



**COVID-19
Schools Community Testing Pathway**

FAQ FOR SCHOOLS

FAQs for School Principals or Designated Contact Person

This leaflet was developed for school principals or designated contact person by the HSE in collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills.

Pre-detected result confirmation and detected result confirmation

Q: What should the school do if a pupil/student is displaying symptoms while at school?

A: The pupil/student should be immediately brought to the designated isolation area in the school, which should have good ventilation and preferably a window to the outside that opens.

The school should contact the parents/ guardians and ask them to collect their child as soon as possible. The pupil/student should be cared for appropriately by a designated staff member until they are collected. The staff member who is caring for the child should take all necessary precautions as outlined in the public health guidance document. The staff member assisting with the pupil/student does not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves, or are later advised to by public health.

After the symptomatic pupil/student has left the isolation space, it should be cleaned and contact surfaces disinfected.

Q. What should the school do if a staff member is displaying symptoms while at school?

A. The onus is on the staff member to immediately inform the principal that s/he is displaying symptoms. The staff member should immediately go home, self-isolate and seek medical review by their GP (phone the GP if you have symptoms of COVID-19, do not attend in person. GP assessment for COVID-19, and COVID testing if required, are free of cost.)

Q: What should the school do if they are informed over the phone that a pupil/student is symptomatic?

A: The Principal is asked only to make a note of the pupil/student's absence. The principal may note a brief description of the pupil/student's symptoms, if they are disclosed by the parent. **However, the principal is not required or entitled to ask about clinical symptoms.** Schools can remind parents that if they are concerned a child may have symptoms of COVID-19, the child should not attend school and they should contact their GP without delay. No further actions are required of the school at this stage.

Q. Should a school advise the school community that a staff or pupil/student is symptomatic?

A. No. Schools are asked to note that they should not inform other parents or staff members that a pupil/student or staff member has gone home due to their symptoms. Other pupils/students or staff do not need to be removed from class. This includes siblings or other household members of staff or pupils/students.

Q: Should siblings/household members of someone with symptoms be removed from the school setting?

A: Only under certain circumstances: if the GP of the pupil/student/ staff member decides that their symptoms are consistent with COVID-19, (for example, fever OR a new cough, shortness of breath, deterioration of existing respiratory condition any loss of or changes to the sense of smell or taste), that person becomes a suspected case of COVID-19 and will be referred for a test. It is at this point that members of the symptomatic person's household, including siblings or children of staff members, should be withdrawn from school by their parents or guardians.

Q: If the school is informed of a positive case, what should the school do?

A. If the case of COVID-19 was in the school during the infectious period the school should await a call from the Department of Public Health. This will usually be on the same day but may be the next day. The 'infectious period' is the timeframe during which someone with an infectious disease can spread it to other people – the 'infectious period' for COVID-19 includes the 24 hours before testing for asymptomatic cases, or the 48 hours before symptom onset for symptomatic cases.

It is important to remember that the confirmed case is no longer within the school and therefore the risk of onward transmission from that person has been removed from the school setting. If the case was not in the school setting whilst infectious, then public health will not routinely call the school because there is no significant risk that the case has spread the infection in the school setting.

When public health doctors make contact with the school they will proceed to ask several questions and undertake a Public Health Risk Assessment (PHRA) with the school.

Advance preparation of the required information (as per the excel sheet format provided on 24th September 2020) will assist the school, and the Department of Public Health, in the event of a Public Health Risk Assessment (PHRA) being carried out.

Q: What should I expect when Public Health call me?

A: The regional Department of Public Health will ask several questions and carry out a risk assessment. Public Health will identify any close contacts from the school setting with you, through the process of the Public Health Risk Assessment (PHRA).

You will be asked by the Department of Public Health to provide information on the close contacts identified. This information will be required in a specific excel format.

The legal basis for sharing requested data with Public Health (Medical Officers of Health and staff in Departments of Public Health) is the [Infectious Diseases Regulations 1981](#) as amended which provides the legal responsibility for Public Health in Article 11 and the authority in Article 19 which states that 'Any person who refuses to comply with a requirement or direction given or a request for information made in pursuance of any of the provisions of these Regulations shall be guilty of a contravention of these Regulations'. This legislation fulfils [GDPR](#) Article 6 conditions c, d, and e regarding lawfulness of processing, and processing of special categories of personal data is allowed under Article 9 2 (i).

Q: What happens if teachers or students receive notifications of the HSE COVID Tracker App?

A: Close contacts within the school setting are identified by Departments of Public Health following a Public Health Risk Assessment (PHRA). If there is any information from the HSE COVID Tracker App, this information will be considered in the risk assessment. However, it may be that not all people who are alerted through the APP are actually deemed close contacts, or vice versa – Public Health might determine that some people who have not been notified by the App are close contacts. While the COVID tracker App is a very useful tool for collecting information on potential close contacts, Public Health risk assessment and advice overrides the App. This is because the Public Health Risk Assessment (PHRA) collects more nuanced, composite information to better appraise infection transmission risk in defined circumstances.

Q. Will the Department of Public Health provide instructions to the school as to how to proceed?

A. Once the Public Health Risk Assessment is complete, the Department of Public Health will then advise you of the public health instructions.

These instructions are delivered by the Medical Officer of Health/ Health officer on the advice of the MOH, under Infectious Diseases legislation.

The advice will typically include asking the school principal to:

- Contact the parents/guardians of the pupils/students, who are determined by Public Health to be 'close contacts'. Parents of these pupils/students will be asked by the school principal to collect them from school as soon as is safely and practically possible, so they can start restricting their movements. This may still be at the end of the school day. Public Health may also ask the school to issue a letter / text message or written guidance to these parents/guardians, prepared and provided by Public Health.
- Contact any staff member who may be determined by Public Health to be a "close contact" and ask him/her to go home to start restricting their movements.

Q. What is the period of restricted movements required of a pupil/student or staff member deemed to be a "close contact"?

A. Pupils/students will be asked to restrict their movements and not attend school for a full 14 days.

This is because it can take up to 14 days for the virus to show up in your system after you have been exposed to it. As per data protection regulations, a school cannot confirm the name of the pupil/student and/or staff member who tested positive ('detected') for COVID-19.

Q: If there is a case identified - how far back do Public Health go to consider close contacts?

A: For a confirmed case of COVID-19 who was symptomatic, Public Health will identify close contacts in the 48-hour period before the person became symptomatic. If the confirmed case was asymptomatic, then public health will identify close contacts for the 24-hour period before the test was taken.

Q. Is contact tracing within the school community always required?

A. No. It may well be that for someone who is identified as a confirmed case of COVID-19 there is no need to do any contact tracing within the school setting. This would likely be because the person was not in school while infectious and therefore no contact tracing of other persons within the school will be required. In this instance Public Health would not contact the school.

Q: I have heard that someone from the school has been identified as a confirmed case of COVID-19 – why has Public Health not contacted me?

A: It may have already been determined that there are no close contacts or onward transmission risk within the school setting, for example if the individual was not in the school during the infectious period. When Public Health do need to contact a school, they will usually do so the same day, or following day. This is safe practice, as the case is no longer within the school setting, and therefore the risk of onward transmission from this case is no longer present.

Q: Can the school share a name of the pupil/student or staff member who is a confirmed case of COVID-19?

A: No, the school cannot share the name of the person who has tested positive for COVID-19 (Covid-19 detected). This information is private and confidential. Close contacts will not be told the name of the confirmed case.

Q: Is the school complying with GDPR requirements when collecting and sharing information on complex/close contacts with the HSE?

A: Yes, under the Infectious Diseases Regulations 1981, as amended, Medical Officers of Health ask that you collect the data, keep it secure and release it only to Public Health when requested to do so as part of the investigations into a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19. Processing of these data by the MOH is provided for under GDPR, special category data 9 2(i).

Q: What if the press media or wider school community contact the school?

A: The following is a generic statement that schools may wish to consider using in full or part in response to press/media queries.

“The school cannot comment on individual cases or outbreaks of COVID-19 to protect the privacy and confidentiality of those involved.

The school can confirm that we have engaged with the HSE. The HSE’s role includes carrying out a Public Health Risk Assessment. As part of this risk assessment, all close contacts will be identified, contacted and advised of the next steps. Close contacts are requested not to come to school, in line with HSE Public Health advice. If Public Health does not make contact with you, you are not impacted and can continue to attend school.

The school will continue to work with the HSE in ensuring all necessary hygiene, health and safety protocols are in place at the school for the prevention and containment of COVID-19.”

If a pupil/student and/or staff member develops symptoms

Q: How will a test be set up for these pupils/student and/or /staff members?

A: The pupil/student or staff member will be advised to contact their GP. Their GP will assess them and determine whether they should be referred for a COVID-19 test. If an individual is referred for a COVID-19 test, s/he will receive a text message with information of the appointment (time and place).

Q: If a pupil/student has symptoms which may be consistent with COVID-19 – what does the parents/ guardian need to do?

A: If a child has symptoms which could be consistent with COVID-19, the parents/guardians should call their GP. Their GP will decide whether they should be tested for COVID-19. If the GP determines that the child does need a COVID-19 test, it is at this point that all of their household contacts are asked to restrict their movements. This means that siblings or staff members in the same household as the person who has symptoms should be removed from the school setting. Only the symptomatic case is asked to self-isolate.

Note: there will be many cases where testing is determined not to be required, for example, because the GP thinks that the child’s symptoms are not due to COVID-19 and might be due to another cause, e.g. the common cold. If the GP does not recommend COVID testing, and it is early in the child’s illness, the recommendation is to observe the child for 48 hours and if no further symptoms develop, then they can return to school. If the GP has made a different diagnosis, parents/guardians should follow advice and recommendations on exclusion depending on this diagnosis.

Q: How soon will the pupil/student or staff member receive a test?

A: The person will receive an automated notification of a scheduled appointment at a testing centre at the next possible free slot for testing.

Q: Will the pupil/student or staff member receive one test or more than one test on the basis of being symptomatic? If the latter, why?

A. If the pupil/student or staff member is experiencing symptoms and has been referred for testing by their GP, they will receive one test.

If a pupil/student/ staff member is identified as a close contact

Q: How will a test be set up for persons identified as a close contact?

A: The HSE will send an SMS with the appointment date, time and location of the free COVID-19 test(s)

Q: How soon will the pupil/student/staff member receive a test after being identified as a close contact?

A: Public Health will advise on the timing of a test for close contacts. This will depend on when the pupil/student/staff member was last in contact with the positive case. Testing will be arranged within 1-2 days

Q: Will the pupil/student/staff member receive one test or more than one test? If the latter, why?

A: Public Health will advise whether a pupil/student/staff member needs one or more tests for COVID-19. They will usually require testing on Day 0 and Day 7 since their last exposure to the confirmed case, but there may be circumstances whereby Public Health require only one test to be undertaken, for example. If sufficient time has elapsed such that the first test for close contacts will be 7 days since they were last exposed to the individual they will only require one test. Public Health doctors will make this judgement following the risk assessment.

Restricting your movements

Q: What does restricting your movements mean?

A: Restricting your movements means avoiding contact with other people and social situations as much as possible.

Therefore pupil/students/staff members~:

- Will have to stay home from school.
- Cannot use public transport.
- Cannot have visitors in their home.

- Cannot go shopping – instead where possible, order groceries online or have family or friends drop them off.
- Should keep away from older people and/or anyone with a long-term medical condition
- Cannot travel outside or within Ireland.

Q: If a test comes back as “not detected” for a symptomatic pupil/student/staff member, will the person still be required to restrict their movements and why?

A: Yes. If the person receives a negative / ‘not detected’ test result, the person should remain at home until they are well enough to return to school, unless parents/guardians of (pupil/students) or staff members are specifically asked by HSE public health to remain excluded because of further investigation.

A pupil/student /staff member can return to their normal activities, once they have been given either:

- a negative (‘not-detected’) test result **and** are 48 hours without symptoms or
- another diagnosis, which is not COVID-19.

Those who live with the person will then no longer need to restrict their movements.

Q: If a test comes back ‘SARS-CoV-2 detected’ (confirmed case of COVID-19) will the pupil /student/staff member still be required to self-isolate?

A: If a person was symptomatic for COVID-19 they should already be self-isolating. If a close contact who was restricting their movements receives a positive COVID-19 test result (SARS-CoV-2 detected), they are now a confirmed case of COVID-19 and must self-isolate; additionally, their close contacts including household contacts must now also start restricting their movements. They may already have been restricting their movements, however if only one person in the house was deemed a close contact from an exposure outside the house e.g. in the school, then the other family members would not have been restricting their movements until this point.

Q: If a pupil/student//staff member has tested positive for COVID-19 and self-isolated for 10 days thereafter, can they return to school/work?

A: Yes, provided that both of the following apply:

- they have not had a high temperature (38 degrees Celsius or over) for 5 days
- it has been 10 days since they first developed symptoms

Close contact information

Q: What does a parent/guardian of a pupil/student who has received a confirmed COVID-19 result need to do?

A: Parents/guardians will automatically be considered to be close contacts if their child tests positive for COVID-19. They will be contacted by the contact tracing centre, a test will be organised for them as they are close contacts and they will be required to restrict their movements for the full 14 days.

Q: What is the definition of a close contact?

A: A person is deemed to be a close contact if s/he has

- Spent more than 15 minutes face-to-face contact within 2 metres or 6 feet of a confirmed case
- Lives in the same house or shared accommodation as a confirmed case
- Shares a closed space with a confirmed case for more than 2 hours

NB: The Public Health Risk Assessment (PHRA) is used in the school setting to determine the close contacts

Q: How will pupil/student/staff members find out that they are a close contact?

A: The pupil/student or staff member may need to be informally advised by the school, for example, when asking parents/guardians to collect their child or when a staff member is being asked to go home.

Public Health may provide a letter, suggested wording for a text message or email, which the school can issue to the families or staff members identified as close contacts.

The HSE contact tracing team will phone the parents/guardians of pupils/students and/or staff members who are identified as close contacts. The HSE will arrange for the child/staff member to have an appointment for a free COVID-19 test. As a close contact of a confirmed case, they will be asked to restrict their movements for the full 14 days, even if their COVID-19 test or tests are negative ('not detected').

If a child does develop any symptoms of COVID-19, their parents/guardian should call their GP without delay.

Q: What should the principal do if parents of pupils/students or staff members, that have not been identified as close contact, ring the school for information on the confirmed (positive) case and other close contacts?

A: The school cannot comment on individual cases or outbreaks as to do so would compromise the privacy and confidentiality of those involved. When a case of COVID-19 is identified which is linked to a school, Public Health professionals discuss the matter directly with the person, or family as appropriate, and ask them about their contacts. Public Health professionals will also discuss the matter directly with the school, undertaking a public health risk assessment. Recommended measures, including any exclusions of other pupils or staff members, are made at this point. Responses and recommendations for each facility may well differ, depending on the circumstances identified by Public Health.

Q: Can the class of a confirmed Covid-19 case attend school?

A: The HSE will have carried out a Public Health Risk Assessment (PHRA). The only individuals who cannot attend school are those who have been identified as close contacts by Public Health. This may be a small number, for example a 'pod', or it could be a full class. However, if a pupil/student /staff member develops symptoms which could be consistent with Covid-19, they should self-isolate immediately and discuss the matter with their GP.

Q: What message can be communicated to the wider school? (if required)

A: A suggested communication would include *"The HSE is guiding our school through the actions we need to take to protect staff, students and our school community. A Public Health Risk Assessment has been carried out. All close contacts have been identified and sent home from school to restrict their movements for 14 days. The school community will continue to engage with and implement Public Health advice to protect ourselves and the school community from Covid-19"*

Q: What is the status of a family member of the pupil/student or staff member who has been identified as a close contact?

A: The person (pupil/student or staff member) who is a close contact needs to restrict their movements for the full 14 days, but no other family member is required to do so – unless they themselves are also identified as a close contact.

Q: Can siblings or children of a staff member who is a close contact attend school?

A: Yes.

Only the /staff member who is a close contact needs to restrict their movements, even though they have no symptoms. However, no other family member is required to do so – unless also identified as a close contact.

If however the staff member who is a close contact develops symptoms, of COVID-19 then they are a suspected case of COVID-19 and should now self-isolate and contact their GP, explaining that they have been identified as a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19 and they now have symptoms too.

If the GP determines they are now a suspected case of COVID-19, they will arrange testing and the close contact should:

- continue to self-isolate; and
- household members should restrict their movements, as per guidance for household contacts of a suspected case of COVID-19.

Q: What should family members do if the pupil/student /staff member receives a confirmed COVID-19 result?

A: The family members are now considered to be close contacts of a confirmed case of COVID-19 and are therefore required to restrict their movements for the full 14 days.

Q: What should the family members do if the pupil/student /staff member receives a “not detected” result after the required number of tests?

A: The family members are not required to restrict their movements

Testing

Q: Is there any occasion whereby someone who has been tested for COVID-19 should be attending a school?

A: Some children living in Direct Provision Centres may well be tested for COVID-19 as part of the routine national testing for vulnerable settings. These children should attend school whilst they are awaiting these test results.

Any child who is symptomatic or being tested because they are a close contact of a confirmed case should not be within the school setting.

Certificates

Q: If a child returns to school but hadn't been tested for COVID-19 should I ask for a GP certificate for this?

A: No. There is a self-certification form on the HPSC website (www.hpsc.ie) 'Return to Educational Facility Parental Declaration Form' which parents can complete.

Q: What is a child has a chronic symptom e.g. cough that the parents say is not related to COVID-19

A: If a child has long-term symptoms related to a chronic condition e.g. a chronic cough, related to asthma, then they/their parents/guardians can complete a self-declaration form on the HPSC website (www.hpsc.ie) for this. They do not require a letter from their GP.

Communication of a result

Q: How long will it take to get a test result?

A: If the result is negative / not detected – an SMS will be sent within 48 hours. If SARS-CoV-2 is detected (positive COVID-19 result) then the HSE will phone the individual or parents/guardians as soon as possible.

Q: If a pupil/student/staff member's test has resulted as 'not detected', how will they be informed?

A: You will receive a text message if the test is negative for COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2 is not detected). You could still get COVID-19 in the future. You should continue to follow the guidelines to protect yourself and others.

Q: If a pupil/student/staff member's test has resulted as detected (positive), how will they be informed?

A: If there is a positive test result for COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2 is detected), the processes of gathering case information and contact tracing will begin. HSE contact tracers will phone the individual or parents/guardians (of the child). The case will be referred to the MOH within the Department of Public Health for public health risk assessment and management. The MOH will liaise with the school and inform them of further action as necessary.

Q: Will a pupil/student's / staff members result be shared with the educational facility?

A: COVID-19 tests remain confidential as per patient – doctor confidentiality. No other pupil/student, parent, family or teacher will be informed of the results.

However, parents should be advised at the point of testing, that if their child's result is positive for COVID-19(SARS-CoV-2-19 detected) then it will likely need to be shared with an appropriate named individual within the school/educational facility, if this is deemed necessary by the Medical Officer of Health for onward safe management of the situation.

Q: If the close contacts identified within the school test positive, will public health perform another risk assessment and is there any action required from the school

A: Public health will review the situation and continue their engagement. Public Health risk assessment is dynamic, changing as information is accumulated.

Q: What if a pupil/student / staff member is waiting more than three days for a test result?

A: Anyone waiting longer than 3 days for a COVID-19 test result should get in touch with the 'HSE delayed COVID-19 test search service' by choosing one of the options below:

- Fill out the online form www.hse.ie/CovidResults; or
- Freephone HSELive on 1850 24 1850 who will take your details. This service is open Monday to Friday: 8am -8pm, Saturday and Sunday 9am-5pm; or
- Call your GP who can submit a query on your behalf using a protected form.

Use of on-line platforms

Q: If the school has on-line media facilities should this be used as a forum for parents to share COVID-19 information?

A: No, we do not recommend that use of on-line forums is encouraged around cases or incidents relating to COVID-19 within the school. This is because it can result in individuals accidentally being identified who might be confirmed cases of COVID-19,

resulting in a breach of confidentiality, or stigmatising children and families with confirmed cases of COVID-19. This in turn can make it challenging for people to reveal any symptoms/concerns in a timely manner, making it more difficult for schools and Public Health staff to protect everyone.

Q: If the school has on-line media facilities should this be used as a forum for parents to share COVID-19 information?

A: No, we do not recommend that use of on-line forums is encouraged around cases or incidents relating to COVID-19 within the school. This is because it can result in individuals accidentally being identified who might be confirmed

Travel

Q: What's the advice for people travelling into Ireland from a country not on the green list?

A: A pupil /student / staff member travelling to Ireland from a location that is **not** on the COVID-19 Green List is required to restrict their movements for the full 14 days. This includes citizens and residents returning to Ireland.

Up to date information and advice on coronavirus is available on [hse.ie](https://www.hse.ie)