

Asymptomatic testing in schools and colleges – Frequently asked questions

Why is the government implementing this programme of testing?

What are the objectives of the Government's asymptomatic testing strategy in education settings?

By testing we will help to break the chains of transmission of coronavirus. The rapid testing programme in secondary schools and colleges will help to identify asymptomatic positive cases. Those who test positive will then self-isolate, helping to keep other pupils and students in face-to-face education.

Why are you doing one-off testing in the beginning of January?

This testing programme is designed to test as many secondary school and college students possible as they resume education in January to identify asymptomatic cases.

Rapid testing and self-isolation of positive cases will avoid individuals carrying the infection unknowingly and potentially spreading it in the school/college setting or the wider community. It will also support effectiveness of the broader [coronavirus testing programme](#) that the Government is putting in place.

Why is asymptomatic rapid testing being introduced now?

One in three people have the virus without symptoms (they are asymptomatic) so could be spreading the disease unknowingly. New technology that allows for rapid testing means that we can now introduce initial testing of staff and students who may be asymptomatic, then daily testing for staff or students who are identified as contacts. Testing for people who are identified as contacts of positive cases will also mean that they do not need to isolate and can stay in face-to-face education.

This is a significant development that will help to identify positive cases more quickly, break the chains of transmission and reduce the disruption that so many schools, colleges and students have experienced in recent months. Schools and colleges will continue to put in place a range of protective measures to minimise the risk of infection spread and weekly testing for staff will also increase their confidence in the workplace.

Children and young people that fall into the clinically extremely vulnerable group should continue to follow the [Guidance on shielding and protecting extremely vulnerable persons](#).

January return

Why have secondary school and college returns been delayed?

With growing infection rates and rising transmission among secondary age pupils and students, it is vital to do everything possible in helping to tackle these trends whilst prioritising education. Mass testing will allow us to identify more asymptomatic cases and break transmission lines. Delaying most students and pupils' full return to face-to-face education until the 18th of January will provide secondary schools and colleges additional time to prepare and ensure mass testing is in place.

What is the Government's plan for January return?

Primary settings

In areas of the country with extremely high rates of incidence or transmission of the virus, the Government has taken the decision to invoke the [Contingency Framework for Education](#), meaning that some primary schools will delay the return of most pupils for two weeks.

For those areas where the Contingency Framework has not been invoked, primary year groups will return as normal from the start of term and wraparound childcare providers (breakfast and after school clubs) can return from the start of term as planned.

Special needs and Alternative Provision settings

All children and young people can return to face-to-face education in special schools, Alternative Provision and special post 16 settings - have the option of agreeing with parents that individual pupils can stay at home, if this is appropriate. More detail can be found here: [Mass asymptomatic testing in specialist settings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Secondary and FE colleges

Secondary schools and colleges should stagger the return of their students to education to give more time to prepare for the rollout of rapid testing for secondary aged pupils and students to find asymptomatic cases and break chains of transmission, before a full return on 18 January.

From 4 January, secondary schools and colleges should provide exam year groups with remote education in line with what they would receive in class and provide face-to-face education for vulnerable and the children of critical workers. They will not be required to, though they may, provide remote education for any other year groups.

During the second week of term, beginning on 11 January, secondary schools and colleges will provide remote education to all students in line with what they would receive in class and will focus on testing as many students as possible, prioritising staff and those students present in school or college and exam year groups. They will begin a staggered return to education, starting with exam years.

All students in secondary schools and colleges should return to face-to-face education on 18 January.

When will schools and colleges be expected to deliver rapid asymptomatic testing to pupils, students, and staff?

Schools and colleges will be open from 4th January to receive deliveries of lateral flow device (LFD) test kits and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and to prepare for the roll out of mass testing in their education settings. Schools and colleges will also be open to vulnerable young people and the children of critical key workers from the 4th January.

During this first week, the weekly testing of the education workforce should begin as should testing for secondary school age students and pupils who attend school or college in the first two weeks. The Department for Education expects secondary schools and colleges to prioritise testing the most vulnerable pupils and students, including those with additional needs.

From the week of 11th January, the testing of all secondary school age students and pupils should start. This will involve two LFD tests, taken at the education setting, 3-5 days apart and in advance of the full return to face-face education on 18th January.

The workforce will be tested weekly. Students, pupils and members of the workforce who have been identified as a close contact of a positive case within the education setting will undertake serial/ daily testing. This will allow them to continue to come into the education setting provided they test negative each day.

Mass Testing

What is the Government's asymptomatic testing strategy in education settings?

One in three people have the virus without symptoms (they are asymptomatic) so could be transmitting the virus unknowingly. That is why the testing of asymptomatic people can support education settings. Identifying positive cases will help break the chains of transmission. Testing programme will involve secondary school and FE pupils and students initially receiving two LFD tests.

Are schools and colleges still expected to deliver one-off testing, and when is this happening?

The expectation is that all secondary schools and colleges will use the week of the 4th of January to prepare for mass testing. From the 11th of January, two rapid tests will be available to all students to identify asymptomatic cases.

Rapidly identifying and containing any asymptomatic cases will prevent individuals from carrying the infection unknowingly and potentially spreading it in the local community. It will also support the effectiveness of the broader coronavirus testing programme that the government is putting in place.

How will the one-off testing work?

All pupils and students in secondary schools and FE colleges can be offered lateral flow testing from the 11th of January. Secondary school and FE college students and pupils will be able to take two LFD tests spaced between 3-5 days apart. The LFDs supplied do not require laboratory processing and can provide a quick result in up to an hour.

Individuals testing positive will need to self-isolate in line with the [stay-at-home guidance](#) for households for those with a possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection. The student, pupil or staff member should then take a confirmatory PCR test to validate the positive result. Additional PCR tests will be sent to schools and colleges for issuing to any individual that receives a positive test, to support swift access to a confirmatory test.

Testing is not mandatory and any student or pupil who does not wish to take the two LFD tests at the start of spring term will not need to produce a negative test result, or provide proof of having taken a test, to return to face-to-face education on the 18th of January. However, testing is strongly encouraged.

How accurate is a lateral flow device test?

Lateral flow tests are very accurate, which means that only a very small proportion of people who do not have coronavirus will receive a positive result (false positive).

If you test positive on a lateral flow test, it is likely that you are infectious at that moment. By using the lateral flow test we can identify people with a high viral load who are the most likely to spread the virus further.

Those who receive a negative test result from an LFD test must still follow social distancing guidance, wear face coverings when appropriate and wash their hands regularly.

My school is all-through. Should I test my primary aged kids too?

No, the mass testing programme is prioritising secondary age pupils and students in schools and colleges; test kits and PPE will be provided on this basis. Further announcements will be made for testing other age groups in due course.

Who will be doing the testing in schools and colleges?

In most cases, pupils will self-swab in order to provide a test sample. There are a number of related roles in the testing process, which are set out in published guidance.

Staff in schools and colleges will need to support the testing programme. The remaining testing workforce may need to be made up of volunteers and agency staff. If a school or college is experiencing difficulties putting testing arrangements in place, further support may be requested under exceptional circumstances to address logistical and planning issues. Schools and colleges will not be guaranteed this provision - educational settings will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. All secondary schools, colleges and independent special schools will be eligible for additional funding for workforce support. All other independent schools will not be eligible.

How many test kits will be delivered to schools and colleges and how often will further deliveries be made.

The number of test kits that each school will receive has been estimated based on the number of teachers and students and expectations around daily/serial testing based on prevalence. Schools and colleges will receive two deliveries in early January 2021. The first delivery will arrive by Royal Mail. These test kits and PPE are for the initial testing programme. In the second delivery, schools and colleges will receive test kits and PPE for the weekly testing of staff and contact daily/serial testing. You will be able to order additional test kits and PPE throughout the testing period as required and information on how to re-order will be shared shortly. You should receive sufficient test kits and PPE for a minimum of at least 2 weeks.

Will we have to opt in to receive the test kit supplies?

As part of its operational guidance, DHSC will set out a legal agreement with terms and conditions that schools and colleges will opt in to by simply choosing to participate in the testing programme. No specific steps need to be taken to sign-up to receive the first delivery of test kits. Further information will be provided about replenishment of these supplies.

What happens if the school/college operates across multiple sites?

It will be for such schools/colleges to determine whether to test on one site or provide on-site testing on each of their sites. We would encourage testing to take place on each site to make it as easy as possible for pupils/students to get tested.

Getting tested

Will the existing testing service remain open?

The Government's normal testing service for symptomatic individuals will continue. This is the foundation of our testing strategy. It is the most effective way to know if you are positive and need to self-isolate. If you have symptoms, you should continue to book a test via the [NHS Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) service](#) or by calling 119 in England and Wales, or 0300 303 2713 in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

How will you avoid a stigma on those who choose not to take part or who test positive in school/college in front of their peers?

Test results should be communicated to students/pupils and staff in private wherever possible.

Can my family get tested too?

No, this testing is aimed at staff and pupils/students in schools and colleges with the goal of keeping schools and colleges open and students in face-face education. Family members of staff and pupils/students taking part are not eligible. If family members experience COVID-19 symptoms, they must follow standard government guidance, including self-isolating immediately and booking a test through the [NHS Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) service](#) or by calling 119 (England and Wales).

Why should I (the pupil/student/staff member) get tested if I (the pupil/student/staff member) have (has) no symptoms?

Lateral flow tests are designed to detect the level of virus in individuals who do not experience and show any symptoms, but who could still be infectious and pass the virus to others. By taking a test, you will help to stop the spread of the virus, protect other people, and save lives.

Why would I (the pupil/student/staff member) take the test? If positive, I will have to self-isolate. Why would I take the risk?

Lateral flow tests are designed to detect the level of virus in individuals who do not experience and show any symptoms, but who could still be infectious and pass the virus to others. By taking a test, you will help to stop the spread of the virus, protect other people, and save lives. This will also mean that staff can continue going to work, schools and colleges can avoid unnecessary staff shortages, and pupils and students can continue in face-to-face education with their peers.

Consent

What happens if a school cannot get the consent and the child turns up to school?

Participation in the programme requires active consent from the person being tested, or, if they are under 16, their parent or /legal guardian. Any staff member, student, or pupil who does not take part in testing will still be able to attend school or college unless they develop symptoms or have been in close contact with a positive result. People who decline to participate in daily/serial contact testing will follow the usual national guidelines and must self-isolate for ten days

Do you need consent to process the personal data required for testing?

Secondary schools and colleges will need to satisfy themselves that they have a lawful basis for processing personal data. The duties prescribed in education legislation for secondary schools and FE institutions require them to plan for safeguarding needs and promote pupils, and students' welfare may provide sufficient legal basis without having to rely on consent. Schools and colleges will provide staff, pupils and parents with a privacy notice explaining what personal data is required to participate in the programme.

Workforce

Will volunteers require a DBS check?

Schools and colleges must comply with their legal duties regarding pre-appointment checks when utilising agency staff, contractors, and volunteers to support testing. Usually, if you are involved in the testing procedure, or if you are at any time with children unsupervised, then you will require a DBS check. If you are volunteering but not assisting with swabbing (for instance, if you are already trained to provide support for a child who cannot self-administer), and you will not be unsupervised with children/ young people at any time, then you will not need a DBS check.

It is essential that agency staff, contractors and volunteers are appropriately supported and given appropriate roles. The school or college should minimise the mixing of volunteers, agency staff and contractors across groups, and they should remain 2 metres from pupils and staff where possible.

Can you say more about what military support will be available and how they will assist?

The nature of support will depend on the requirements of individual secondary schools and colleges. 1,500 military personnel have been committed to supporting schools and colleges. They will remain on task, providing virtual training and advice on establishing the testing process, with teams on standby to provide in-person support if required by schools and colleges. Schools and colleges can request this additional help through the [DfE helpline](#).

Some military personnel will provide remote support to schools and colleges with strategic planning, assisting with practical elements of delivering mass testing. This support may include answering questions about setting up and running a mass testing site for a large school. In other cases, the Department intends to provide 'on the ground' military support to schools and colleges to assist with setting up testing sites where testing would otherwise not be able to go ahead. Schools and colleges can request this additional help through the DfE Helpline.

What further workforce support may be available to my school or college?

As well as accessing workforce funding and military support, there are other options available to schools and colleges to support their testing workforce.

- Support for pupils who are unable to self-swab may be available to access via our DfE helpline. Clinical support would be for children and young people whose physical and health needs prevent them from administering their own test, and where parents and/or existing school staff cannot assist.
- Leadership support will be made available via Ofsted HMIs or peer to peer support between schools.
- Commercial routes for hiring external temporary and non-clinical routes can

be accessed via a range of existing frameworks. More detail on 'How to Buy' from each of these frameworks will be published on the DfE Portal.

- Accessing volunteers. Schools and colleges can use volunteers that are either already available to them (parent volunteers, school governors, those volunteering in other areas of the school/college) or by engaging with volunteers via one of the national networks such as Do.it.org or Reach Volunteering. Volunteer Centres can also be used as a way of engaging with volunteers, and schools and colleges can find their local centre by using the postcode search function on the National Centre for Voluntary Organisations website.

Will my school or college have costs reimbursed?

Schools and colleges will receive funding to support them with testing costs incurred. We have made £78m available to support schools and colleges with the initial roll-out of mass testing. This will be paid retrospectively. The amount of funding available to a school or college will depend on its size as this will impact the number of additional staff required to conduct testing. We have provided a [workforce planning tool](#) which will provide illustrative workforce requirements and associated funding. The tool is to give an estimate of funding that a school may receive. The basis of your actual funding allocation will be on data returns provided through the 'School Census Autumn 2020' return and the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) R04 return for 2020 to 2021. The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) will automatically make these payments to those institutions that deliver the initial roll-out of rapid mass testing.

What can the funding be used for?

The Department of Education expects that the primary cost incurred will be additional staffing costs, but schools and colleges will have discretion about spending it to meet other reasonable testing costs. Additional relevant expenditure may include:

- Minor incidental expenses, such as printing, paper/stationery, cleaning materials/equipment, tissues, and wipes, etc.; and
- Additional waste disposal costs incurred given the higher waste volumes likely to be generated from the testing bays (for example, LFD kits, disposable PPE, tissues, paper bowls, etc).

Have the insurance companies who work with schools and colleges, including the Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) scheme, confirmed that they would cover all the activities related to the mass testing programme?

The RPA will indemnify members if a claim is brought by a third party (including pupils) or employees. It will cover death, injury, or damage to third-party property, due to the school or colleges undertaking the rapid tests.

It would be advisable that these establishments and all other schools and colleges which are not members of the RPA, should contact their individual commercial insurance provider, for definitive clarification on cover.

RPA cover is subject to the usual RPA Membership Rules and its terms, conditions, and limitations. It will include defence costs and any damages/compensation that the Member is legally liable to pay to the claimant. The RPA will not provide an indemnity to any other party (e.g., the machine manufacturer) if the other party incurs a legal liability.

It is a requirement that risk assessments are undertaken, recorded, and adhered to. In the event of loss or damage to any equipment that is owned by or the Member's responsibility (e.g., through a lease or hire agreement) used in the provision of the testing, the RPA will provide an indemnity to the Member for the cost of repair or replacement. The cover is subject to the usual RPA Membership Rules (including all limitations, conditions, and exclusions).

How are schools and colleges expected to deliver remote education alongside administering mass testing?

Secondary schools and colleges will operate a staggered return, which will support the effective delivery of the mass testing programme and provision of high-quality remote education. This remote learning will be offered to exam year groups (y11 and y13) from 4th January and other students and pupils from the 11th January. Guidance and resources on remote education can be found here – [Get Help with Remote Education – GOV.UK](#). Pupil and students who are classed vulnerable or have parents that are key workers will attend school or college in person from the start of term, as will all students in primary, special and alternative provision schools, and colleges.

To deliver testing at the required scale means schools and colleges need to provide staff members to support the programme. This support will cover the seven testing roles as set out in the [School and Colleges Handbook](#). The Department recognise that teachers' priority should be delivering education and confirms this does not necessarily need to include teaching staff. The testing workforce may be a mixture of volunteers and agency staff, identified by the school or college, such as non-teaching staff or exam invigilators. The Department will reimburse, state-funded schools and colleges, and independent and non-maintained special schools, reasonable workforce costs incurred.

The Department understands that school and college leaders are in the best position to secure the necessary resource for testing; which is from within their own school and local communities. The Department recognise that some schools and colleges may be unable to identify sufficient staff/volunteers to cover the seven testing roles. In such scenarios, the school/college should contact the Schools Helpline and have their case triaged. The Department will assess the specific needs of the school or college. Where additional support is required, the Department will agree on what appropriate assistance is needed on a case-by-case basis. It will reserve extra resources for those schools and colleges that are in greatest need.

Training

How much time does a school or college require to plan the test area, set up the area, and undertake staff training?

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 for 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."

Test process

After LFD testing - the results take up to one hour to develop. Do we hold pupils and students until the result, or can they go back to class?

When the testing is part of routine weekly or mass testing, individuals can return to regular school or college activities. However, anyone tested as part of the daily/serial testing of contacts programme will need to wait somewhere before being allowed to begin normal school/college activities until they receive a negative test result. These holding spaces must be separated for each group of close contacts and cleaned after all individuals leave.

What happens if a pupil, student, or staff member's lateral flow test result is positive?

Individuals who return a positive lateral flow test result must self-isolate immediately and take a confirmatory PCR test. If the PCR test returns a positive result, the individual must continue to self-isolate and follow NHS Test and Trace guidance. They should also inform their school or college of the positive result. A confirmatory PCR test is crucial as it activates contact tracing, which reduces the spread of the disease. If an individual does not take a PCR confirmatory test, they must self-isolate for ten days and inform their contacts to self-isolate in line with public health advice.

Why cannot staff and, students test themselves at home, rather than this having to happen in school?

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

Are secondary schools and colleges to receive supplies of PCR test kits for those who return a positive LFD test?

PCR test kits will be supplied to secondary schools and colleges. Any individual who receives a positive LFD will be provided with a confirmatory PCR test kit to take at home. They will not be expected to take the PCR test in school/college and should return home to self-isolate immediately.

Test area

What happens if a school or college does not have an appropriate space to do this?

Schools and colleges will receive funding to support them with testing costs incurred. A total of £78m has been made available. The Department for Education anticipates the primary costs incurred by secondary schools and colleges will be additional staffing costs. However, they may also spend the funding on any relevant additional non-workforce costs incurred to set up to deliver testing (for example: mirrors, installing temporary hardcovers on carpets to facilitate cleaning; extra cleaning and waste disposal). Where a school or college is still having difficulties in finding suitable space, they should contact the helpline to discuss further options of support that might be available.

SEND

How will mass testing be administered in a SEND context and will there be any additional support or resources for special schools or those with a high number of SEND pupils and students?

The Department for Education has provided [guidance on delivering mass testing in specialist settings](#).

What consideration is given to administering the test for SEND pupils and students or those with co-ordination issues who physically will not be able to manage this due to poor fine motor skills? Will the Test assistant be able to do the test for them?

Special schools and specialist colleges have a range of staff to meet pupils and students' health needs. These staff already have undertaken various training to support health needs and could provide support taking swabs for those who cannot self-administer. "Support for pupils who are unable to self-swab may be available. Clinical support would be for children and young people whose physical and health needs prevent them from administering their own test, and where parents and/or existing school staff cannot assist."

What about student with SEND who will not be able to manage a self-swab who are in a mainstream school?

Support for pupils who are unable to self-swab may be available if there are no suitable staff to administer tests. Clinical support would be for children and young people whose physical and health needs prevent them from administering their own test, and parents or existing school staff cannot assist.

In some cases, the individual may wish to have a trusted adult from the setting to supervise the self-swab of the test. The setting may also wish to consider whether it would agree in exceptional circumstances to a parent coming into the setting to support their child to self-swab or to swab their child. This might be a reasonable adjustment for the testing of a child or young person with a disability, for example.

Is there to be priority testing for SEND pupils and students?

The asymptomatic testing programme will help to keep education settings open and ensure as many pupils as possible receive a high-quality face to face education by helping break the virus' transmission chains. The Department expects schools and colleges to prioritise testing the most vulnerable pupils and students, including those with additional needs.

How are staff defined in special schools?

The teaching workforce includes all staff who are school/college-based. Schools and colleges should also offer testing to other staff members, such as clinical practitioners, therapists, or other support staff. Some staff (particularly those employed through the NHS) may have separate arrangements for regular testing.

Equipment

What equipment or resources will a secondary school or college need to provide?

Detailed information on the materials schools and colleges will need to source and organise to support asymptomatic testing sites is provided in the operational [Guidance for asymptomatic testing in schools and colleges](#) and the [Schools and Colleges Handbook](#).

How and when will test kits/PPE be provided – what will be provided and how will stocks be replenished?

Schools and colleges will initially receive two deliveries of PPE and test kits. The first delivery will arrive by Royal Mail on 4 January. These test kits and PPE are for the mass testing programme. In the second delivery, schools and colleges will receive test kits and PPE for the weekly testing of staff and contact daily/serial testing. You will be able to order additional test kits and PPE throughout the testing period as required, and the Department for education will issue further guidance this shortly. You should receive enough test kits and PPE for a minimum of at least two weeks. The number of test kits that each school will receive has been estimated based on the number of teachers and students and, in line with the daily/serial testing to be carried out from January. The calculation will also consider the prevalence of the virus in the local community.

What specific storage arrangements are required for the test kits?

The temperature for storing LFD devices and reagents is between 2°C and 30°C. The LFD devices and reagents must be between 15°C and 30°C during use.

What are the PPE requirements for staff?

The PPE requirements for staff vary depending on the role. All staff must wear a fluid-resistant (Type 11R) surgical mask. Processors must also wear disposable gloves (which will require changing after each session), a disposable plastic apron, and eye protection (goggles or a visor). The test assistant and results recorder will

both need disposable gloves. The cleaner will need disposable gloves and disposable apron (to be changed in cleaning a spillage) and eye protection (goggles or a visor). PPE should be changed whenever staff members leave and re-enter the test site area (including during a session) or if protective properties are compromised or contaminated.

Transport

What if staff or students need to travel to school or college on public transport – should they still attend school or college if they are in the daily/serial testing window?

After being identified as a close contact of a positive case within an education setting, an individual receiving daily/serial testing will not need to self-isolate, follow social restrictions, or travel arrangements beyond the rules and guidance issued for the tier they are living in. If the individual cannot take a test during this time, i.e., weekends or holidays, they must self-isolate. If the seven-day period ends over the weekend, the individual would need to take a further LFD test on the following Monday.

What happens if, in exceptional circumstances, the parent is unable to collect a child who has tested positive?

Parents or carers should arrange for their child to be collected as quickly as possible following a positive test. The pupil or student should wear a face covering and keep a safe distance from others in a designated waiting area within the education setting. If possible, the child should walk, cycle or scoot home. Pupils and students who have tested positive must not travel home using public transport. Exceptionally the local authority may be able to help source a suitable vehicle which would provide appropriate protection.