

## **Latest Questions on Testing**

**Are tests in special schools are not the same as the tests that have been provided to primary schools, therefore they cannot be used at home. However, I seem to recall reading somewhere that the DfE said there were plans to start providing special schools with home testing kits in the future.**

Special schools with primary aged students only will receive home testing kits for staff as part of the Government's asymptomatic testing strategy in primary settings.

Staff working in 'all-through schools' and middle schools should be tested through the secondary school testing programme. Any schools with a mix of primary- and secondary-aged pupils should follow the secondary school testing procedures for staff outlined in the Government's guidance. All staff, including those working solely with primary-aged pupils, should therefore be tested twice a week in school and these schools will not be issued with home testing kits for staff members. We are working with our suppliers to ensure that these schools receive sufficient kits to test all staff.

The latest guidance on asymptomatic testing in specialist settings can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-full-opening-special-schools-and-other-specialist-settings/mass-asymptomatic-testing-in-specialist-settings>

### **Changes to LFT tests highlighted in the update e-mail:**

Following a positive LFD test result taken at a secondary school or college, an individual will need to self-isolate in line with government [stay-at-home guidance](#), and contact tracing will need to commence. It will also be the trigger for self-isolation payments. Anyone that has been identified as a close contact of a person who has received a positive LFD test result should isolate in line with [stay-at-home guidance](#).

### **How should primary schools manage close contacts of those who have positive LFDs tests?**

Primary schools should send home those people who have been in close contact with the person who has tested positive, as defined in the [actions for schools during the coronavirus outbreak guidance](#). Those who have come into close contact with staff who have a positive LFD result should isolate straight away rather than waiting for the staff member's confirmatory positive PCR test.

### **How to manage primary bubbles: what happens to the teacher's bubble of pupils / other close contacts if they test positive?**

Where there is a positive case, not all members of the teacher's 'bubble' / group will be asked to self-isolate. Schools/nurseries should only send home any pupils who have come into close contact with the teacher as defined in the [actions for schools during the coronavirus outbreak guidance](#).

**PCR tests can remain positive for some time after Covid infection (hence the 90 day delay) – is the same true for LFT?**

PCR test can pick up circulating viral RNA for some time after the person no longer has the infection. LFD picks up viral antigens, which are mainly produced during the infectious phase of the disease, so it is not likely to remain positive for longer.

The guidance on repeat testing has been updated in the protocols and FAQs as follows  
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Testing someone with a recent Covid-19 diagnosis:

- If staff/student have recently (within 90 days) tested positive for COVID-19, they are likely to have developed some immunity.
- These people are exempt from testing by both PCR and LFD within 90 days of a positive test, unless they develop new symptoms.
- However, they may choose to take a LFD test after the isolation period, for example as part of a workplace or community testing programme. If found positive on LFD test, they will be required to self-isolate for 10 days or longer if symptomatic. This should only be done after completion of the required self-isolation period (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>).
- They are still required to self-isolate if identified as a close contact of a positive case, even if this is within the 90-day window.
- Where applicable, for daily contact testing studies/pilots, these individuals may choose to self-isolate for 10 days or take part in daily contact testing with LFD for 7 days. If the LFD is found positive during daily contact testing, they will be required to self-isolate for 10 days.

**LFD testing taking place in secondary schools. Advice has changed to indicate that the tests undertaken in schools needs to be disposed via the schools clinical waste services (unlike home tests) and our stakeholders have advised us that as school demand increases so does the cost to school. Are there any plans now (in light of this change and extra financial burden) to reimburse extra school costs. On that is there any update on extending the school emergency extra costs for Covid-19 that ended last financial year?**

Each school or college will be required to make use of their pre-existing contract with their waste contractor in order to dispose of testing waste. They should advise their waste contractor that waste has been classified as 'healthcare waste' not 'clinical waste'. The healthcare waste (yellow and tiger bags) should be stored and collected separately from existing waste and with the recommended routes for disposal detailed in the "how to guide." Documents are available on the shared document [drive](#).

Funding will be paid to schools and colleges who have conducted testing in respect of workforce costs and other incidental costs relating to testing such as waste disposal.

**Do you have an estimated publication day for updated guidance on secondary school testing? Are you able to share a draft in the meantime? –**

We have produced a range of products to support schools with the delivery of asymptomatic testing. All of our [guidance](#) for schools is being updated to reflect any announcements.

**Clarification over use of school testing facility by local fire service?**

The schools and colleges mass testing programme and community testing programme are designed to be delivered in parallel and are funded separately. If the local fire service wants to use a school building outside of school hours then this is acceptable providing it has the agreement of the school or academy trust. The local authority and school must work together to ensure If a local authority wants to use a school building they must work with the school to satisfy themselves that this is both safe and legally acceptable to do so taking into account issues such as:

- Separate booking and results systems;
- Testing materials for the school and community testing are kept separate;
- Effective safeguarding is in place by ensuring that the periods of operation as a school testing site or community testing site do not overlap.;
- Effective cleaning between use as a school testing site and as a community testing site; and
- Satisfy themselves that they can make the school facilities available for this use.

This list is not extensive and the due diligence on this matter rests with the local authority and school.

**Can all schools and colleges have home testing kits for all staff?**

Home testing kits are being provided to test primary staff as part of the Government's asymptomatic testing strategy in primary settings. Staff, pupils and students in secondary settings will continue to be tested on asymptomatic test sites in their secondary school and college.

Staff working in 'all-through schools' and middle schools should be tested through the secondary school testing programme. Any schools with a mix of primary- and secondary-aged pupils should follow the secondary school testing procedures for staff outlined in the Government's guidance. All staff, including those working solely with primary-aged pupils, should therefore be tested twice a week in school and these schools will not be issued with home testing kits for staff members. We are working with our suppliers to ensure that these schools receive sufficient kits to test all staff.

Home test kits are not yet more widely available for the wider school and college workforce and we will update the sector when there any changes to this advice.

**It would help us with staffing capacity to allow staff to test at home, do we need different kits?**

Work is ongoing to develop more testing options, including the use of antigen LFDs at home for staff and students.

The government is continuing to look at the viability of home test kits in various circumstances and we will write to schools when there is an update.

Test kits delivered to schools and colleges must be used as instructed so secondary school and colleges must use their current test kit allocation via the school or college ATS.

**Why can home testing kits be disposed of in household waste when secondaries and colleges are paying additional costs for waste collection?**

This is a matter of waste classification, so a combination of what the waste material is and also where it is being produced, waste from a household falls under different regulation than that from organisations. We are working with Defra and the Environment Agency to see if we change this for some settings including most schools, but there is still some way to go due to the way that waste is regulated.

Each school or college will be required to make use of their pre-existing contract with their waste contractor in order to dispose of testing waste. They should advise their waste contractor that waste has been classified as 'healthcare waste' **not** 'clinical waste'. The healthcare waste (yellow and tiger bags) should be stored and collected separately from existing waste and with the recommended routes for disposal detailed in the "how to guide." There is also further advice in the "waste letter for providers." Both documents are available on the shared document drive.

Funding will be paid to schools and colleges who have conducted testing in respect of workforce costs and other incidental costs relating to testing such as waste disposal.

**Why is there no mention of RIDDOR reporting in the testing materials?**

This should be raised with the Health and Safety Executive. RIDDOR is normally defined by the LA H&S team who are involved in the assessment and reporting of a COVID RIDDOR – they will have their own policies and procedures; this is not a testing related question and therefore do not believe it should be part of the SOP.

**Should all through schools use the primary or secondary testing model for staff?**

Any schools with a mix of primary- and secondary-aged pupils should follow the secondary school testing procedures for staff outlined in the Government's guidance. All staff, including those working solely with primary-aged pupils, should therefore be tested twice a week in school and these schools will not be issued with home testing kits for staff members. We are working with our suppliers to ensure that these schools receive sufficient kits to test all staff.

**Will the Government issue guidance on how we carry out tests on return to school?**

We have produced a range of products to support schools with the delivery of asymptomatic testing. All of our [guidance](#) for schools is being updated to reflect any announcements.

### **How do we upscale testing without staffing, physical space, and logistics to do so?**

Guidance on how to carry out testing can be found on the [google drive](#).

Secondary schools and colleges can find detailed information on the number of staff and estimated time and space needed for each asymptomatic testing site, and training needs in the following guidance <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/asymptomatic-testing-in-schools-and-colleges> and the Schools and Colleges Handbook. As an indication, a school or college can complete 11-13 tests, per bay, per hour. "We have provided a workforce planning tool which will provide illustrative workforce requirements and associated funding.

The workforce planning tool, which can be accessed within the digital portal, can provide further help and guidance on the size and scale to meet a schools needs.

### **Are the Government considering a staggered return to school to enable us to have the capacity to test pupils twice?**

We hope it will be safe to commence the reopening of schools from Monday 8 March.

The Prime Minister said that in the week commencing 22nd February, the Government intends to set out the results of its review into the latest lockdown measures and publish a plan for taking the country out of lockdown.

A small number of FE students and apprentices who would otherwise be completing their courses or apprenticeships in January, February or March are able to attend where it is not possible for their training or assessment to be completed remotely. This includes:

- those who are due to do a licence to practise, or other occupational competence, assessment in January, February or March.
- those training for some critical worker roles, for example engineering, health & social care, manufacturing technologies, nursing & subjects & vocations allied to medicine, transportation operations & maintenance, agriculture, education and training and building & construction (where this is connected to utilities and communications) that are due to complete in the next 3 months.

This decision follows an in-depth analysis of both the virus prevalence data and the data on NHS capacity. It has been concluded that school and college attendance must continue to be limited to help support the reduction in the overall number of social contacts in communities.

The rapid testing programme for secondary schools and colleges will continue for those on site. All secondary schools and colleges will be expected to test their students as they return to school/college. Staff in primary and secondary schools, and in all colleges, now have access to two tests per week which will continue when schools fully open.

Schools are not expected to remain open to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers over the half-term.

We are committed to giving schools, pupils and parents two weeks' notice of any changes in the current restrictions.

**If school staff are called for vaccination as schools open to more pupils and staff, it will cause huge staffing issues. Could school staff be vaccinated before pupils return?**

JCVI advises that the first priorities for the COVID-19 vaccination programme should be the prevention of mortality and the maintenance of the health and social care systems. This prioritisation captures almost all preventable deaths from COVID-19 and will include thousands of those in the education and childcare workforce.

DfE is working with the Department for Health and Social Care and Public Health England to ensure that the education and childcare workforce is considered for prioritisation in the roll out of the vaccine.

**Some schools have a rota system in place for staff, some working alternate weeks, one week in school, one week working from home, with this in mind should staff test whilst working remotely?**

As key workers, all secondary teaching staff are entitled to be tested twice weekly through the school testing programme and schools should make arrangements for their teachers to be tested in school. While it is up to schools to agree arrangements with members of staff, we would advise that staff working predominantly from home should not be travelling to school specifically to be tested, and that the testing should be carried out when the teaching staff are attending school for other reasons.

When travelling to and from school, teachers should be reminded to follow the national guidance on social distancing, and to avoid journeys on public transport wherever possible.

**Should staff test at home 3 days prior to coming back to school after a week of remote working to ensure any sign of the virus is picked up?**

Same as above.

**Could the Government provide clarification on how testing should work in secondary schools whilst operating on a rota?**

Same as above.

**Can the online registration system be changed to hold details against each child's UPN, which could then be entered at the point of testing to match the test to the person?**

The online registration system is a generic system built by NHS Digital to be used for a range of settings (eg. care homes, prisons), not just school and colleges, which is why UPN is not a valid entry field. Unfortunately, we can't change that, but we are soon to be adding a bulk upload facility to reduce some of the burdens on the registration process.

**What is meant by testing pupils twice on return? Two LFDs 3-5 days apart for every child (who consents) or are we expecting them to PCR before they return? Can they be in school in between the two tests?**

Schools and colleges should continue to test their staff regularly (two days in a week, 3-4 days apart, preferably in the morning of the school day e.g. Monday morning and Thursday morning), and test pupils twice (3-5 days apart) upon their first return to school. This has been in place since January 2021. Under the current testing policy, pupils and students are not being tested on a weekly basis and should have had their two lateral flow tests when they returned the first time. We do not expect pupils and students to be tested on a regular basis, or if they have been absent for a period. Schools have recently been invited to volunteer to participate in a Daily Contact Testing study/trial which would involve regular testing of students. The study has not started yet.

**Should we be testing vulnerable and keyworker students who are in school currently, twice a week?**

Same as above

**What does 'on return to school mean'? Does it mean once classes resume or after isolation or after a weekend?**

When schools and colleges re-open, pupils and students should have their two Lateral Flow Tests. If key workers or vulnerable children are attending school or college, these tests should have been offered when they returned the first time. We do not expect pupils and students to be tested on a regular basis, or if they have been absent for a period.

**If a child has a period of absence whether covid related or not – it could be a child of a critical worker who only attends school on a rota basis, due to parents shifts as an example – do we then carry out the two LFT tests again as they are returning to school, or is this only done the first time the return?**

When schools and colleges re-open, pupils and students should have their two Lateral Flow Tests. If key workers or vulnerable children are attending school or college, these tests should have been offered when they returned the first time. As per current policy, we do not expect pupils and students to be tested on a regular basis, or if they have been absent for a period. This is subject to future national testing policy reviews.