

Topics being raised on the Back to School Helpline

Face Coverings

Cloth face coverings help prevent transmission of the COVID-19 virus from the wearer to those they come into close contact with. Public health advice has been given to the Department of Education on the wearing of face coverings in schools and this advice has been accepted by the Department.

Primary School

Public health advice does not recommend the wearing of face coverings for primary school children.

Teachers, SNAs and other staff in primary schools are required to wear a face covering when a physical distance of 2 metres from other staff and children cannot be maintained.

Post Primary

Teachers, SNAs and other staff and students attending post primary schools are required to wear a face covering when a physical distance of 2 metres from other staff and students cannot be maintained.

Cloth face coverings should not be worn by any of the following groups:

- Any person with difficulty breathing
- Any person who is unconscious or incapacitated
- Any person who is unable to remove the face-covering without assistance
- Any person who has special needs and who may feel upset or very uncomfortable wearing the face covering, for example persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental health conditions, sensory concerns or tactile sensitivity.

General:

Staff and students are likely to have their own face coverings for use in schools.

The Department has advised schools that they should have additional disposable face coverings available for students, teachers and staff in case a back-up face covering is needed during the day.

The Department has also provided a framework and funding for PPE, including face coverings.

In certain situations in schools the use of clear visors should be considered for staff interacting with students with hearing difficulties or learning difficulties.

Staff, such as SNAs and bus escorts, who may be in closer and continued proximity to students, may wish to use medical face masks to EU Standard 14683. These masks are available on the PPE framework.

Travel Abroad

Government policy, which is based on official public health advice, continues to advise against non-essential travel overseas for everyone.

It is a requirement for anyone coming into Ireland, from locations other than those with a rating of 'normal precautions' ("green"), to restrict their movements for 14 days, and this includes school staff, parents and children or other students coming from abroad to attend school in Ireland. Restricting your movements means staying indoors in one location and avoiding contact with other people and social situations as much as possible.

The school has a duty of care to all of its pupils and staff members. If a school has reasonable grounds for believing that its duty of care toward its staff and pupils is being undermined in circumstance where a person – staff member or pupil - has not observed the mandatory requirement to self-isolate for 14 days following return from a non-green list country, it is reasonable for the school to refuse access to the pupil or staff member this period.

Pupils who live with someone who travels abroad for work

The general public health advice outlined above for people returning to Ireland having worked abroad should be followed by the person who has worked abroad (e.g. a parent/guardian).

Living with a parent/guardian who travels abroad for work does not prevent children from attending school. The parent/guardian should follow all of the HSE guidelines on their return home.

Uniforms

There are no recommendations in the public health advice to suggest an increased risk in wearing uniforms. The Department has not issued any guidance on the wearing of school uniforms in a COVID-19 environment. Normal washing and hygiene arrangements should apply to uniforms. The wearing of school uniforms remains a matter for each school.

Temperature Checks/COVID-19 Symptoms

The public health advice is that temperature checking is not recommended because fever is not a consistent symptom of COVID-19 in children. Parents and/or schools do not need to take children's temperatures very morning.

Parents and pupils/students are reminded that if they feel unwell and/or have ANY COVID-19 symptoms they should not attend school. Link to the symptoms are here:

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/symptoms.html>

Visitors to Schools

Visitors to schools during the day should be minimised as much as possible and by prior appointment and should be received at a specific contact point.

Visitors who are admitted to schools should then be subject to the same controls as apply to staff entering the school.

Visitors should perform proper hygiene on arrival at school.

Schools should consider the use of Perspex in school offices if there is likely to be a high throughput of visitors, despite the restrictions above.

Visitors should maintain 2 metres physical distancing from pupils/students and staff while in school.

Visitors should sign a contact tracing log which each school is required to keep. The Department has provided a sample tracing log at Appendix 5 of the School COVID-19 Response Plans.

Movement of Staff between schools and within schools

Education staff move routinely between schools in the context of substitute teachers, shared special education teachers etc. and it is not possible to eliminate this movement entirely.

The Department has provided additional staffing resources which will help to minimise the movement of staff within and between schools. It is recognised that there will continue to be movement of staff between schools albeit perhaps at a reduced level. In these circumstances the following should be considered:

- A teaching resource shared between schools should remain in a school for a full day where practicable.
- A staff member shared across classes within a school should take particular care to maintain physical distancing, proper hand and respiratory hygiene in moving throughout the school.
- Records of their contacts should be maintained as they may be needed for contact tracing purposes.