

Schools and colleges to reopen from tomorrow as part of Step One of the roadmap

The Prime Minister has today hailed the collective efforts of the public to bring infection rates down so we can start Step One of the roadmap, with pupils across England returning to school and college from tomorrow.

Throughout the pandemic, the Prime Minister and Chief Medical Officer have been clear of the benefits that being in school brings to the physical and mental health of children and young people. Getting children back to face to face education has remained the national priority throughout lockdown.

The sacrifices that have been made by each and every member of the public by staying at home whilst the most vulnerable in our society have been vaccinated, has meant that we can now begin the cautious easing of restrictions. Millions of children and young people will be reunited with their friends and teachers, with schools returning from tomorrow.

Many secondary schools and colleges have already started inviting students for their first rapid lateral flow test, with schools and colleges having discretion on how to stagger the return of their students over the next week to facilitate testing and their safe return to the classroom. After three initial tests on-site students will be provided with two rapid tests to use each week at home.

Nearly 57 million lateral flow tests have already been delivered to schools and colleges across the country. Over 5 million lateral flow tests have been conducted across education settings during lockdown, with nearly one million last week alone.

Prime Minister, Boris Johnson said:

The reopening of schools marks a truly national effort to beat this virus. It is because of the determination of every person in this country that we can start moving closer to a sense of normality – and it is right that getting our young people back into the classroom is the first step.

We are being cautious in our approach so that we do not undo the progress we have made so far and I urge you all not to give up on your efforts to keep your families and others safe. Get the vaccine, get tested, and remember that we are all in this together.

The government has confirmed twice-weekly testing using lateral flow tests will be given for free to all adults in households with primary, secondary school and college-aged children and young people, including childcare and

support bubbles, to help find more Covid-19 cases and break chains of transmission. One in three people who have coronavirus have no symptoms and will be spreading it without realising it, so rapid regular testing offers a reliable and effective additional tool to help keep schools safe. Twice-weekly testing will also be offered to adults working in the wider school community, including bus drivers and after school club leaders.

As we move towards a more normal way of life, testing will be a key part of continuing to protect loved ones and the community. As the Health Secretary set out earlier this week, our roadmap is built on the principle of replacing the protection that comes from lockdown with the protection that comes from vaccines and regular testing.

Lateral flow testing detects cases quickly – in under 30 minutes – meaning positive cases can isolate immediately. This could be the difference between finding and isolating cases and their close contacts, or a whole school being sent home due to an outbreak. It could also be the difference between a workplace having to close for a period, or being able to stay open and running.

Secondary school and college students are also being asked to wear face coverings wherever social distancing cannot be maintained as an additional safety measure through to Easter.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Tomorrow will mark a moment of joy for millions of people across the country – from the students going back to class to the teachers who can't wait to get them back – as young people walk through their school and college gates and are reunited with their friends.

I do not underestimate how challenging the last few months have been with some children in class and most at home, but I do know how important it is for all children to be back in school, not only for their education but for their mental health and wellbeing.

Over the last few days I've been visiting schools and speaking to staff who have been preparing for the full return and their sheer dedication and selflessness has shone through.

I'd also like to thank children, young people, their families and carers for their patience and resilience in the face of the challenges the pandemic has posed.

Existing safety measures also remain in place, including maintaining distance between staff and students where possible, good ventilation and regular hand washing.

Dr Susan Hopkins Covid-19 Strategic Response Director to Public Health England and Chief Medical Adviser to NHS Test and Trace said:

Schools re-opening for all students is important for children's wellbeing and mental health as well as their learning.

Scientific studies show that rates of COVID-19 infection in schools reflect rates in the community and schools have reduced the risk of transmission. With extra precautionary measures and twice-weekly testing in place and the lowest rate of infection since September 2020 it's better that students are now back in the classroom.

Outside of schools, it remains crucial that current restrictions are followed.

The return to face to face education has been supported with a £1.7 billion package, focusing on an expansion of one-to-one and small group tutoring programmes across all age groups, summer provision for those pupils who need it the most, and flexible additional one-off funding for schools to use in the best interests of their most disadvantaged pupils.

The National Tutoring Programme that was set up to reach the most disadvantaged young people with one-to-one or small-group tutoring has already reached over 125,000 young people this academic year, and will continue to expand thanks to the extended funding package. This targeted intervention is proven to boost progress by up to three to five months from just a single block of tutoring.