**Coronavirus (COVID-19) and schools: FAQs**

**Update: Thursday 19 March 2020**

The government has announced that schools will close from Friday 20th March until further notice for all but pupils whose families are ‘key workers’ and vulnerable groups

**Who are key workers?**

**Health and Social Care-** This includes but is not limited to doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, care workers, and other frontline health and social care staff including volunteers; the support and specialist staff required to maintain the UK’s health and social care sector; those working as part of the health and social care supply chain, including producers and distributers of medicines and medical and personal protective equipment.

**Education and childcare-** This includes nursery and teaching staff, social workers and those specialist education professionals who must remain active during the COVID-19 response to deliver this approach.

**Key public services -** This includes those essential to the running of the justice system, religious staff, charities and workers delivering key frontline services, those responsible for the management of the deceased, and journalists and broadcasters who are providing public service broadcasting.

**Local and national government-** This only includes those administrative occupations essential to the effective delivery of the COVID-19 response or delivering essential public services such as the payment of benefits, including in government agencies and arms-length bodies.

**Food and other necessary goods-** This includes those involved in food production, processing, distribution, sale and delivery as well as those essential to the provision of other key goods (for example hygienic and veterinary medicines).

**Public safety and national security-** This includes police and support staff, Ministry of Defence civilians, contractor and armed forces personnel (those critical to the delivery of key defence and national security outputs and essential to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic), fire and rescue service employees (including support staff), National Crime Agency staff, those maintaining border security, prison and probation staff and other national security roles, including those overseas.

**Transport-**This includes those who will keep the air, water, road and rail passenger and freight transport modes operating during the COVID-19 response, including those working on transport systems through which supply chains pass.

**Utilities, communication and financial services**

This includes staff needed for essential financial services provision (including but not limited to workers in banks, building societies and financial market infrastructure), the oil, gas, electricity and water sectors (including sewerage), information technology and data infrastructure sector and primary industry supplies to continue during the COVID-19 response, as well as key staff working in the civil nuclear, chemicals, telecommunications (including but not limited to network operations, field engineering, call centre staff, IT and data infrastructure, 999 and 111 critical services), postal services and delivery, payments providers and waste disposal sectors.

**Which pupils are classed as vulnerable?**

Vulnerable children include children who are supported by social care, those with safeguarding and welfare needs, including child in need plans, on child protection plans, ‘looked after’ children, young carers, disabled children and those with [Education, Health and Care Plans](https://www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs/extra-SEN-help) (EHCP)

**Do I turn up for work on Monday?**

Yes, unless your employer tells you not to, or you need to self-isolate. If you have school-age children to care for, talk to your employer.

It will depend on your school and the provision they will put in place. Government advice as of yesterday is that schools will close for all but pupils whose parents/carers are key workers or in vulnerable groups.

This means that provision for a small number of pupils will need to be maintained.

To ensure you continue to be paid, you must be available to work, and school leaders will now be assessing what provision they will put in place from Monday.

**What if I’m in an ‘at risk’ group?**

There are groups of people who have an increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19).

**If you are in this group, you are advised to work from home wherever possible and your employer should look at ways to support you in this. You will need to speak to your line manager as soon as possible about this.**

Those groups who have an increased risk include people who are:

* aged 70 or older (regardless of medical conditions)
* under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below (ie anyone instructed to get a flu jab as an adult each year on medical grounds):
	+ chronic (long-term) respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis
	+ chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
	+ chronic kidney disease
	+ chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
	+ chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson’s disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), a learning disability or cerebral palsy
	+ diabetes
	+ problems with your spleen – for example, sickle cell disease or if you have had your spleen removed
	+ a weakened immune system as the result of conditions such as HIV and AIDS, or medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy
	+ being seriously overweight (a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above)
* those who are pregnant

**What happens to my pay if my school is closed?**

If your school or workplace is closed but you have a permanent contract and are available to work, you therefore should be paid as normal.

**What about pay and sick pay when absent from work?**

The NJC ‘Green Book’ states that:

*“An employee who is prevented from attending work because of contact with infectious disease shall be entitled to receive normal pay. The period of absence on this account shall not be reckoned against the employee’s entitlements under this scheme.”*

In addition, quarantine or workplace closure should not count towards any accumulation of points towards Bradford Factor or any other ill-health disciplinary scheme.

**Will I still be paid if I am quarantined due to the Coronavirus?**

With regards to employees attending work, GMB members working in local government have the following protections under the NJC ‘Green Book’ terms and conditions:

*“An employee who is prevented from attending work because of contact with infectious disease shall be entitled to receive normal pay. The period of absence on this account shall not be reckoned against the employee’s entitlements under this scheme”*

This means that if you are employed under green book terms and conditions which includes Local Government and Schools staff, including most academies, if you are required to self-isolate or are placed in quarantine, you should continue to receive your normal pay.

**Where can I get the latest government advice for schools?**

Guidance for schools is being regularly updated, so GMB advises members working in schools to keep up to date with this advice, by clicking on the following link. However, if you feel any of the advice is unclear or causes concern, contact your GMB branch for support.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19>

The DfE’s helpline for students, staff and parents can be contacted on: 0800 046 8687. Opening hours are: 8am - 6pm (Monday to Friday) & 10am – 4pm (Saturday & Sunday)  or email  DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk

**What if a staff member or student develops Coronavirus?**

Where children present with temperature above 37.8 or continuous cough, they will need to be placed in an isolated area until they are collected.

There will need to be separate cubicles or significant distances kept between children (not every child will have COVID and there is a need to prevent cross contamination).

Each school is likely to approach this in a different way as there is little national guidance at present. However, we would expect that a risk assessment is undertaken for isolation in each school. This should be shared with the relevant staff involved.

The area will need to be continuously monitored from a distance of at least 2m to ensure that staff members avoid exposure as far as possible.

If you in a group that has an increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19), but are still in work, you should not have any contact with anyone who shows potential symptoms.

**Should medication be given to children with a temperature?**

The normal school policy on administration of medicines should apply.

Where PPE is available this must be worn, but if the task is no more than dispensing tablets/oral suspensions, this can be passed in sealed boxes and cleaned on return.

**What should my school be doing now?**

Employers and managers in schools should be monitoring advice from Government, assessing risks to employees and pupils, reviewing their policies and procedures, considering additional safety measures, and communicating information to staff, pupils and parents as the situation develops.

**If I am required to work how can I continue to protect myself?**

If unwell parents or carers turn up at schools, the only control is maintaining the 2m distance wherever possible, in addition to regularly washing hands for at least 20 seconds (including when entering the building).

**What does my employer have to do to keep me safe?**

Full details about the Coronavirus for GMB members is available on the GMB website, which provides an update for GMB members on controlling the risk of the Coronavirus, and full information on your Employers’ duty of care to reduce the risks from exposure to biological hazards to as low as is reasonably practicable.

If you have an underlying health condition talk to your employer about a risk assessment to decide whether you are safe to remain at school.