



## Questions & Answers – Reopening Schools 2020

### Contents

Q1. Uniforms.....	5
Q2. Can staff/students opt to wear visor instead of mask? .....	5
Q3. What about masks during lunch break? .....	5
Q4. Is there more flexibility regarding the 1m provision given the requirement to mask/face coverings? .....	5
Q5. Can you now have more pupils in a room as they are all wearing masks?.....	6
Q6. Any guidance on managing students who refuse to wear a mask or visor and do not have sensory or medical issues? .....	6
Q7. Breaks for mask fatigue? .....	6
Q8. Quantity of face covering to be supplied to teachers? .....	6
Q9. Any advice for staff on physical distancing? .....	6
Q10. Staff Meetings .....	7
Q11. What about the staff room – kettle, water boilers (Burco), fridge, milk jugs, utensils etc. – being handled by so many different people? .....	7
Q12. In staff room, should staff be divided into pods? .....	7
Q13. DES Signage - One of the signs sent to schools indicates that anyone under 13 years old age should not be required to wear a face covering.....	7
Q14. Collection of Copies for correction? Yes or No? If Yes, do they have to be put in container for period of time? .....	8
Q15. Holding AGM of Parent Associations - timing is set down in the PA constitution.....	8
Q16. Who signs contact tracing log? Visitors only? .....	8
Q17. Union stewards in a few schools making additional demands of Principals.....	8
Q18. Taxi for suspected Covid-19 student cases? .....	8
Q19. LWR – If you have 2 expressions of interest for one position but one teacher is hard to replace – can you refuse to appoint them?.....	8
Q20. Can LWR be a job-sharing teacher? Must they be full time? .....	8
Q21. What to do if no LWR nominations are received? .....	8
Q22. LWR Procedure if school has two or more to appoint; LWR – how to select if teachers and SNA/ auxiliary staff are interested. ....	9
Q23. Ventilation of school facilities. ....	9
Q24. Will there be a facility for teachers/staff and pupils to be tested straight away when people present with symptoms of Covid-19? .....	9

Q25. Does a teacher or student who displays Covid-19 symptoms have to undergo a test before they can return to work/school? .....	9
Q26. Are parents obliged to tell schools if they or their children have tested positive for Covid?.....	9
Q27. What are the guidelines for a school if a parent works abroad for periods of time and then returns home. Do their children continue to come to school or do they remain at home for a period? .....	9
Q28. Are siblings of suspected Covid cases also to be isolated in school prior to collection from building?.....	9
Q29. If a pupil is sent home with suspected Covid and is asked to isolate and await a test, what happens to their siblings in other classes? .....	10
Q30. If a pupil complains of being unwell and is isolated and sent home should siblings of the pupil be isolated and go home also? .....	10
Q31. Impact of a suspected case. Are all families of children in the class informed if there is a suspected case? Are all families of children to include siblings informed- including neighbouring schools?.....	10
Q32. What about an isolation area in small school where there is no extra room. Would a Perspex cube put together for the purpose be okay?.....	10
Q33. Is there a definitive published procedure for dealing with suspect Covid-19 cases both with children and teachers?.....	10
Q34. Steps to be taken when pupils / staff present with symptoms? If presenting just one symptom or will there be a checklist i.e. pupil must present with minimum 3 symptoms before acting? .....	10
Q35. If there is a Covid case in the school, is it the responsibility of the school or the HSE to let parents know? .....	11
Q36. Please outline the procedure in relation to pupils displaying symptoms in school.....	11
Q37. If we have one suspected case must we close that room for 72 hours? And does that mean leaving that class at home for 72 hours?.....	11
Q38. If a pupil has a suspected case and the parent is advised to contact their GP for possible testing should the school ask for a medical cert confirming a positive or negative test - or is it sufficient to take parent's word on the matter?.....	11
Q39. What about pupils with medical conditions who have been told that they can go back to school, but parents don't want to send them?.....	11
Q40. If you know a family is going abroad and returning on August 21st - can you insist on quarantine and not returning at start date - Aug 28th until quarantine is over .....	12
Q41. What if a parent or other member of a household has to self-isolate? Do the children in the family still attend school? .....	12
Q42. Will the Dept of Ed draft specific guidelines/letter to parents re going back to school e.g. parents not to send children into school with temperatures? .....	12
Q43. If a pupil gets on the school bus and is sneezing/coughing etc, is the escort responsible for not letting the pupil on the bus?.....	12
Q44. If a pupil is sent home with suspected Covid-19 what is necessary for their return? - Doctor's note? .....	12

Q45. How can we make provision for online teaching if all staff are teaching face to face?.....	12
Q46. Do schools need medical certification to prove authenticity of high-risk children? .....	12
Q47. Who supervises a pupil or staff member presenting with symptoms, while waiting to be taken home? .....	13
Q48. Can a BOM make an amendment to the Covid-19 Policy Statement in Appendix 1 in the roadmap to include the following: The school reserves the right to refuse admission to any pupil who has travelled to a non-green list country with the last 14 days?.....	13
Q49. If a child returns from abroad and the parents want to send their children to school before the 14-day self-isolation is complete, where does the school stand? .....	13
Q50. Can a school refuse admission to a pupil who is presenting with Covid-19 symptoms?.....	13
Q51. A staff member has a child at home in high risk category and is very concerned about going back into the classroom in case she brings home the virus. ....	13
Q52. Third party use of school facilities.....	13
Q53. Taking temperatures. ....	13
Q54. Advice re extra-curricular activities and what is allowed i.e. in sport. ....	14
Q55. Will schools get an increased number of POR's in September 2021 based on the higher number of WTE for September 2020. ....	14
Q56. Meeting parents of incoming students. ....	14
Q57. Physical Education.....	14
Q58. Face coverings. ....	14
Q59. Travel Abroad. ....	15
Q60. Pupils who live with someone who travels abroad for work. ....	15
Q61. Temperature Checks/Covid-19 Symptoms.....	16
Q62. Visitors to Schools. ....	16
Q63. Movement of staff between schools and within schools. ....	16
Q64. What should a school do if a student displays symptoms which may be consistent with .....	17
Q65. Does the staff member who has cared for the student need to isolate?.....	17
Q66. Should parents, students and staff be informed that a member of the school community has gone home due to their symptoms?.....	17
Q67. When should siblings of a suspected Covid-19 case be withdrawn from school?.....	17
Q68. Whose responsibility is it to respond to confirmed cases of Covid-19 in schools? .....	17
Q69. What actions should be taken to a confirmed case of Covid-19?.....	17
Q70. What happens if no evidence of Covid-19 is detected by a test? .....	18
Q71. When a case is confirmed as positive will Public Health HSE liaise with the school?.....	18
Q72. Will every student in a class be tested where there is a positive case? .....	18
Q73. What about close contacts of a Covid-19 positive case? .....	18
Q74. What is a close contact of a student Covid-19 positive case? .....	18

Q75. What happens to a close contact of a Covid-19 positive case? .....	19
Q76. Given the possibility of a Covid-19 outbreak in a school setting is there anything that schools can do now to prepare for a Public Health Risk Assessment and to manage cases? .....	19
Q77. Vaccinations. ....	19
Q78. Physical Education.....	19
Q79. Extra-curricular Activities. ....	20
Q80. Parent Teacher Meetings.....	20
Q81. Open Evenings.....	20
Q82. Croke Park Hours.....	20
Q83. Staff Meetings. ....	20
Q84. Field trips.....	20
Q85. Work Experience. ....	21
Q86. Evening Study. ....	21
Q87. Parents Association AGM.....	21
Q88. Board of Management Meetings. ....	21
Q89. Board of Management Elections (Parent/Guardian nominees). ....	21
Q90. COVID 19 App.....	21
Q91. MLM Interviews. ....	22
Q92. Use of School Premises for Outside Use. ....	22
Q93. Foreign Trips.....	22



### **Q1. 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.

### **Q2. Can staff/students opt to wear visor instead of mask?**

The guidance is in the Response Plan (version2) page 18.

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7acad-reopening-our-post-primary-schools/#Covid-19-response-plan-for-safe-reopening-of-post-primary-schools>

It is a requirement that teachers, staff and students attending post primary schools wear a face covering when a physical distance of 2m from other staff or students cannot be maintained.

Cloth face coverings act as a barrier to help prevent respiratory droplets from travelling into the air and onto other people when the person wearing the face covering coughs, sneezes, talks or raises their voice. Cloth face coverings are therefore intended to prevent transmission of the virus from the wearer (who may not know that they are infected) to those with whom they come into close contact.

In certain situations, the use of clear visors should be considered, for example staff interacting with students with hearing difficulties or learning difficulties. All students on the post primary transport scheme should be asked to wear face coverings unless there is a good reason not to do so.

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.

### **Q3. What about masks during lunch break?**

The current guidance is that everyone should physically distance 2m when not wearing a mask.

### **Q4. Is there more flexibility regarding the 1m provision given the requirement to mask/face coverings?**

There is no change. The 1m guidance still applies as set out in the framework to maintain Physical Distancing in the Classroom.

**Q5. Can you now have more pupils in a room as they are all wearing masks?**

There is no change to the number of students in a classroom. Schools should follow the 1m guidance as set out in the framework to maintain Physical Distancing in the Classroom.

**Q6. Any guidance on managing students who refuse to wear a mask or visor and do not have sensory or medical issues?**

It is a requirement that students attending post primary schools wear a face covering when a physical distance of 2m from other staff or students cannot be maintained.

There has to be a good reason why a student would be allowed not to wear a face covering. The education partners are working on a protocol for students which will deal with this issue. It is expected that a refusal without good reason will be regarded in the same way as a breach of the school code of conduct.

Notwithstanding the above, 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.

**Q7. Breaks for mask fatigue?**

This would require 2m distancing.

**Q8. Quantity of face covering to be supplied to teachers?**

Staff should be encouraged to have their own reusable masks.

Schools should consider having additional disposable face coverings available for students, teachers, and staff in case a back-up face covering is needed during the day. Whilst staff may wish to utilize their own face covering on a day-to-day basis, schools should have available a stock of additional disposable or multi-use face coverings, or if appropriate face visors, available for staff in case a back-up face covering is needed throughout the day or where required on an ongoing basis.

**Q9. Any advice for staff on physical distancing?**

A distance of 2m is recommended for physical distancing by staff. This is particularly relevant to distancing between adults when they are not engaged in teaching such as the staff room and arriving to work.

If 2m cannot be maintained in staff groups, as much as distance as is possible and updated guidance on face covering should be observed.

At post primary level consideration could be given to formation of staff “pods” or teams who work together and take breaks together.

Staff meetings should be held remotely or in small groups or in large spaces to facilitate physical distancing.

Implement a no hand shaking policy.

Minimise gathering at the beginning or end of the school day.

See Par. 5.5 The Response Plan

#### **Q10. Staff Meetings**

Par. 5.4 The Response Plan

A distance of 2m is recommended for physical distancing by staff. This is particularly relevant to distancing between adults when they are not engaged in teaching.

If 2m cannot be maintained in staff groups, as much distance as is possible and updated guidance on face covering should be observed.

Staff meetings should be held remotely or in small groups or in large spaces to facilitate physical distancing.

#### **Q11. What about the staff room – kettle, water boilers (Burco), fridge, milk jugs, utensils etc. – being handled by so many different people?**

There should be very regular cleaning by the users for all touch points and a plentiful supply hand sanitiser points in the staff room. The HSA recommends that employees should avoid sharing cups, bottles, cutlery, pens etc. Staff should use and retain their own cups etc. Stagger staff breaks where possible.

#### **Q12. In staff room, should staff be divided into pods?**

The guidance is to increase physical distancing and to decrease interactions. Anything to do this is encouraged. Pods should be considered.

#### **Q13. DES Signage - One of the signs sent to schools indicates that anyone under 13 years old age should not be required to wear a face covering.**

This is not the case in post primary schools. The DES, in the Response Plan (version 2), states that It is a requirement that students attending post primary schools wear a face covering when a physical distance of 2m from other staff or students cannot be maintained.

**Q14. Collection of Copies for correction? Yes or No? If Yes, do they have to be put in container for period of time?**

Where they are collected, they should be boxed for a period as previously advised for the book loan scheme.

**Q15. Holding AGM of Parent Associations - timing is set down in the PA constitution.**

A number of schools hold the AGM in the first weeks of the new school year. Under the current restrictions it is not possible to hold meetings of more than 6 people. Schools should either postpone the AGM or arrange to have the meeting held remotely. In the case of elections, a postal ballot could be considered.

**Q16. Who signs contact tracing log? Visitors only?**

The contact tracing log is required so that if there is a case of Covid-19 in the school, all those who might have been in the building and in contact with an infected person can be easily identified. As each school keeps a roll of students and would have a system for all staff to report their absence, this negates the need for staff and students to sign the log. All other callers to the school should sign the log. Each teacher should be reminded to keep a roll for each class period.

A detailed sign in/sign out log for necessary visitors approved by the principal should be maintained. A sample contact log is available at **Appendix 5**, The Response Plan.

**Q17. Union stewards in a few schools making additional demands of Principals.**

The Board of Management has approved the Covid-19 Response Plan signed by the chair and the Principal. This plan, and accompanying documentation, was drawn up following consultation with the Education Partners, including the unions. It complies with public health advice. Schools should operate in line with this plan.

**Q18. Taxi for suspected Covid-19 student cases?**

Contact parents/guardians to collect the student in the first instance.

**Q19. LWR – If you have 2 expressions of interest for one position but one teacher is hard to replace – can you refuse to appoint them?**

Ultimately you can refuse but it would be an absolute last resort. Try everything. It's a discussion with the teacher concerned e.g. might not be timetabled for house exams; possibly offset against compulsory S&S obligations

**Q20. Can LWR be a job-sharing teacher? Must they be full time?**

It can be a part-time teacher.

**Q21. What to do if no LWR nominations are received?**

In such an instance the onus is on management to appoint a member of the school staff



**Q22. LWR Procedure if school has two or more to appoint; LWR – how to select if teachers and SNA/ auxiliary staff are interested.**

Further advice will be provided for this situation. There is ongoing engagement between the Department and the unions on this issue.

**Q23. Ventilation of school facilities.**

Rooms should have adequate ventilation. Doors/windows should be opened to allow air to circulate whenever feasible. If you have mechanical ventilation does it need cleaning or maintenance before the school reopens? Such systems should be maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

**Q24. Will there be a facility for teachers/staff and pupils to be tested straight away when people present with symptoms of Covid-19?**

The Government aims to have rapid testing for anyone displaying symptoms – this will also apply in the case of school staff and pupils.

**Q25. Does a teacher or student who displays Covid-19 symptoms have to undergo a test before they can return to work/school?**

The public health advice on what to do if experiencing Covid-19 symptoms can be found here: <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/symptoms.html>

The teacher must self-isolate, contact their GP who will arrange for a test.

**Q26. Are parents obliged to tell schools if they or their children have tested positive for Covid?**

The HSE will advise close contacts of anyone with a suspected or confirmed case of Covid-19. Parents should follow the advice of the HSE in these situations.

**Q27. What are the guidelines for a school if a parent works abroad for periods of time and then returns home. Do their children continue to come to school or do they remain at home for a period?**

The general public health advice for returning to Ireland having worked abroad should be followed by the person who has worked abroad (in this case the parent). This will not prevent that person's children from attending school. The parent should follow all of the HSE guidelines on their return home.

**Q28. Are siblings of suspected Covid cases also to be isolated in school prior to collection from building?**

No. The advice in relation to dealing with a suspected case is set out in the HPSC health advice on reopening schools and in the School Covid-19 Response Plan.

The person (staff or pupil) with the symptoms should go home to self-isolate, contact their GP for advice and the HSE will then decide, based on the circumstances in each case, what constitutes a close contact for the purpose of deciding who else in the school/family requires to self-isolate and/or be tested.

**Q29. If a pupil is sent home with suspected Covid and is asked to isolate and await a test, what happens to their siblings in other classes?**

It is a matter for the HSE to advise as to who is considered a close contact and therefore required to either self-isolate and or present for testing. See answer to the question above.

**Q30. If a pupil complains of being unwell and is isolated and sent home should siblings of the pupil be isolated and go home also?**

No. See answer to questions directly above.

**Q31. Impact of a suspected case.**

**Are all families of children in the class informed if there is a suspected case?**

**Are all families of children to include siblings informed- including neighbouring schools?**

The HSE will inform any staff/parents who have come into close contact with a diagnosed case via the contact tracing process. The HSE will contact all relevant persons where a diagnosis of Covid-19 is made. The instructions of the HSE should be followed and staff and pupil confidentiality is essential at all times.

**Q32. What about an isolation area in small school where there is no extra room. Would a Perspex cube put together for the purpose be okay?**

This matter is dealt with in the HPSC public health advice on reopening schools (page 23 Section 5.7) and in the School Covid-19 Response Plan (Section 8 ). The isolation area does not need to be a separate room, although that is preferable. If it is not a separate room it should be 2 metres away from others in that room.

**Q33. Is there a definitive published procedure for dealing with suspect Covid-19 cases both with children and teachers?**

Yes. The HPSC public health on reopening schools and the School Covid-19 Response Plan sets out a step by step guide of how to manage a suspected case and includes a checklist to ensure that all the steps are followed at Appendix 7 of the School Response Plan.

**Q34. Steps to be taken when pupils / staff present with symptoms? If presenting just one symptom or will there be a checklist i.e. pupil must present with minimum 3 symptoms before acting?**

This is dealt with on the advice as to how to deal with symptoms which states that if you have ANY common symptom of Covid-19 you should follow the steps set out. Link attached again for ease of reference.

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

**Q35. If there is a Covid case in the school, is it the responsibility of the school or the HSE to let parents know?**

This is dealt with at Section 8 of the School Covid-19 Response plan which states that it is the HSE who will inform parents/staff who have come into close contact with a diagnosed case via the contact tracing process. The HSE will contact all relevant persons where a diagnosis of Covid-19 is made. The instructions of the HSE should be followed and staff and pupil confidentiality is essential at all times.

**Q36. Please outline the procedure in relation to pupils displaying symptoms in school**

This is dealt with at Section 8 of the School Covid-19 Response Plan.

**Q37. If we have one suspected case must we close that room for 72 hours? And does that mean leaving that class at home for 72 hours?**

The HPSC public health advice on reopening schools (page 22 cleaning/disinfecting rooms where a pupil or staff member with a suspected case was present) and the School Covid-19 Response Plan Section 7 Page 25 and 26) sets out the cleaning regime that should apply. It does not require the room to be out of use for 72 hours – “once the room has been cleaned and disinfected and all surfaces are dry, the room can be reused”.

72 hours is referenced only for the double bagging of waste before it is presented for general collection.

**Q38. If a pupil has a suspected case and the parent is advised to contact their GP for possible testing should the school ask for a medical cert confirming a positive or negative test - or is it sufficient to take parent's word on the matter?**

It is not appropriate for the school to look for a medical certificate of a positive/negative result. Parents and staff should follow the HSE advice on what to do if experiencing Covid-19 symptoms.

**Q39. What about pupils with medical conditions who have been told that they can go back to school, but parents don't want to send them?**

Some pupils or their parents may be experiencing anxiety about the return to school in a Covid-19 context to such an extent that the pupil does not return as expected.

All schools are expected to support such pupils in making a full return to school and to provide supports to ensure their anxiety is managed in such a way as to enable them to engage productively in learning in school.

The Department will provide further guidance on how to support high risk students in the coming days.

**Q40. If you know a family is going abroad and returning on August 21st - can you insist on quarantine and not returning at start date - Aug 28th until quarantine is over**

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.

**Q41. What if a parent or other member of a household has to self-isolate? Do the children in the family still attend school?**

The HSE will advise who within a family are considered close contacts and who should self-isolate and/or present for testing.

**Q42. Will the Dept of Ed draft specific guidelines/letter to parents re going back to school e.g. parents not to send children into school with temperatures?**

The Department has prepared a national media campaign to run later in the month of August to provide advice and support to parents and pupils on school reopening. It will include issues such as advice on staying at home if unwell.

**Q43. If a pupil gets on the school bus and is sneezing/coughing etc, is the escort responsible for not letting the pupil on the bus?**

Parents have been advised not to send their child to school and/or on school transport if they display symptoms of Covid-19. Equally if a pupil displays symptoms in school the parents should be contacted to collect the child and they must not use school transport. If a pupil starts to show symptoms on the school bus, they should continue to the school, be brought to the isolation area and parents contacted immediately to bring them home.

**Q44. If a pupil is sent home with suspected Covid-19 what is necessary for their return? - Doctor's note?**

Parents and pupils are to follow the HSE advice including to self-isolate while awaiting a test. If the outcome of the test is negative and the pupil is symptom free, they should return to school. If the test is positive the HSE will advise on appropriate next steps in the circumstances.

**Q45. How can we make provision for online teaching if all staff are teaching face to face?**

The Department will provide further guidance in the coming days on how to support high risk students.

**Q46. Do schools need medical certification to prove authenticity of high-risk children?**

Will be dealt with in the Department guidance awaited.

**Q47. Who supervises a pupil or staff member presenting with symptoms, while waiting to be taken home?**

The school should make the necessary arrangements from the existing staff to allow an adult to supervise the pupil with symptoms while awaiting collection by parents/guardians.

**Q48. Can a BOM make an amendment to the Covid-19 Policy Statement in Appendix 1 in the roadmap to include the following: The school reserves the right to refuse admission to any pupil who has travelled to a non-green list country with the last 14 days?**

The Department has issued an email to all schools on this matter which states: 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. This means staying indoors in one location and avoiding contact with other people and social situations as much as possible.

This is the position which schools should adopt in managing this issue at school level.

**Q49. If a child returns from abroad and the parents want to send their children to school before the 14-day self-isolation is complete, where does the school stand?**

Dealt with in the previous question.

**Q50. Can a school refuse admission to a pupil who is presenting with Covid-19 symptoms?**

The advice to parents and schools is that nobody should attend school or work if they have Covid-19 symptoms. That advice should be reiterated to parents. It will also form part of the national media campaign on school reopening.

**Q51. A staff member has a child at home in high risk category and is very concerned about going back into the classroom in case she brings home the virus.**

This issue has been dealt with in Circular 49/2020 [https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0049\\_2020.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0049_2020.pdf)

**Q52. Third party use of school facilities.**

Allianz has undertaken to prepare advice for schools on the use of school property by third party users. This should issue to schools during the last week of August.

**Q53. Taking temperatures.**

The Response Plan does not provide for the taking of temperatures. It is not the role of the school to take anyone's temperature

**Q54. Advice re extra-curricular activities and what is allowed i.e. in sport.**

Schools should refer to the HPSC guidance on Return to Sport.

**Q55. Will schools get an increased number of POR's in September 2021 based on the higher number of WTE for September 2020.**

If the current rules apply it is anticipated that there would be an increased number of middle leadership posts in September 2021.

**Q56. Meeting parents of incoming students.**

Current regulations restrict outside groups to no more than six people. Schools might explore other options such as online meetings.

**Q57. Physical Education.**

Minimise equipment sharing and clean shared equipment between users by different people. Shower facilities shall not be available for use by students due to the increased risk associated with communal shower facilities and areas. This shall be reviewed in line with government guidance

20<sup>th</sup> August 2020

**Q58. 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.

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.

**Q59. 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 for this period.

**Q60. 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.

### **Q61. 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>

### **Q62. 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.

### **Q63. 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.

25<sup>th</sup> August 2020



**Q64. What should a school do if a student displays symptoms which may be consistent with Covid-19?**

The school should contact their parent or guardian and ask them to collect their child as soon as possible. The student should be placed in an isolation space and cared for appropriately by a staff member whilst they are waiting to go home.

The isolation space should be cleaned and contact surfaces disinfected when vacated.

At this stage, **no further action** by the school is required.

**Q65. Does the staff member who has cared for the student need to isolate?**

The staff member who has cared for the child with symptoms during this time does not need to go home unless subsequently advised to by Public Health HSE.

**Q66. Should parents, students and staff be informed that a member of the school community has gone home due to their symptoms?**

No. Schools are asked to note that they should **not** inform other parents or staff members that a pupil or staff member has gone home due to their symptoms. Other pupils or staff do **not** need to be removed from class, including siblings or other household members.

**Q67. When should siblings of a suspected Covid-19 case be withdrawn from school?**

When the GP of a student or staff member has assessed the symptoms to be consistent with Covid-19 infection and the person is referred for a test, at this point the person becomes a suspected Covid-19 case and household members including siblings should be withdrawn from school by their parent or guardian.

**Q68. Whose responsibility is it to respond to confirmed cases of Covid-19 in schools?**

The response to confirmed cases or outbreaks of Covid-19 in a school is the responsibility of and will be led and managed by **Public Health HSE**. All decisions as to appropriate actions following a confirmed case or outbreak will be made by their teams in the context of a full Public Health Risk Assessment procedure.

**Q69. What actions should be taken to a confirmed case of Covid-19?**

Any actions to be taken by the school will be communicated directly by Public Health HSE. School management will be informed as and when such actions such as exclusion of children or staff; partial or full closure, are deemed necessary on public health grounds. If the school is not so informed, it has **not been deemed necessary** by Public Health

**Q70. What happens if no evidence of Covid-19 is detected by a test?**

Where no evidence of Covid-19 is detected by the test, the student child or staff member should remain at home only until he or she is clinically well enough to return to school unless specifically requested by HSE to do otherwise. Household members can return to school immediately following the receipt by the parent or guardian or staff member of a “not detected” result.

**Q71. When a case is confirmed as positive will Public Health HSE liaise with the school?**

When a case has been confirmed, the Medical Officer of Health and teams will liaise directly with the school and inform them of the confirmed case as necessary and will undertake a Public Health Risk Assessment to inform any further actions and recommendations.

Core to this assessment will be the likelihood of onward transmission from the confirmed case and will be informed by an urgent discussion with the school to establish any appropriate isolation for identified staff or pupils.

**Q72. Will every student in a class be tested where there is a positive case?**

There is no blanket policy to test entire classes or years. The strategy will be determined after risk assessment of the confirmed case, considering the likely source of infection and the likely potential for onward transmission of infection within the school setting. The Public Health Risk Assessment may recommend widespread swabbing within a class or school under HSE mass testing procedures.

The risk assessment may be dynamic and change as new information becomes available and the testing strategy may evolve as information unfolds.

**Q73. What about close contacts of a Covid-19 positive case?**

Close contacts will be identified following Public Health Risk Assessment and engagement with the school.

Close contacts will be directly notified by the HSE and advised to restrict their movements and present for testing on day zero and day seven. Close contacts will restrict their movements for 14 days even in the event that Covid-19 is not detected in both of these tests.

**Q74. What is a close contact of a student Covid-19 positive case?**

The definition of close contacts within the school setting will be variable. It will not be automatically assumed that a whole class will be deemed as close contacts.

In secondary settings where there is social distancing rather than a ‘pod’ per se, close contacts will be determined by proximity and interaction with the positive case; class placement; classroom structure; common travel; social networks and friendship groups etc.

**Q75. What happens to a close contact of a Covid-19 positive case?**

These identified close contacts will have to be removed from the school setting. They will be tested as per national contact guidelines (Day 0 and 7) and they should be advised to restrict their movements and remain alert for symptoms, as per national guidelines.

There may be other community close contacts who will also be excluded from the school but because of their community exposure NOT their school exposure e.g. siblings / cousins etc.

**Q76. Given the possibility of a Covid-19 outbreak in a school setting is there anything that schools can do now to prepare for a Public Health Risk Assessment and to manage cases?**

To inform the Public Health Risk Assessment and to manage cases and outbreaks and identify relevant contacts, schools should have prepared a summary, based on headings listed below, ready to give to the Medical Officer of Health as part of the statutory investigation and management of Covid-19.

- A brief description of the school (type, numbers of staff and students and special features such as special education units) pertaining to the schools
- A list of staff and students with appropriate contact telephone numbers
- Prepare a broad description of classrooms (number of classrooms, average capacity of the classrooms)
- An outline of the staff and students' movements around the school, between lessons and breaks (student based, or teacher-based classrooms – whether they move between every class)
- A list of 'pods' and 'bubbles' should be kept up to date (more relevant in the primary setting)

1<sup>st</sup> September 2020

**Q77. Vaccinations.**

As is normal at this time of year, HSE staff have been contacting schools in relation to organisation of the annual immunisation programme. School management is reminded that under GDPR, the HSE should only be informed of the number of pupils in each class and that the names and addresses of students should not be shared.

The HSE has acknowledged that the school vaccination programme may need to be done in a different venue or may be delayed because of Covid-19. While schools may not be in a position to host the vaccination programme, the information can be circulated to parents where this is requested by HSE. The completed forms can then be passed by the school from parents to HSE in line with normal practice.

**Q78. Physical Education.**

Students should be encouraged to participate in PE in schools. As part of the return to school plans the Department has published guidance for practical subjects in Post Primary Schools, including guidance for PE. This guidance is based on Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC)

guidance for the return to sports activities for children and adolescents. The guidance provides that, where practical, PE lessons should take place outdoors. If this is not possible, the external PE hall doors should be opened. Face coverings do not have to be worn outdoors. Indoors where physical distancing is not possible, face coverings should be worn by post primary students. The Physical Education Association of Ireland has provided a useful link on recommended physical education activities at this time.

<https://www.peai.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/PEAI-Newsletter-Autumn-2020.pdf>

#### **Q79. Extra-curricular Activities.**

Advice is awaited from the Department. In preparation for a resumption of activities, schools should observe the protocols that have been put in place by the associations/bodies governing individual sports and activities. The following link on Gov.ie is very useful in this regard. <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/07253-return-to-sport-protocols/>

#### **Q80. Parent Teacher Meetings.**

It is advised that face to face parent teacher meetings should not occur for the foreseeable future. Instead of the current model of meetings, in consultation with staff, schools may consider other options including the possibility of online engagement with parents. Given the timeframe of 2.5 hours per meeting and the availability for parents of the required technology it is unlikely that online engagement could replicate the current in-person meetings. JMB welcomes thoughts and ideas from schools on this topic.

#### **Q81. Open Evenings.**

The Department of Education is not in favour of large or small gatherings in schools other than for students attending school. Hence, the advice is not to host an in-person open evening. Schools are exploring alternatives including webinars, short documentaries, virtual presentations, media and social media platforms etc. Again, ideas for sharing are welcomed.

#### **Q82. Croke Park Hours.**

The commitment to Croke Park hours remains in the current year. Rescheduling some of the planned meetings and the associated hours commitment will require consultation and consensus with the staff.

#### **Q83. Staff Meetings.**

As stated previously, the Department of Education is not in favour of large or small gatherings in schools (other than for the school cohort of students). Hence, staff meetings should be held using remote means/ teleconferencing/ video conferencing.

#### **Q84. Field trips**

Field trips may go ahead. There should be physical distancing in the transport used, one person per two-person seat in a bus. This is a different standard than that used in school buses which have yet to meet the expected standard. Students should use masks while travelling on the bus and when they are closer than 2 metres to others indoors/outdoors. The distance travelled should be kept to a minimum.

**Q85. Work Experience.**

Schools are going ahead with this where feasible. Most students through family connections or friends access their own placement. It is essential as always that the student is comfortable with the work experience placement. In the current environment, it may be difficult for some students to secure a placement and they will need support from the school personnel responsible for the programmes.

**Q86. Evening Study.**

The Department has undertaken to prepare advice regarding evening study. While this is awaited, JMB advises that the same standard of physical distancing as applies in the classroom should be maintained. The study group which should be broken into pods of no more than 24. Putting more than one pod into a larger area is not advised except where this area is used, or would be used, for more than one class group.

**Q87. Parents Association AGM**

The AGM should be held using an online platform. The Department is opposed to gatherings of this type in schools.

**Q88. Board of Management Meetings.**

Based on Department advice regarding gatherings in schools, board meetings should be conducted using an online platform. The requirement to provide a Child Protection Oversight Report (CPOR) will not apply to board meetings held remotely whether by video conference or teleconference. This is because it is not possible to meet the requirement to provide to board members the specified documentation at the board meeting. The Principal must continue to maintain the relevant data and records for the CPOR which shall be provided at the next face to face meeting of the board. The data in the report must reflect cases arising since the previous CPOR was provided to the board.

However, please note that the Department's Parents' and Learners' Unit (PLU) is reviewing and updating this advice on the CPOR and further advice on this matter will issue to schools shortly.

**Q89. Board of Management Elections (Parent/Guardian nominees).**

In co-operation with the school parents' association, elections are required where the term of office of the board comes to an end on October 15. Normally, the methodology for the election would be agreed with the parent's association. Current advice is that paper does not pose a risk especially if it is stored for 72 hours. Some schools have suggested using electronic methods. Security, authenticity and confidentiality would be obvious questions arising. Also, some parents might not have the required IT facilities or might not be comfortable with electronic voting. For these reasons, while email might be used to seek nominations JMB recommends that schools retain the old paper-based election system.

**Q90. COVID 19 App.**

Whenever there is a confirmed case of COVID 19 in a school a public health risk assessment will be carried out by the HSE. The tracker app triggers notifications to those considered by the app

to be close contacts of the confirmed case and it will send them for testing. This testing may be unnecessary. The HSE public health assessment supersedes the app as the app cannot know the full circumstances of the interaction with the positive case. At that point some or all of those notified via the app may be advised that a test is not needed and that they do not need to restrict their movements. All staff will be advised to continue to be vigilant for symptoms.

**Q91. MLM Interviews.**

Schools are using both socially distanced in person interviews and remote platforms such as ZOOM and Google Meet. It is for the interview board to decide which is the most suitable option in the current circumstances.

**Q92. Use of School Premises for Outside Use.**

If your school decides to proceed with third party use of any school facilities, then, as always, a licence agreement should be in place along with confirmation of adequate insurance from the third party. Within this licence agreement, the school and the third party should formally agree on cleaning and waste disposal responsibilities in keeping with the school Response Plan, together with clear instructions around the specific areas of the school premises that the third party has permission to access.

**Q93. Foreign Trips.**

Schools should adhere to government guidance regarding external travel. The current guidance is not to travel abroad unless it is essential and to observe the required protocols around restricted movement, where applicable, on return. Accordingly, it is advised that school trips abroad should be cancelled or deferred until travel restrictions are lifted.

23<sup>rd</sup> September 2020