

FAQs on BET schools and COVID-19

BOURNE EDUCATION TRUST
VERSION 1, 4TH SEPTEMBER 2020

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1. COVID-19 testing/vaccines

Are schools carrying out COVID-19 tests? How do I get a test for myself or a member of my household?

No, please go to <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/>.

What symptoms should I be looking out for?

Familiarise yourself with the symptoms and make sure you know what to do if you think someone is unwell. The most common symptoms are:

- A new, continuous cough
- Fever/high temperature (37.8C or greater)
- Loss of, or change in, sense of smell or taste.

Further advice can be found at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>.

What do I do next if someone in the household has symptoms?

Please do not send your children to school if you suspect they or someone in the household may have COVID-19. If a member of your household has symptoms you should book a test as soon as possible, which is as soon as symptoms first appear. You can request a test at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/>.

Are schools "detaining" children who display symptoms?

No. If a child is showing symptoms of COVID-19 they will be isolated from others within the school until a parent/carer can come to collect them. If that child has siblings in the school, parents will be asked to collect them too, even if they are not displaying symptoms. They should remain at home and everyone in the household should self-isolate until the person who is symptomatic receives their test results.

If the test is negative, household members can stop isolating. If the child has no symptoms such as fever, or diarrhoea and vomiting for 48 hours and is better, then the child can return to school. If the test is positive, that person must isolate for 10 days and those in the household for 14 days.

Are children being vaccinated at school against COVID-19?

No. There is currently no vaccine against COVID-19.

Are schools regularly taking children's temperatures using thermometer guns?

No. We are asking parents to make sure they are aware of all the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and to keep their child at home if they, or someone else in the household is suspected of having the virus. Likewise, if your family have returned (or come) to England from a country which is not exempt from the UK quarantine rules, children should stay at home following the relevant guidance.

2. Self-isolation/quarantine

Who must isolate if someone in the household is showing symptoms?

Everyone in the household should self-isolate until the person who is symptomatic receives their test results. If the test is negative, household members can stop isolating. If the child has no symptoms such as fever, or diarrhoea and vomiting for 48 hours and is better, then the child can return to school. If the test is positive, that person must isolate for 10 days and those in the household for 14 days.

Someone in my household has tested positive, what do we do now?

You must all isolate at home for 14 days. If anyone else in the household develops symptoms during this period, you should arrange to be tested. You will need to complete the 14-day isolation even if you have tested negative as you could still be incubating the virus.

My child has had contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19, what do we do now?

If they have been asked to isolate at home because they are a contact of a confirmed case, they must isolate at home for 14 days from the last day they had contact. You will be told what day this was by the Test and Protect team. If they, or anyone else in the household, develop symptoms during this period you should arrange to be tested. They will need to complete the 14-day isolation even if they have tested negative as they could still be incubating the virus.

My child has had an ordinary cold and a cough which is now lingering, can they come back to school?

If the cough is not new, the child is showing no other symptoms and either a test was not necessary (as COVID-19 was never suspected) or they had a COVID-19 test which was negative, then your child can return to school.

We have just come back from a holiday overseas; do we need to quarantine?

For the latest advice on which countries require you to quarantine on your return, please visit <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus>.

What if a parent regularly travels abroad for work and is exempt from quarantine (working in oil and gas industry/road haulage etc.). Do the children need to quarantine each time the parent returns?

No. If your children have not been abroad, they do not need to quarantine.

3. Outbreaks in schools

What happens if there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in a school/educational setting?

If there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in school or an educational setting, the local Health Protection Team (HPT) will set up an Incident Management Team (IMT) to assess the situation in more detail. The assessment will draw on information gathered by speaking with the case, their contacts, from the school itself and the education service. It is likely the headteacher and members of the school leadership team will attend any meetings. If during these preliminary investigations others are found to have symptoms, they too would be advised to self-isolate and to be tested.

Further steps might include isolating a wider group of pupils and staff, but this would depend on each individual situation. Cleaning and disinfection protocols would be enhanced as they are a vital part of prevention and reduction in the spread of infection.

What happens if there are concerns that several children/staff are unwell, and COVID-19 might be present in the school/educational setting but there have not been any test results?

If pupils/staff are unwell and there is a concern this might be COVID-19, the headteacher or senior leader at a school or educational setting will contact Public Health England and the local Health Protection Team directly. It is likely the immediate advice would be that individuals with symptoms should self-isolate and are tested. There will still be circulation of other more common viruses.

Will the school close if any child or teacher tests positive for COVID-19?

Each case will be looked at individually to assess the risk. If someone in the school tests positive, the school will continue to follow measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The local Health Protection Team will conduct a rapid investigation and undertake a risk assessment. The HPT will advise on the most appropriate actions to take.

What interventions might be put in place if there is an outbreak in the school?

The local Health Protection Team or Incident Management Team will work with the school to identify the appropriate measures. They will decide what steps need to be taken locally to contain any outbreak.

What if more cases are found in the school/education setting?

An outbreak is defined as two or more people who experience a similar illness or confirmed infection and are linked by a common factor such as an education setting. An outbreak will be managed intensively by the Public Health Team.

How will pupils and parents know what is happening?

The Incident Management Team would establish a sub-group, which includes staff from the education department and the affected school to work together on communications with Public Health England. This would ensure staff, pupils and parents have the information and advice they need to do the right things and why.

How long could an outbreak last?

Depending on the scale, an outbreak could take several weeks to run its course. However, schools have already adapted to hybrid learning and an outbreak need not necessarily require a whole school to close. The Incident Management Team may meet every day, less frequently as the situation becomes stabilised. Public Health England will provide ongoing advice, support and surveillance of the situation and on any additional positive test results should these occur.

Who will contact us to let us know if our child has been directly affected?

Anyone who is identified as having been a 'close contact' with any of those who have tested positive, will be contacted directly by the local Incident Management Team. Close contacts will be advised to self-isolate at home and they will be given full advice on what that means.

Can schools give out children's details to track and trace investigators?

Yes.

How will we know when the children can safely return?

The Health Protection Team or Incident Management Team will declare when the outbreak is over.

4. Hygiene and Cleaning

How often are classrooms/schools being cleaned?

All our schools were given an enhanced clean before the children and staff started back. Areas that are frequently used are being cleaned regularly during the day.

Is hand sanitiser available in school?

Hand sanitiser is available for children and adults coming in and out of our buildings and when moving from class to class. Children can bring their own hand sanitiser to school if they want.

What measures have you put in place to make sure children are washing their hands regularly?

Teachers and pupils are following new cleaning and hygiene protocols which include regular hand washing. You can help at home too by talking to children about the need to keep themselves and others safe at school by washing their hands.

Is it safe for my child to use the toilets in school?

Yes, schools have their own systems in place for the use of toilets to cut down on close contact and the spread of germs. All children and staff should follow these steps:

- a. Frequent washing/sanitising of hands and drying thoroughly, and always when entering/leaving the building, before/after eating and after using the toilet.
- b. Avoid touching faces including mouth, eyes and nose.
- c. Using a tissue or elbow to cough or sneeze.

5. Face coverings and physical distancing

Do primary and nursery school children need to wear face coverings in school?

No. Primary and nursery school children do not have to wear face coverings in school, but they can if they would prefer to.

Do secondary school children need to wear face coverings in school?

Yes, but not in the classroom. We ask that all children in BET secondary schools wear face coverings in the communal areas of the school. This means they must be wearing a face covering when moving about the school, when they come in and when they leave, when they go to the toilet and when they are moving between classes. There are exemptions for those with pre-existing conditions or medical issues that would prevent this. If this applies to your child, then please contact your school.

Must teachers, or other adults, wear face coverings in school?

Teachers and adults must wear face coverings in communal areas in BET secondary schools. They do not have to wear them in the classroom, **unless** they are going to be close to someone (within 2m, face-to-face) for longer than 15 minutes. They must wear a face covering in communal areas, when moving about the school, when they come in and when they leave, when they go to the toilet and when they are moving between classes.

Do all children need to wear a face covering on school transport?

Yes, all children aged 11 and over must wear a face covering on all types of school transport.

My child cannot wear a face covering because of physical/behavioural/emotional reasons?

If a child cannot wear a face covering for specific reasons, they will not have to. Please, contact your school to discuss this.

My child cannot wear a face covering, do I need to notify the school?

You should contact your school to discuss why you think your child cannot wear a face covering. It may be that an individual risk assessment needs to be carried out.

What reasons will be considered acceptable for a child not to wear a face covering?

There can be many reasons why face coverings are not suitable for certain children. If you feel your child should not be wearing one for health, behavioural or emotional reasons, then please contact your school to discuss this.

No child will be denied education because they are not wearing a mask, but it is in everyone's interest to do what they can to comply, to try our best to keep the whole school community safe.

What will happen in the school if a child refuses to wear a face covering?

If there is no obvious reason why a child should not wear a face covering and the school have not been contacted by a parent requesting they be exempt, this matter would be dealt with by the school in line with the behaviour management policy.

What counts as a face mask or face covering?

A face covering can be a covering of any type (except a face shield) that covers the mouth and nose. It is recommended that it be made of cloth or other textiles and should be two, and preferably three layers thick, and through which you can breathe. Religious face coverings that cover the mouth and the nose count as face coverings for these purposes. Transparent face coverings which assist communication for those who rely on lip reading and facial expressions can also be worn.

Why aren't the schools providing face coverings?

Face coverings have been necessary in enclosed public places for some time now so it is reasonable to assume that most children and young people will have access to reusable face coverings. YouTube has guidance on how to make a simple face covering – see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRfhuRNua_E.

However, where anybody is struggling to access a face covering, they have forgotten it, or it is dirty, schools will have a small contingency supply available.

Where do children put their masks when they are not wearing them, for example, during lessons?

Every time they put on or take off their face mask they should wash or sanitise their hands first and avoid touching their face. When temporarily storing a face mask, in their pocket or school bag, they should put it into a washable bag or container first. A zip-lock freezer bag is ideal for this. They must not put the mask down on surfaces where it can pick up germs.

If the face covering is reusable, it should be washed every day at 60 degrees centigrade or in boiling water.

Teach your child how to put on and take off the covering, using only the handles and remind them they should not touch their face covering.

What about disposable face coverings?

We would prefer if children could be provided with reusable face coverings as they are better for the environment and create less waste. They are also more cost effective for you. If using disposable face coverings though, please remind your children these should only be worn once, then disposed of properly. If the face covering is not reusable, they should dispose of it safely in the general waste bin. Face coverings must not be discarded on transport, even in any on-board bins. When pupils get off, they should take their face covering with them and either store it for later (in line with guidance) or dispose of it in a bin, away from the bus or train.

Please remind your children it is not acceptable to just throw these face coverings away. Littering is a criminal offence, and you can receive a fixed penalty of up to £80.

Do pupils need to physically distance from each other?

Children do not have to physically distance from each other, but they should try to keep their distance from adults. It would be helpful if you could remind them of this and practice physical distancing with them to help them understand how far 2m is. All adults in schools should try to keep 2m apart.

Schools have their own systems in place for the use of toilets to try to cut down on close contact and the spread of germs.

Where possible our schools will cut down on the movement of pupils around the school and in secondary schools there may be specific arrangements in place for children moving around the school. Activities where lots of children gather will be avoided, so there are unlikely to be normal school assemblies for a while.

What other measures are in place?

Wearing a face covering is just one way to try to stop the spread of the virus. Children should be reminded of the other ways to help keep themselves and others safe:

- Physically distancing from adults (2m)
- Do not share pens, pencils and other personal items, especially food
- Wash hands regularly
- Always cough or sneeze into a handkerchief or the elbow, and wash hands afterwards.

6. Uniforms and equipment

Do children need to wear school uniform?

Yes, we expect children to wear their school uniform as normal.

Is it alright for my child to bring their own pencil case to school?

It is alright for children to bring their own pencil case to school, but they should not share anything in it with other children.

How are you making sure resources or equipment that is being used by more than one person is clean and safe to use?

Teachers and pupils are wiping down surfaces and resources they have used, once they've finished using them, or move classroom.

Are water fountains available in school?

Yes, water fountains are available, for pupils to fill up their own water bottles, but not for direct drinking, though individual schools may have alternative arrangements in place.

If we return to home learning, or move to blended learning, I do not have any/enough devices for my children to use. Can you help?

Should your child have limited access to a device at home to engage with their learning, please contact the school that your child attends to register your request.

Why are some schools saying they will not be using paper or exercise books and children must bring their own devices, but other schools are using exercise books?

Blended learning during lockdown has meant that schools are building on the benefits of using technology in curriculum delivery. Where schools can use technology then this is encouraged. Protocols exist for cleaning IT and are being followed where necessary. Where this is not possible schools are using individual workbooks to reduce the possibility of transmission. Textbook sharing is minimised and controlled. Schools are trying to ensure individual usage thereby reducing risk.

Are schools still able to hand out textbooks? How do I know these are safe to bring home?

Where there are sufficient copies of textbooks these are being given out on an individual basis.

7. School meals/milk

Will my child be able to get lunch at school?

Yes, a limited menu of school meals is available in all schools as normal and lunches can be booked and paid for online as usual. Individual schools may change their routine or timings slightly.

Can my child bring a packed lunch with them?

Yes, packed lunches can be brought in as usual, but children should not share what is in them with anyone else.

My child is in the sixth form school and goes to the local shops at lunchtime, can they still do this?

Yes, we realise that in secondary schools, some young people choose to leave school at lunchtime to visit local shops. They will need to remember to wear a mask and be aware that queues may be much longer as shops might operate a “one in one out” policy. Secondary schools with sixth forms will provide more guidance on local arrangements.

Is school milk available?

In general, school milk is available and can be booked and paid for in the usual way. Under 5s can continue to access free milk if requested. However, some schools have delayed the start of the service whilst they reopen for all pupils. Please contact your school for details of when the service is available from.

8. Breakfast and after-school clubs

When will breakfast and after-school clubs begin again?

This will vary from school to school. Please contact your child’s school if unsure.

9. Getting to school

Is school transport (buses, minibuses, taxis) running as normal?

School transport is running as normal however, there are rules that need to be followed:

- **Hand hygiene** is important, so children using school transport **must** wash their hands before they leave the house. Hands will also have to be sanitised on arrival at school.
- Children over the age of 11 travelling on **all school transport must wear a face covering** unless they are medically exempt.
- Children **must now wear a face mask on school buses**.

Do all children need to wear a face covering on school transport?

Yes, all children aged 11 and over must wear a face covering on all types of school transport (unless they are medically exempt).

I like to drop my child off by car, can I still do this?

Even if your child is entitled to free transport, making more use of active travel options will improve their physical and mental health too. The healthiest and most fun way for children to get to school is by walking, cycling, and scooting.

If you are thinking about using a car to get to/from school remember that parking near schools is strongly discouraged for safety reasons. Why not look for alternative drop off points, away from the school, where you and your children can walk the remaining distance?

I usually take my child to school; can I still do this?

Yes, but please remember to stay **2m away from other adults** when dropping your children off at school. Do not congregate around the school gates. Schools have their own tailored approach to how children should arrive and leave. Speak to your school for more information.

10. Emotional well-being

My child is feeling anxious about being back in school and worried they might catch COVID-19. What can I do to reassure them?

It is understandable that some children may feel very anxious about an outbreak of COVID-19, being back in the classroom, exam results or starting a new school. There is a lot of good advice for children and parents from Mental Health UK – see <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/returning-school-after-lockdown>.

All schools will be focussing on emotional well-being in the first few weeks, to help our children settle back in and to respond to any anxieties or concerns they may have.