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[Covid restrictions in education settings to end at Step 4](#)

Further Covid restrictions in education settings will end from Step 4, the Education Secretary has confirmed today [6 July].

As part of Step 4, expected to take place on 19 July, 'bubbles' will end for all children under 18, social distancing will no longer be necessary, and schools will not need to stagger start and finish times, though they can continue with existing arrangements until the end of term if they wish.

The lifting of Covid restrictions in schools is in line with the general removal of restrictions for England at Step 4. Schools may choose to continue with these measures until the end of the Summer term.

From 16 August, the legal requirement to self-isolate for contacts of a positive case will end for everyone aged under 18, and for adults who have been fully vaccinated. This means that from the autumn term, only those who test positive will need to self-isolate. From Step 4, NHS test and trace will carry out contact tracing in all education settings rather than being run by the school or college. Those identified as close contacts will be advised to take a PCR test, and only need to isolate if they test positive. Children must self-isolate if they have symptoms of Covid or a positive test result.

Testing for close contacts under 18 will be split into two categories. All Primary, Secondary and College age children should take a single PCR test. Early Years children should only take a PCR test if a member of their household tests positive.

Protective measures will remain in place for the autumn term in all education settings including practicing good hygiene, ventilation, and regular testing until the end of September to strike a balance between relaxing restrictions and minimising further disruption to children's education. Two onsite tests should be taken by each secondary school and college student on return, followed by twice weekly testing at home. The Government will review testing requirements by the end of September.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

I am incredibly grateful to everyone working in education and childcare for their tireless work to make the best of what has been a very challenging situation.

While the pandemic is not over, we are moving into a new phase of managing Covid, from strict rules and towards personal responsibility. The measures we will have after summer strike the right balance as we learn to live with the virus so children can get on with their lives and education in the best possible way.

Education settings will continue to have an outbreak management plan and work with local health teams, as is standard practice. Local Directors of Public Health may advise a setting to temporarily reintroduce some control measures in the event of an outbreak.

All school trips, drama, music and sporting activity will be able to resume in line with the relaxation of restrictions across society from Step 4.

Education settings still operating over the summer will continue to test twice a week, with asymptomatic test kits still available to families over the summer break.

In line with measures for wider society, the Government will be recommending that face coverings will no longer be necessary in any education setting and social distancing will no longer be necessary, including in schools and colleges. This differs from Step 3 of the roadmap, where face coverings were no longer recommended for pupils and students in classrooms or communal areas.

All education staff are urged to get both vaccine doses if they have not yet done so, helping further reduce any potential disruption as a result of self-isolation. From Step 4, there will also be no restrictions on in-person teaching and learning in universities.

[Further detailed guidance](#) has been published to enable schools and colleges to plan for how they will operate from September.

£226 million package to support vital bus services

- funding will maintain bus services as passengers begin to return in higher numbers in the months following lifting of restrictions
- Department for Transport also announces 35 expressions of interest for share of first tranche of £120 million to roll out zero emission buses across England
- both packages come as part of government drive to build back greener from the pandemic

Bus operators across the country will benefit from £226.5 million in government funding to help ensure they continue to run vital services as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, Roads Minister Baroness Vere has announced today (6 July 2021).

The funding will run from September 2021 to April 2022 and will support operators across England, outside of London, cementing the government's commitment to level up transport links as passenger numbers begin to return to pre-pandemic levels.

It comes as the Department for Transport also announces it has received 35 Expression of Interest applications for the [Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas \(ZEBRA\) scheme](#), which gives local transport authorities the opportunity to compete for a share of £120 million to support the rollout of zero emission buses across England.

Both schemes are part of the government's drive to build back better and greener from the pandemic, as the UK prepares to host [COP26](#) and achieve net zero emissions by 2050.

Roads Minister Baroness Vere said:

Buses are the lifeblood of our communities, helping us get to work, school and to see friends and family.

The recovery funding will ensure vital services continue to run by supporting operators in those initial months, as restrictions are lifted and passengers begin to return in higher numbers.

And as we build back greener from the pandemic, the £120 million to roll out zero emission buses will have a profoundly positive effect on our towns and cities, lowering emissions, improving air quality and reducing noise pollution.

The recovery funding announced today will follow the current emergency support package, which is due to end next month after providing more than £1 billion to keep bus services running throughout the pandemic – and will be provided on a formula basis, ensuring the sector can begin to return to commerciality. The funding will be the final tranche of COVID-19-related support provided to the sector.

In addition to helping maintain services, recovery funding will support the key aims of the [National Bus Strategy](#) of encouraging local authorities and operators to work together to deliver better bus services.

The [ZEBRA fund](#) was launched in March this year with local transport authorities able to apply under either a fast track or standard process.

The following local transport authorities have been selected under the fast track process to progress to the next stage of the competition:

- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority
- Kent County Council
- Leicester City Council
- Milton Keynes Borough Council
- Warrington Borough Council
- West Midlands Combined Authority

The 6 shortlisted authorities will now develop business cases for investment, with the government awarding the first tranche of funding from the ZEBRA scheme to authorities that produce the strongest business cases.

More local transport authorities will be announced as being selected to produce business cases under the standard process in due course.

The ZEBRA funding comes from the wider £3 billion fund announced by the government to improve bus services in our national bus strategy, published on 15 March 2021.

Supporting vital bus services: recovery funding

During the pandemic, the government has provided unprecedented levels of financial assistance to the bus sector through the [COVID-19 Bus Service Support Grant \(CBSSG\)](#), supporting bus operators and local transport authorities in England outside of London, with up to £1.4 billion in funding since March 2020.

With patronage falling and social distancing limiting passengers onboard, CBSSG has funded up to 100% of pre-COVID-19 service levels, ensuring key workers have continued to be able to travel easily and safely. Critically, as restrictions are lifted and passengers return, the bus sector is important in helping the economic recovery.

I appreciate that this presents bus operators with a fundamental financial challenge. To encourage passengers back, local bus services should be as available as they were prior to the pandemic. Without support, however, it may not be possible for operators to maintain the services they have provided up until now.

I can therefore announce that a further £226.5 million in financial support in the form of recovery funding has been made available for the bus sector. Funding operators and local authorities from 1 September 2021 until the end of the current financial year, this will succeed CBSSG, which ends on 31 August.

In addition to helping maintain services, recovery funding will support the key aims of the [National Bus Strategy](#) of encouraging local authorities and operators to work together to deliver better bus services. In return for receiving funding, operators will be asked to commit to co-operating with the process for establishing Enhanced Partnerships or franchising.

With the publication of the National Bus Strategy in March 2021, the government set out bold ambitions to address the long-term challenge of providing quick, reliable, simple and affordable bus travel. Local authorities have been asked to develop ambitious [Bus Service Improvement Plans](#) by this October, outlining what will be done at a local level to make travelling by bus as attractive as possible.

The Prime Minister has announced £5 billion for buses and cycling, to deliver the strategy and provide vital investment for the sector.