

Testing measures to ensure young people return to classrooms

All secondary schools have been asked to provide one on-site test for pupils ahead of their return to the classroom this term to help reduce the transmission of Covid-19.

Education staff and college students are being asked to self-test at home before they return, and were sent home with tests ahead of the Christmas break.

Schools and colleges ordered tests before Christmas and have received these in advance of pupils returning, and will continue to be able to order additional tests through a separate supply route. Schools and colleges made test kits available to pupils before the end of term and they will have access to more as needed.

Students returning to university have also been advised to test before they travel back to campus.

Secondary, college and university students and education staff and early years staff should then continue to test themselves twice a week, and more frequently if they are specifically asked to do so, such as in the event of an outbreak.

12-15 year olds are encouraged to get fully vaccinated (two doses), to ensure they are protected. 16 and 17 year olds are now eligible for boosters and are being strongly encourage to take up this offer when invited to do so, along with university students.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

Being in face to face learning is undoubtedly the very best place for children and young people's education and wellbeing, and my priority remains on keeping early years settings, schools, colleges and universities open so that face-to-face education can continue.

As we enter this new term, I want to thank all staff working in education for their continued dedication and resilience. It is through the hard work of all of you that we have ensured, and will continue to ensure pupils and students get the learning that they deserve. We must continue to look forward and not forget how far we have come in our fight against this virus.

The very best way we can continue to protect ourselves and our families is by getting the booster, or second jab if you are aged 12-15 – as soon as possible. I urge anyone who hasn't done this to do so now.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

We are doing all we can to minimise disruption this virus causes to everyday life, including keeping children in school, and regular testing is a key way to support schools and protect face-to-face teaching.

Vaccines remain our greatest line of defence so I urge all 12-15 year olds who have not come forward yet to get vaccinated, and all teachers to Get Boosted Now to protect yourself and those around you.

Children's Commissioner for England Dame Rachel de Souza DBE said:

Children have told me how much they really value and appreciate school as a place to learn, build friendships and take part in activities that benefit their physical and mental wellbeing.

As Children's Commissioner and having run schools all my life, I'm always excited about the start of a new term and the return to school. I am especially focused on this one, as it is so important schools are open and ready to welcome children.

We are so fortunate to have great teachers and parents who have already done so much to have children back in the classroom, and former teachers happy to volunteer extra support to keep children there. I want our classrooms open and operating because I firmly believe it is where all children belong and want to be. We owe it to them to make sure this happens.

Proportionate safety measures will also remain in schools, colleges and universities to help reduce the transmission of the virus, including increased ventilation and good hygiene, with older students and staff wearing face coverings.

All early years settings, schools, colleges, and universities are advised to continue to follow the latest guidance set out by the department which is kept regularly under review.