

The Update

2 Nov 2022

The latest news and announcements from Derbyshire UNISON

COVID-19 in schools

Your school should be following certain safety measures around ventilation, face masks and risk assessments to protect staff and safeguard students.



Latest COVID-19 advice for school and early years staff

Unfortunately Covid cases are again increasing significantly and recent DfE attendance data shows pupil absences are also increasing at the same time. UNISON is therefore calling on the government to produce a winter plan to reduce illness and absences.

Contacting Derbyshire UNISON

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UNISON assistant general secretary Jon Richards said:

“Winter is coming and the virus is staging a comeback. Yet the government doesn’t appear to have a plan.

“Unless urgent action is taken, cases will surge and schools, hospitals, care homes and other key public services will be without the staff they need to function.

“Bringing back free testing is a must so people don’t unwittingly

take the virus into work, school or the pub.

“A system of proper sick pay where everyone, no matter where they work, gets full pay when poorly is also long overdue.”

In the meantime your school should be following certain safety measures to protect staff and safeguard students.

This circular highlights those measures and provides links to support you in school.

Covid symptoms/positive tests

Your schools should be urging all those with either Covid symptoms or a positive Covid test (regardless of whether they have symptoms or not) to stay at home in line with government guidance until they are no longer infectious and are well enough to attend.

Schools should ensure staff are fully paid for these absences and that these periods of absence should in our view not be counted towards sickness absence triggers or sickness entitlements in line with NJC guidance.

Schools should also ensure contractors (catering, cleaning etc) are following the same practice for their staff.

Ventilation

Your school should ensure good ventilation, and monitor CO2 levels to reduce the risk of airborne transmission of Covid and other viruses. Your school should be actively monitoring CO2 levels in all rooms to check ventilation and working to keep CO2 levels below 800 ppm. See our [guidance on improving ventilation in schools](#).

Face masks

Your school should be allowing all staff and pupils who wish to do so to wear a face mask in school. High quality and well-fitting face masks offer much greater protection to the wearer especially when a significant number of people around you are not wearing masks. In line with our [Joint Unions' Risk Assessment checklist](#) (please note this document is being updated) we are urging schools to provide FFP2/3 masks to staff who were previously classified as clinically extremely vulnerable or otherwise at significantly greater risk, and any member of staff who is anxious about their situation.

We also encourage schools and other settings to adopt an agile approach and respond proportionately to spikes and outbreaks by reinstating the wearing of masks where necessary as part of risk assessments and in response to local public health guidance.

Where face coverings are worn, pupils who

rely on lip reading or facial expressions to communicate, can be supported by the wearing of transparent face coverings which the school should provide.

Covid booster/flu jabs

Eligible staff should be allowed paid time off work to get their Covid booster and or flu shot.

Risk assessments

Schools should have updated both their 'whole school general risk assessment' and 'individual risk assessments for staff and pupils with underlying health conditions' in line with their legal health and safety responsibilities. See [our risk assessment guidance from last term](#) (please note this document is being updated) which we are urging schools to follow.

Long COVID

The education unions have produced a joint [Long Covid Protocol](#) that we are urging school employers to sign up to locally. Has your school signed up? If not then please send them a copy.

Clinically vulnerable

UNISON published [joint union guidance](#) with NEU, GMB and Unite to explain the current government guidance for clinically vulnerable people (please note this document is being updated).

Here is a list of all the relevant DfE and government guidance relevant to education and childcare settings:

- [Health protection in children and young people settings, including education](#)
- [Emergency planning and response for education, childcare, and children's social care settings](#)
- [Good estate management for schools](#)

New and updated UKHSA guidance for the general population, which is also relevant to education and childcare settings, includes:

- [People with symptoms of a respiratory infection including COVID-19](#)
- [Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19](#)
- [Ventilation to reduce the spread of respiratory infections, including COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19: guidance for people whose immune system means they are at higher risk](#)

Workloads

We know how exhausted school staff are after the last two years and it is important you are not being required to undertake roles that you are not trained, qualified or paid to do.

Any proposed changes in role or responsibilities for support staff should be discussed and agreed with the individual staff member.

Only suitably qualified teaching assistants (usually HLTAs) should be asked to lead classes. Support staff who are asked to undertake a role they are not trained or qualified for should urgently raise this with their union rep or the branch office 01629 582266 / branch@unisondc.co.uk

Classroom temperatures

It has come to our notice that some school staff have been informed their school will only be heated to a temperature of 16 degrees celsius. This is the legal minimum temperature and is totally inadequate, especially when coupled with ventilation measures. If you are aware of this being the case in your setting, please inform UNISON immediately. (01629 582266 / branch@unisondc.co.uk)