



On 19 July the country is expected to move on to Step 4 of the Government’s roadmap and further restrictions will be lifted.

As the Prime Minister set out, this means that from that point most of the restrictions we have faced as a society in the last year-and-a-half will be removed, helping to minimise disruption to education.

Many schools, colleges and universities will have started their summer breaks by then but it means the return to education in the autumn will feel very different as a result. There are schools, colleges and universities that will still be teaching on 19 July and they, along with early years settings, will be able to relax restrictions at that point.

One of the key changes is that pupils or students will no longer be required to remain in year group or classroom bubbles and children will be able to mix freely in the early years. Face coverings will also no longer be recommended in any setting and social distancing will no longer be necessary.

Of course, it is still necessary to be careful and that’s why it remains essential that secondary pupils, teachers, staff and their families continue to test themselves for the virus and isolate if positive or if they have been in close contact with a positive case – but we will be able to see the back of the wholesale isolation of groups of pupils from 16 August in time for the autumn term.

Close contacts can be anyone who:

- lives in the same household as someone with COVID-19 symptoms or who has tested positive for COVID-19
- has had any of the following types of contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19:
 - face-to-face contact including being coughed on or having a face-to-face conversation within 1 metre
 - been within 1 metre for 1 minute or longer without face-to-face contact
 - been within 2 metres of someone for more than 15 minutes (either as a one-off contact or added up together over 1 day)
 - travelled in the same vehicle or a plane

Here we answer your questions on what these changes mean for you, whether you’re a parent, carer, pupil, teacher or student.

Will secondary age pupils at schools have to stay in bubbles?

No. Secondary school and college students won't have to stay in bubbles.

What about face coverings?

Face coverings are no longer recommended in education settings. Headteachers may still wish to recommend pupils wear them and pupils themselves remain free to wear face coverings if they decide to. Staff and visitors are free to wear a face covering in communal areas if they wish to. It may be the case that, in the event of a significant outbreak, face coverings in schools will again be recommended.

Do secondary age pupils have to take tests?

Regular asymptomatic testing will pause in education settings over the summer except in those that remain open, such as summer schools, out of school activities based on education sites and settings that do not operate on a term time basis. In these cases, staff and students should continue to test twice weekly at home and it is important test results are reported regardless of whether they are positive, negative or void.

Asymptomatic testing in secondary schools and colleges - including two tests in person on return – will resume at the start of autumn term and continue until the end of September with a review at that point. It means apart from tests taken in person on the return to school, pupils will be expected to carry on testing themselves twice a week using LFD tests obtained online, through their school/college or via their GP.

What if there is a positive case in a secondary school or college?

From 16 August, children under the age of 18 years old will no longer be required to self-isolate if they are contacted by NHS Test & Trace as a close contact of a positive COVID-19 case. Instead, children will be contacted by NHS Test & Trace, informed they have been in close contact with a positive case and advised to take a PCR test. 18-year-olds will be treated in the same way as children until 4 months after their 18th birthday to allow them the opportunity to get fully vaccinated.

What things will be staying the same?

Guidance on hygiene measures, cleaning keeping classrooms well ventilated will remain, as will local contingency measures if there are significant outbreaks. These may require greater levels of isolation and community testing.

What happens to testing over the summer for all staff, secondary and college students?

Over the summer all staff, secondary school and college students should continue to test and report results online. You can test during your summer by ordering your free rapid Covid-19 tests online nhs.uk/GetTested, or by picking them up at pharmacies. If you're attending a summer school or any education setting, you will continue to receive tests from school or college.