



## BULLETIN 1

# PRIORITISE SAFE SCHOOLS

September 2021

COVID-19 continues to impact on schools. Since the reopening of schools cases have increased dramatically. Now is not the time to relax safety procedures. DE Education Restart Guidance for School and Educational Settings in NI (August 2021) has seen a relaxation of safety guidance.

**INTO advises all members to resist the introduction of practices that relax mitigating identified risks.**

Current safety guidance includes:

<b>Risk Assessments</b>	Thorough risk assessing and implementation of mitigations remains key to ensuring a safe working environment and any changes to current school day procedures/practices must be fully risk assessed. All schools must have completed whole school risk assessments in consultation with the Trade Union H&S Rep. Risk assessments should be reviewed and updated in response to changing circumstances, then shared with staff and school specific guidance provided. Additional costs relating to mitigations e.g. admin, staffing, PPE should be identified and recorded as COVID costs
<b>Classrooms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each Teacher should be provided with hand sanitizer and cleaning aids to be stored safely in the classroom.</li> <li>Protective Bubbles 'It will be for each school to determine if they wish to continue to use some/all of the principles of bubbles that they will have used during the 2020-21 year, particularly if they believe that they have proved effective in mitigating virus transmission and that pupils' ability to learn is not unduly impacted.'</li> <li>Social distancing schools should continue to endeavor to implement as much social distancing as is practical where physical capacity and curriculum delivery permit. 2m remains in place between adults and as far as possible between adult and pupils.</li> <li>Minimise risk of transmission by maximizing space, all pupils facing to the front of the classroom as much as possible, assigning pupils to particular desks</li> <li>Risk assess circulation/transitions "Education settings should continue to operate local approaches that minimise interaction between pupils at social and dining times."</li> <li>Regular hand hygiene (hand washing facilities &amp; provision of hand sanitiser at key areas) good respiratory hygiene tissues and bins to be provided "A supply of disposable tissues should be available to implement the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach in each classroom"</li> <li>Desks and frequent touch points should be cleaned regularly – EA guidance states minimum start and end of day</li> <li>Items that cannot be cleaned easily should be removed from communal areas</li> </ul>
<b>Ventilation</b>	Maximize ventilation at all times - open all windows and doors where possible – concerns re: ventilation must be raised with school leaders and reported to EA for CO <sub>2</sub> assessment and potential mechanical support. School activities are encouraged to take place outside wherever possible, increase ventilation while spaces are unoccupied e.g. between classes.
<b>Arrival &amp; departure times</b>	Schools should consider how they can avoid parents congregating at school gates at the start and the end of the school day. However, schools should recognise the difficulties that staggered start and finishing times cause for many families with more than one child at a school.
<b>Face Coverings</b>	Staff are encouraged to wear a face covering where they are not able to maintain 2m social distance including all communal areas. Primary school children are recommended not to use face coverings on school premises but are strongly recommended to wear them on all public and school transport Post-primary pupils are strongly recommended to wear a face-covering at all times when inside school buildings, including classrooms, corridors and confined communal spaces such as toilet areas. However, for subjects where social distancing is possible, such as drama in a large hall, face coverings are no longer required. It is mandatory for all post-primary school age pupils to wear a face covering on all public and school transport.
<b>PPE</b>	"When it is appropriate to the task they are undertaking" or identified as part of a risk assessment PPE should be provided with training Visors do not offer protection unless worn with a mask.
<b>Transfer of items between home and school</b>	Public health advice is that although COVID-19 spreads from person to person through small droplets, aerosols and through direct contact, there is a relatively low risk of virus transmission associated with surface contacts in schools. The risk from sharing resources such as library books or bringing schoolbags into school is extremely small. Schools are no longer required to advise children not to bring in items such as schoolbags or pencil cases. Essential medication, such as EpiPen, should be brought in and stored in school in line with the schools Storage and Administration of Medicines policy.
<b>Staff Meetings</b>	In school meetings between school staff should take place by tele-conference or video-conference where possible, however, face to face meetings in school without a maximum number of adults will be permitted providing other suitable COVID-19 mitigations are in place. These include ensuring that a suitably sized and well-ventilated room is used in order to facilitate social distancing of 2m between adults, subject to appropriate risk assessments. In line with <a href="#">PHA guidance</a> a risk assessment should be completed for indoor gatherings of >15 people
<b>Marking</b>	When marking work, it should be marked within the classroom; apply good hand washing procedures or use hand sanitiser at regular intervals, do not touch your face after handling pupils' books. The use of gloves is not recommended as the misuse or removal of gloves incorrectly, could inadvertently cause contamination. Consider the use of other forms of feedback techniques such as verbal feedback, whole class feedback, self-assessment or comments written onto post-it notes etc.
<b>PHA Guidance</b>	Follow PHA Guidance School leaders should ensure that Whole School Risk assessments are reviewed and updated in line with current guidance. Such risk assessments should identify mitigations required, be unique to each school setting and shared with all staff.

All guidance from DE, EA and PHA can be updated at any point. INTO will continue to work with Employing Authorities, through NITC, to ensure that the identification of risk to staff and pupils and the mitigations put in place are reasonable and fit for purpose.

For up-to-date information check out the FAQs on the [INTO website](#).