



This is your daily email to keep you updated on the government's response to coronavirus (COVID-19).

Free school meal provision

During the period of national lockdown, schools will continue to receive their expected funding for benefits-related free school meals and universal infant free school meals. Schools should continue to provide meal options for all pupils who are in school.

Schools should also continue to provide free school meal support to pupils who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals and who are not attending school. Schools will be able to claim additional funding where lunch parcels or vouchers for local shops or supermarkets are being provided.

Lunch parcels should include ingredients for five lunches for children eligible for free school meals while they are learning at home. The Department for Education (DfE) has worked with the Lead Association for Catering in Education and Public Health England to provide [helpful guidance on putting together food parcels](#). Schools may be aware of instances where lunch parcels have not met the guidelines. The Secretary of State for Education has today said that lunch parcels that do not meet these standards are unacceptable. DfE is committed to ensuring that eligible pupils receive a high standard of free school meals whilst they are at home during term time and have published [guidance to support schools in meeting these standards](#). DfE is happy to support any school in discussions with contractors to ensure that all eligible children can receive a high-quality free school meal.

A national voucher scheme will be in place from next week, and the cost of these vouchers will be met centrally by DfE. Schools should provide lunch parcels or local alternatives, such as locally arranged vouchers, ahead of the national voucher scheme re-opening. Edenred will be operating the national voucher scheme and schools will begin to receive direct communication from them over the coming days. This will include important information on accessing the ordering site, so that orders can be placed from next week.

For further details, please see our guidance for [providing school meals during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#).

Updated public health guidance to support exams from January 2021

We have updated our [public health guidance to support exams from January 2021](#), setting out that schools and colleges can continue with the vocational and technical exams that are taking place this month, where they judge it right to do so.

This update also provides further guidance on the set up of the exam room, face coverings, maintaining distance between staff and candidates and the guidance to follow when a candidate has a negative test.

Letter from the Secretary of State for Education to Ofqual's Chief Regulator

Following the Prime Minister's announcement of the national lockdown on 4 January 2021, the government announced exams this year would not go ahead as planned.

Today, the Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, sent a [letter to Simon Lebus, Ofqual's Chief Regulator](#). This letter outlines the process to agree alternative arrangements for exams in 2021 and confirms that this year the government will be trusting teachers to assess students' grades and will not be making use of an algorithm.

A [response to this letter](#) has also been published. It confirms Ofqual's agreement to work with the Department for Education and others across the sector to put in place the fairest possible alternative arrangements.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) staff testing in primary schools

On 15 December, the Secretary of State for Education announced [plans to introduce asymptomatic testing in schools and colleges](#), starting with secondary and further education colleges and rolling-out to primary schools in January.

We can confirm that primary schools and maintained nursery schools should expect to receive a delivery of home testing kits between the 18 and 22 January for testing of staff. Further support and guidance on how to use the tests will follow shortly. If you have not received a delivery by close on 22 January, or have missing or damaged items, please complete this [contact form](#). You will need the URN for your school or college to complete this form. You do not need to start any testing before the week commencing 25 January.

Primary schools with attached early years settings will receive sufficient test kits to test both their primary and early years staff. Maintained nursery schools will also

receive testing kits to offer to their staff. Private early years providers will continue to be [prioritised for coronavirus \(COVID-19\) testing](#) through the NHS testing programme.

Rapid coronavirus (COVID-19) testing in secondary schools and colleges

Secondary schools have now received lateral flow device test kits and many schools have now started testing. Rapid testing helps identify those asymptomatic cases that might otherwise not be detected, causing the virus to spread further.

Secondary schools should now offer:

- initial testing of vulnerable children and children of critical workers who are on school and college sites (two tests, three to five days apart)
- weekly testing of staff who are on school and college sites
- daily testing of close contacts of positive cases in school and college as an alternative to self-isolation

Staff, pupils and students in secondary schools and colleges who are on site can take daily lateral flow device tests for seven days. As long as their results are negative, they will be able to continue to access school and college as usual.

The military can offer support on setting up the provision and give advice both virtually and on the ground. To request support, please contact the Department for Education coronavirus (COVID-19) helpline on 0800 046 8687.

Rapid testing incident reporting

As part of the testing quality compliance, it is essential that every incident that interrupts, or has the potential to interrupt, testing is reported.

If issues on site are local, such as damaged packaging, missing components or you can't open your test site, then they should be reported using the [asymptomatic testing for coronavirus in schools and colleges incident reporting form](#).

Incidents which require escalation, such as a device which is damaged or breaks during use, any concerns about the performance of a specific testing kit, if injury occurs, or any other serious incident takes place, these should be reported to the Department for Education coronavirus (COVID-19) helpline immediately by calling 0800 046 8687. Anonymised details of these incidents will be passed to the Medicine and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency as part of their clinical compliance.

Delivery of lateral flow test kits to secondary schools and colleges

Today we will be publishing an updated [delivery schedule](#), which includes details of all the deliveries that have been made. If you think you are missing a delivery, please check this spreadsheet to find out if there are any outstanding deliveries for your school or college.

We will shortly be providing details on how to order new and replacement lateral flow testing kits for when your supplies run out. Please do not use the contact us form, or the 119 helpline to request new lateral flow testing kits at this time.

The initial deliveries contained enough testing materials to test all pupils and students twice, and staff for two weeks on return to education, so every school and college should have sufficient kits.

If your school or college has small numbers of missing or damaged items, this should not stop you testing as between both deliveries you should have received enough stock to continue testing. If, however, you do not have enough testing kit to continue testing now, please contact the Department for Education coronavirus (COVID-19) helpline on 0800 046 8687.

Guidance in the schools and colleges [How To Guide](#) includes details on waste collection and how to order more bags if they are required.

Violence against women and girls – call for evidence launched by the Home Office

The Home Office have launched a call for evidence to inform the development of the government's next Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. Views are sought from those with lived experience of harm as well as those with expertise in working with victims and survivors, those involved in preventative activity and those involved in providing services. This includes relevant professionals, such as those working in social care, education, law enforcement, local government, public health and healthcare.

Anyone aged 16 or over is welcome to contribute to the call for evidence and does not have to have experienced violence or abuse to take part.

Anyone wishing to participate is asked to [complete the public survey](#) or provide a written submission.

Further information on this consultation and how to get involved can be found in the Home Office [violence against women and girls call for evidence](#).

This consultation will close at 11:45pm on 19 February.

The information below has not changed since our last update

Department for Education coronavirus (COVID-19) helpline

The Department for Education coronavirus (COVID-19) helpline and the PHE Advice Service (option 1) is available to answer any questions you have about coronavirus (COVID-19) relating to education settings and children's social care.

Phone: 0800 046 8687

Opening hours:

Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm

Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 6pm

Please listen carefully to all of the available options before selecting the most appropriate option for your nursery, school, college or university.

Look up your unique organisation number (UON)

If you have not received your unique organisation number (UON) for ordering new coronavirus (COVID-19) test kits you can [look it up using your unique reference number \(URN\) or your UK provider reference number \(UKPRN\)](#) or by calling the Test and Trace helpdesk on 119.

Department for Education guidance

Our guidance to support education providers, local authorities and parents during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak can be accessed using the links below:

- [Guidance for early years and childcare providers](#)
- [Guidance for schools](#)
- [Guidance for further and higher education providers](#)

- [Guidance for local authority children's services](#)