

Staffing guidance – categories of staff and social distancing 18th May 2020

As we move through the current situation the staffing of schools changes as numbers of children change. To this end we have pulled together the advice on what each different category of staff is and what the current guidance is for that category.

The details below are based on Gov.uk, DfE, ACAS, LGA and NEOST advice as at 18th May 2020.

We are aware that many schools have been managing their staffing under the current circumstances differently to the way in which they would need to were schools to open more fully, as has been proposed for on 1st June, especially for primary schools. Whilst the government has issued some advice we expect that there will be further guidance with regards risk assessments, and we will update our guidance at that point.

Whilst the guidance below states the facts as they are known, it will be the case that some staff anxieties will be heightened regardless of government guidance. Staff will need to be reassured as to how the school is doing everything reasonably practicable and within government guidelines to keep them safe. There is further guidance with regards to this in the document, encouraging support for staff wellbeing but also support from your HR Adviser where staff unreasonably refuse to work.

1. Who does this guidance relate to?

This guidance relates to all staff in school:

- All Teaching Staff
- Classroom Support Staff
- Office Support Staff
- Premises Staff

Specifically, the categories of staff (as stated by the government) that this guidance relates to, include staff who are:

- a) Clinically Vulnerable, i.e. those who are:
 - aged 70 or older (regardless of medical conditions)
 - under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below (that is, anyone instructed to get a flu jab as an adult each year on medical grounds):
 - chronic (long-term) mild to moderate respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis
 - chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
 - chronic kidney disease
 - chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
 - chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), or cerebral palsy
 - diabetes
 - a weakened immune system as the result of conditions such as HIV and AIDS, or medicines such as steroid tablets
 - being seriously overweight (a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above)
 - pregnant women

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others>

- b) Extremely vulnerable which are those who are:
- Solid organ transplant recipients.
 - People with specific cancers:
 - people with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy
 - people with lung cancer who are undergoing radical radiotherapy
 - people with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
 - people having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
 - people having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
 - people who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs
 - People with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe chronic obstructive pulmonary (COPD).
 - People with rare diseases that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell).
 - People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection.
 - Women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

- c) Living with clinically vulnerable people as listed in (a) above.
- d) Living with extremely vulnerable as listed in (b) above.

2. General Advice

Schools should ensure the government's social distancing measures are implemented at all times. This includes:

- Where possible staying 2 metres (6 feet) away from other people
- avoiding busy commuting times on public transport where travel is essential
- washing your hands more often - with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use a hand sanitiser when you get home or into work, when you blow your nose, sneeze or cough, eat or handle food
- avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- avoid close contact with people who have symptoms
- cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in a bin and wash your hands
- clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces

3. Additional school advice:

Within the school settings, ensure that the following is adhered to at all times:

- do not attend school if you or a member of your household displays symptoms of coronavirus and self-isolate in line with government guidelines
- children are clear on what to do if they experience symptoms of coronavirus
- children are seated at desks that are far apart

- ensure everyone queues and eats further apart than normal – this also includes all staff in the staff rooms
- Prevent different groups of children from sharing equipment and resources
- keep both staff and children apart when in the playground or doing any physical exercise
- visit the toilet one after the other
- stagger break times for both staff and children
- keep doors and windows open where safe and practical to do so to allow air flow
- put guidelines/markers on the floor in corridors
- avoid unnecessary staff gatherings
- ensure parents are aware of the advice and recommendations on transport to reduce unnecessary travel on public transport
- use signage to guide parents and carers about pick up and drop off points so they know where to drop and collect their children

It is still important to reduce contact between people as much as possible, and we can achieve that and reduce transmission risk by ensuring children, young people and staff where possible, only mix in a small, consistent group and that small group stays away from other people and groups.

Where settings can keep children and young people in those small groups 2 metres away from each other, they should do so. While in general groups should be kept apart, brief, transitory contact, such as passing in a corridor, is low risk.

Please see further guidance at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings>

In addition, whilst the DfE have confirmed that personal protective equipment (PPE) is not required for the majority of staff in education settings beyond what they would **normally** need for their work, (and even if they are not always able to maintain a 2 metre distance from others), arrangements should be made for the very small number of cases where PPE supplies will be needed, such as in cases where staff provide personal or intimate care for pupils and/or for cases where a child becomes unwell with symptoms of coronavirus while in their setting and needs direct personal care until they can return home.

Please see further guidance on PPE at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safe-working-in-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care/safe-working-in-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care-settings-including-the-use-of-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>

Particularly, for specific categories of staff, these following should be adhered to:

- a) Clinically Vulnerable Staff:
 - School to undertake a risk assessment in the first instance before putting these staff on the rota
 - Reasonable adjustments to be made to ascertain how these staff can come into the school to undertake work, offering the safest available on-site role, staying 2 metres away from others wherever possible
 - Working from home should endeavour to be supported

Current DfE Guidance for these staff is that “Clinically vulnerable individuals who are at higher risk of severe illness (for example, people with some pre-existing conditions as set out in the Staying at home and away from others (social distancing) guidance have been advised to take extra care in observing social distancing and should work from home where possible. Education and childcare settings should endeavour to support this, for example by asking staff to support remote education, carry out lesson planning or other roles which can be done from home. If clinically vulnerable (but not clinically extremely vulnerable) individuals cannot work from home, they should be offered the safest available on-site roles, staying 2 metres away from others wherever possible, although the individual may choose to take on a role that does not allow for this distance if they prefer to do so. If they have to spend time within 2 metres of other people, settings must carefully assess and discuss with them whether this involves an acceptable level of risk.”

b) Extremely vulnerable:

- Working from home to be encouraged if possible and staff to be advised to seek medical advice in the first instance
- Staff should not be expected to come into work

Current DfE Guidance for these staff is that “Clinically extremely vulnerable individuals are advised not to work outside the home. We are strongly advising people, including education staff, who are clinically extremely vulnerable (those with serious underlying health conditions which put them at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus and have been advised by their clinician or through a letter) to rigorously follow shielding measures in order to keep themselves safe. Staff in this position are advised not to attend work. Read COVID-19: guidance on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable for more advice.”

c) Living with vulnerable people as listed in (1a) above.

- School to undertake a risk assessment in the first instance
- Staff to make themselves available for work

Current DfE Guidance for these staff is that “If a child, young person or a member of staff lives with someone who is clinically vulnerable (but not clinically extremely vulnerable), including those who are pregnant, they can attend their education or childcare setting.” Advice on social distancing in the home can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection#:~:text=Minimise%20as%20much%20as%20possible,using%20the%20facilities%20first.>

d) Living with extremely vulnerable as listed in (1b) above.

- Staff members in this category do not need to start shielding themselves, therefore, they need to stringently follow the guidance on social distancing
- School to undertake a risk assessment in the first instance before putting these staff on the rota
- Reasonable adjustments to be made to ascertain how these staff can come into the school to undertake work, offering the safest available on-site role, staying 2 metres away from others wherever possible
- Working from home should be supported if stringent social distancing is not possible

Current DfE Guidance for these staff is that “If a child, young person or staff member lives in a household with someone who is extremely clinically vulnerable, as set out in the COVID-19: guidance on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable guidance, it is advised they only attend an education or childcare setting if stringent social distancing can be adhered to and, in the case of children, they are able to understand and follow those instructions. This may not be possible for very young children and older children without the capacity to adhere

to the instructions on social distancing. If stringent social distancing cannot be adhered to, we do not expect those individuals to attend. They should be supported to learn or work at home.”

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-school-closures/guidance-for-schools-about-temporarily-closing#workforce>

4. Risk assessment for ‘stringent social distancing’

The advice on social distancing measures applies to everyone and should be followed wherever possible. To be able to demonstrate how schools are going to adhere to stringent social distancing, consider the following:

- Ascertain which category each individual falls into
- Risk assess each category and how it applies to each individual
- Make reasonable adjustments for each staff in line with social distancing measures
- Some flexibility in school rota to be considered
- Ensure staff wellbeing is maintained and considered
- Communicate the Education Support Partnership hotline (<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/>) to staff for emotional support or your Occupational Health Provider
- Signpost staff to: <https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/ourfrontline/> which they may find useful too as an additional resource.

Use the [risk assessment form template](#) for assessing how best to support staff.

5. Health and Safety at work act / duty of care

Employers are under a legal duty to maintain health and safety; this continues to be the case during an emergency situation. Employees are likely to be concerned about the risk of contracting the virus. The employer must take all reasonable steps to protect employees’ health and safety, provide clear and accessible communications about the likely risks and take a supportive view of those who have caring responsibilities. Employers can also provide opportunities for employees to discuss their concerns with their line manager or an occupational health or counselling service. More advice about actions you can take to support wellbeing can be found <https://local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support/wellbeing/wellbeing-front-line-staff>

A few general indicators for workplaces with regards to supporting their health and safety at this time:

- make regular announcements to remind staff to follow social distancing advice and wash their hands regularly
- provide additional soap, water, hand sanitiser and tissues and encourage staff to use them
- where it is possible to remain 2 metres (3 steps) apart, use floor markings to mark the distance, particularly in the most crowded areas (for example, in the corridors and playground)
- where it is not possible to remain 2 metres apart, staff should work side by side, or facing away from each other, rather than face to face if possible
- where face-to-face contact is essential, this should be kept to 15 minutes or less wherever possible
- use signage to direct movement into lanes, if feasible, to create a one-way traffic along corridors, while maintaining a 2 metre distance

- regulate entry so that the premises do not become overcrowded
- use additional signage to ask visitors/parents/staff not to enter the premises if they have symptoms
- if feasible, place plexiglass barriers at points of regular interaction (at the reception) as an additional element of protection (eg where people might touch or lean against the reception desk, ensure they are cleaned and disinfected as often as is feasible in line with standard cleaning procedures).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>

Local Government advice is that: “It is anticipated that employees will, as far as possible within the constraints of school closures, caring responsibilities and complying with Government advice on self-isolating and social distancing, continue to perform their duties and be flexible to ensure that services continue to be provided. If difficulties arise with a refusal to attend work or a refusal to carry out certain duties, managers should ascertain what the concerns are, consider what, if anything, can be reasonably done to address those concerns and take action accordingly, to encourage the individual to work.

If this has been done, but the individual still refuses to attend or perform the task then this may constitute unauthorised absence or partial performance (ie where they are only prepared to carry out certain tasks rather than their full range of duties). This may be a disciplinary issue, which may justify withdrawal of pay. The manager should explain the individual’s contractual obligations and the consequences of refusing to work. If there is still no change in the individual’s position, immediate advice should be sought from HR to ensure an appropriate and consistent approach can be taken.”

For more information and references:

<https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus/vulnerable-people-and-high-risk>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-school-closures/guidance-for-schools-about-temporarily-closing>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-school-closures/guidance-for-schools-about-temporarily-closing#workforce>

Documents updated on 12th May 2020

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-educational-and-childcare-settings-to-prepare-for-wider-opening-from-1-june-2020/actions-for-education-and-childcare-settings-to-prepare-for-wider-opening-from-1-june-2020>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-educational-and-childcare-settings-to-prepare-for-wider-opening-from-1-june-2020/opening-schools-for-more-children-and-young-people-initial-planning-framework-for-schools-in-england>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/reopening-schools-and-other-educational-settings-from-1-june>