**School information pack on managing covid in the school setting**

This document has been produced by the Public Health Agency (PHA) and aims to support schools and pre-schools in preparing and managing their response to cases and clusters of COVID-19 within the school setting.

Related documents for carrying out the risk assessment with the PHA COVID19 School Team can be found on the COVID-19 page of C2K Exchange.

For ease of use, this document is split into Section 1- Managing a positive case and Section 2- Managing more than one positive case.

**Contact Details**

When a school receives notification of a confirmed case of COVID-19 (that is, confirmed with a positive test) in a pupil or member of staff, in the first instance, you should contact the Education Authority emergency helpline for COVID-19 suspected or confirmed cases on **028 9041 8056** or at [confirmed.covid19@eani.org.uk](mailto:confirmed.covid19@eani.org.uk). They will provide initial advice and prepare you for phoning the PHA COVID19 School Team. This helpline is open 7 days a week 8am to 8pm.

You should then contact the PHA COVID19 School Team by either completing the following online form <https://hscforms.hscni.net/education-cell-online-form/> or by calling **028 9536 0484.** Someone from the team will call you back to discuss the risk assessment and answer any questions that arise in relation to this. The PHA team is open Monday to Friday 8am to 4pm and Saturday to Sunday 10am to 2pm.

Section 1

The School response to confirmed COVID-19 in a school community will be tailored to the situation and will vary, for example, a small number of pupils and/or staff may need to self-isolate for a period of time. Sometimes whole classes or year groups may be asked to self-isolate. In rare circumstances the school may have to close.

You will normally be told about a confirmed case by the parent of the child or by the member of staff concerned. Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 usually receive this result by text and/or email and receive this as soon as the result is available. Sometimes the PHA schools team are notified about a case by contact tracing before the school has been advised. If the case has given permission, the PHA school team will contact the school to make them aware of the case.

When you are informed of the confirmed COVID case, it is helpful if you could gather the following information:

* Name and date of birth
* What date did they first develop symptoms?
* What symptoms did they have?
* What date did they have a test?
* When were they last in school?
* Which class/es are they in?
* Are there other household or community contacts who are positive?

If you are unsure about accuracy of reported test result you may wish to ask if the parent/staff member would be willing to share a screen shot of the result. (If you do this, do not share this information with anyone outside public health.)

Having gathered the initial information above, identification of close contacts in the school can begin. You need to consider the **2 days** prior to the child/member of staff feeling unwell (becoming symptomatic) – this is considered to be the infectious period. If the child/member of staff did not have any symptoms when they took the test then you should consider the 2 days prior to the test being taken.

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| Definitions of Close Contacts  In the context of a case in a school, a close contact is anyone who has been close to a confirmed case of COVID-19 from 2 days before the person was symptomatic\* to 10 days after the onset of symptoms (ie the infectious period) and fulfils any of the following:   * lives in the same household * has been within one metre and had face-to-face contact (including being coughed on or having a face-to-face conversation) or skin-to-skin contact * been within 2 metres of someone for more than 15 minutes (**either as a one-off contact, or added up together over one day**) * has travelled in a small vehicle with the case * travelled in a  large vehicle / plane near the case   An interaction through a Perspex (or equivalent) screen with someone with the person who has COVID-19 is not usually considered to be a contact, as long as there has been no other contact such as those in the list above.  \*If the person who has tested positive for COVID-19 did not have symptoms, then then infectious period is counted from 2 days before their test was taken to 10 days after their test was taken. |

Individuals should **only** be classed as a **close contact** if they meet the above definition. The approach set out in the Department of Education New School Day Guidance are designed to limit close contacts within the school using measures such as “pupil bubbles”, fixed classroom floor plans with named forward facing seating and social distancing. Implementation of the guidance should make the identification of contacts easier and limit the number of close contacts identified.

Note: The NI Contact Tracing service started enhanced (reverse) contact tracing in mid-November where positive cases are asked about places, settings and activities attended in the 7 days before symptom onset, this is to try and identify potential sources. It does not need to be carried out in the schools setting.

**Practical aspects of identifying contacts**

Confirmed case in a pupil

**Pupils**

* Consider close contact definition above. For post primary pupils, this will include pupils who have sat within 2 metres of the positive pupil/staff member in their class/each of their classes. Your floor plans should help you identify these children.
* Consider areas like study halls and libraries too.
* You should also consider any friendship groups out with classes, for example, lunchtime and breaks.
* How they travelled to school and traveling in a school vehicle for whatever reason.
* In primary and special schools in most situations the entire class bubble will be identified as close contacts.

**Classroom staff**

* It is recommended that teachers and classroom assistants maintain 2m social distance from children. However, it is acknowledged that this is not practical in some situations – particularly primary and special schools. Consider whether staff would meet definition above. In post primary schools adult to pupil distancing is more reliable. However, some staff – for example special educational needs assistants are more likely to have close contact with a positive case.
* Remember to think about staff who have been in the class who are not based there all the time. For example, substitute teachers and visiting health professionals.

**Wider school**

* If the school has implemented the bubble approach, this should reduce contacts outside of the class bubble.
* Consider contacts in other areas – implementation of new school day guidance should mean that office, catering and other staff are not usually close contacts but sometimes for genuine reasons they will have had contact with the child which meets the definition.

Confirmed case in a member of staff

* The same definition should be used to identify staff and students who meet the close contact criteria should the confirmed case be a member of staff.
* **As well as the classroom and pupil facing environment contact between staff in staff rooms, corridors and on breaks should be explored.**

At this stage you should contact the Education Authority emergency helpline for COVID-19 suspected or confirmed cases on **028 9041 8056** or at [confirmed.covid19@eani.org.uk](mailto:confirmed.covid19@eani.org.uk)

You should then contact the PHA COVID19 School Team by either completing the following online form <https://hscforms.hscni.net/education-cell-online-form/> or by calling **028 9536 0484.** Someone from the team will call you back to discuss the risk assessment and answer any questions that arise in relation to this.

When the close contacts have been identified between yourself and the PHA you should enter the close contact information on the **SIMS Report** and upload to the PHA using the **AnyComms+** website. If your school does not have access to the SIMS system you should enter the close contact information on the **Close Contacts template list for Schools** and email it to the dedicated PHA COVID19 School Team email address at: [EducationalSupport@hscni.net](mailto:EducationalSupport@hscni.net).

As contact tracing is vitally important to slow the spread of COVID-19 and data sharing for this purpose is in the public interest for public health reasons, schools do not require the consent of parents or pupils to share a pupil’s personal data with the PHA COVID19 School Team for this purpose. You **should however still make parents and pupils aware that you are required to share pupil’s personal information with the** PHA COVID19 School Team **for this purpose**.

All those on the contact list should be contacted by the school to advise them not to come to school/nursery for **10 days** from their last contact with the case, and that a letter will follow. PHA will issue a letter to the school for dissemination to close contacts. This advises that they have been identified as a close contact, the date of the contact and the date they are required to isolate to. The letter also provides some general information. **The letter is currently available in several commonly used languages and can be translated on request.**

You may also wish to send a separate letter to all other parents/carers **whose children have not been** identified as close contacts and a letter to staff members who have **not** been identified as close contacts. PHA schools team can provide you with the letters which provide general advice to staff and families and advise that there has been a positive case, that close contacts have been identified and advised to self-isolate, and that everyone else does not need to take action but should be vigilant for any symptoms.

**Section 2: Managing more than one positive case of COVID19**

If you receive information of a new confirmed case in your school you should follow exactly the same steps as outlined in section 1. (There may be a circumstance where the new case is already self-isolating due to being identified as a close contact of a previous case in the school and there may be no further close contacts identified but you must still inform PHA of the new case.)

A **cluster** of cases is two or more confirmed cases where the first date of each of their symptoms is within a 14-day period within the school setting.

The PHA will discuss whether wider measures need to take place with you on the phone. If the number of cases of COVID19 in the school continues to escalate, the PHA will work closely with the school to risk assess the situation, determine whether there is evidence of transmission within the school setting and consider whether further mitigation or infection control measures are required.

If the PHA determines that further assessment of a cluster is required they will discuss this with the principal. In initial video conference will be held to review cases, undertake a more detailed assessment and consider school cases in the context of wider community transmission.

Depending on the outcome of this more detailed review a decision may be taken to establish a wider Incident Management Team (IMT) to assess the need for further management. IMT membership will generally include individuals from the school, PHA, the Education Authority, CCMS and others, as appropriate. Further measures may include consideration of wider testing of school pupils, school closure, further communication with parents and carers and the media.

The following documents can be accessed on PHA website:

* Copy of this guidance
* SIMS report instructions
* Close Contacts template list for Schools