cases

The new case count must be much lower than it is now, with a sustained downward trend and confidence that new cases are known and counted promptly. And the Government must have extensive, open and transparent arrangements in place for testing, contact tracing and isolating those with COVID-19 symptoms.

2: A national plan for social distancing

The Government must have a national plan in place which includes parameters for both appropriate physical distancing and safe levels of social mixing in all further education settings. To help ensure physical distancing during travel and at colleges, all staff and

students who can work and study from home must continue to do so.

3: Comprehensive testing

Comprehensive access to regular testing for students and staff, with isolation for all suspected cases, to ensure colleges don't become hotspots for COVID-19. In addition to routine testing, protocols to be in place to ensure testing across whole college sites and other non-college work-based learning sites whenever a confirmed case of COVID-19 occurs.

4: A whole college strategy for health and safety

Risk assessments and safe ways of working for all tasks and spaces within a college should be established with relevant staff and unions in advance. This should include regular deep cleaning and stringent hygiene measures. Where PPE is identified as required by risk assessments, supplies of these are secured before re-opening of affected areas. Strategy to be clearly communicated to all stakeholders.

5: Protection for the vulnerable

Vulnerable staff, and staff who live with vulnerable people, must work from home, fulfilling their professional duties to the extent that is possible. Plans must specifically address the protection of all staff, students and members of their households who are vulnerable to COVID-19.

As we have said in the introduction, we are awaiting the rewriting of the colleges FAQs. In the meantime, please make sure you read the general advice which you can find within the schools FAQs.



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HERE WHEN YOU NEED US

Read the government guidance on school reopening



Read the government guidance on school reopening for specialist schools and other settings



Read the workplace checklist issued by the unions



Read the advice for vulnerable staff issued by the unions



Read the planning guide for colleges issued by the unions



Read government advice on safe working in education



Read HSE advice on wearing face coverings

