



connectme
Coronavirus (COVID-19) update



Devon
County Council

BACK TO SCHOOL SPECIAL

Wednesday 3 March 2021



All pupils in Devon can return to school and college for face-to-face teaching from next week as the [government's four-step plan to ease lockdown](#) gets underway.

We are proud of the way our schools have come together to navigate the significant upheavals of the last year successfully, working to keep everyone safe and support our children and young people.

We know some people will be feeling anxious, but please feel reassured that our schools are experienced at managing risk and are well practiced at keeping staff, children and their families safe in line with COVID-19 guidelines. If you have concerns, please discuss these with your school or college. They will be able to explain the protective measures they are using to help keep everyone safe.

Going to school is an essential part of a child's social, emotional and academic development and, for them, the benefits greatly outweigh the risk posed by coronavirus. We've gathered some useful information and resources in this email to help you and your child prepare for next week, including what safety measures will be in place and how to support your child's mental health.

Important!

The most important thing you can do to help keep everyone safe is to remember that nobody should attend school if they, or anyone in their household or support bubble, is showing any symptoms of coronavirus. Please stay at home!



Why are all children going back to school?

The government has said that all children and young people, in all year groups, will start to return to school and college full time from Monday 8 March. Your school will have told you exactly when your child can return.

This is because the prevalence of coronavirus has decreased since the lockdown measures were introduced in January.

Returning to school or college is vital for children and young people's educational progress, for their wellbeing, and for their wider development.

When will schools reopen for face-to-face teaching?

All primary pupils should attend school **from Monday 8 March**, unless your school has advised otherwise, for example some schools may have already had a non-pupil day planned.

All secondary pupils and college students will be offered asymptomatic testing from Monday 8 March, and should return to face-to-face education on the date their school has advised. Schools will be aiming to test pupils on their first day back.

If you or your child (if they are aged over 18) do not consent to testing, they will not be stopped from going back and will return in line with their school or college's arrangements.



What safety measures will be in place?

Each school will have their own arrangements and can let you know about the measures they have put in place to help keep everyone safe. This could include:

- introducing a one-way system
- marking the floor to support social distancing
- putting up signs to remind everyone to wash their hands and cover their mouths when coughing or sneezing
- creating 'bubbles', or grouping children and teachers by class, or year group
- having different start and finish times, break times and mealtimes throughout the day to manage the flow of children through the school

Asymptomatic testing

Alongside these range of protective measures, the government has also asked primary and secondary school and college staff to continue to [take two COVID-19 tests each week at home](#). Twice-weekly testing will also be offered to adults working in the wider school community, including bus drivers and after school club leaders.

The guidelines also include [offering all secondary school and college students three COVID-19 tests on their phased return to the classroom](#) following their first negative

test result. The government has requested that students then take two rapid tests each week at home.

Testing remains voluntary but is strongly encouraged, and students will not be tested unless they (if they are aged over 18) or their parent or carer has given informed consent. It's to help keep everyone safe by identifying people who are infectious but do not have any coronavirus symptoms. Those who test positive will self-isolate, helping to reduce transmission of the virus and keep schools open for all pupils.

There are currently no plans to carry out regular asymptomatic testing for primary school pupils.

Face coverings

The government has also advised [staff and students in secondary schools and colleges to wear face coverings](#) in all areas, including classrooms, where social distancing cannot be maintained and as a temporary extra measure. The [usual exemptions will of course apply](#) and children should not be denied education on the grounds that they are not wearing a face covering.

They are also required to wear one when travelling on dedicated school transport, unless they are exempt. More on that below.

Children in primary school do not need to wear a face covering and should not be asked to wear one.



Staying safe on your journey to school

We have been working closely with transport providers and schools and colleges since last summer to [ensure that school transport is as safe as possible](#).

This includes providing around 70 duplicate services to create additional capacity across the county at peak times for students who travel to and from school or college on the bus or train, where social distancing measures remain in place.

Exeter College students who use rail services, are encouraged to consider using the rail replacement coaches which have been laid on for them – this will help rail

staff to maintain social distancing on rail services to and from college. More details about all these services can be found on the [Travel Devon website](#).

Students aged 11 years old and over must wear face coverings at all times on dedicated school transport for their own safety, as well as the safety of their fellow passengers. Face coverings are mandatory on public transport as part of the government's measures to combat COVID-19, and we're operating a 'two strikes' policy whereby students found not wearing a face covering by the school or transport operator on two occasions ([if they are not exempt from using one](#)) will be refused travel for a period of time.

The majority of children travelling on Special Educational Needs (SEN) transport are [exempt from wearing face coverings](#). However, passengers with special education needs who can wear a face covering are encouraged to do so.

All secondary schools and colleges can issue our exemption cards for exempt students upon parental request. Failure to produce this exemption card when boarding school transport without a face covering could result in a warning and ultimately a refusal to allow the student onto the vehicle. Special educational needs school students will not require an exemption card.

More information on transport services in the county is available on the [Travel Devon website](#) and our [dedicated coronavirus webpages](#).

Now that spring is here and the weather has started to improve, some families might also choose to walk, scoot or cycle rather than use school transport.

[Travel Devon has some top tips](#) for cycling to school on their website where you can also [find maps of local cycling routes](#). Bikeability has some really useful information including [tips for cycling safely during the coronavirus pandemic](#) and [cycling skills for families](#).



Volunteers needed for COVID-19 testing in schools

As part of the government's plans to allow all children to return to face-to-face education, secondary school pupils and college students are being [asked to take part in asymptomatic testing](#) to help keep everyone safe by identifying people who are infectious but do not have any coronavirus symptoms (around a third of all cases).

We desperately [need volunteers to help carry out this testing programme](#) so pupils can return to the classroom as quickly as possible.

Tasks will include registering students, distributing test kits, setting up samples for analysis and interpreting the result, as well as keeping testing stations clean.

Roles are available in Braunton, Chulmleigh, Crediton, Cullompton, Dawlish, Exeter, Exmouth, Great Torrington, Ilfracombe, Newton Abbot, Sidmouth, South Molton, Teignmouth, Tiverton, Uffculme and Plymouth.

More details, including a short training guide and application form are [available on the Devon Communities Together website](#). The application process allows you to choose the school nearest to you.

Regular asymptomatic household testing

The government has confirmed [twice-weekly testing using rapid lateral flow tests will be given for free to all households](#) with primary, secondary school and college aged children and young people, including childcare and support bubbles.

It's because one in three people with coronavirus show no symptoms and potentially spread it without knowing, so targeted, regular testing will mean more positive cases within households are found and prevented from entering schools and colleges, helping to keep educational settings safe.

The twice-weekly testing can be carried out using home-testing kits which can be collected from [NHS testing locations or ordered online](#). Please note they cannot be collected from Devon County Council community testing sites at the moment.

Our community testing sites are only able to carry out on-site tests, which [must be booked in advance via our website](#). As well members of a household, childcare bubble or support bubble of school and college staff and pupils, this facility is also available for anyone whose job or volunteering work requires them to leave the house and be in contact with others, anyone who cares for others, either paid or voluntary.

The government policy and guidance around testing is changing rapidly – we will [keep our website updated](#) to reflect any changes.



Help your child prepare for school and support their mental health

While the prospect of going to back school will be exciting for many pupils, some [might feel anxious](#). That's perfectly normal. Lots of children will feel the same way.

Start to talk to your child about the daily routine that they were once so familiar with and what they are looking forward to about going back. You could go through some of the changes they may expect at school and think about ways they can re-establish their connections with friends and teachers.

Reassure children about the safety measures in place to keep them safe and remind them that they can also help prevent germs spreading by washing their hands with soap, coughing or sneezing into their elbow and giving everyone extra space.

It doesn't have to start as a conversation about worries, but these might arise as you talk. There are lots of resources in the [Mental Health Foundation's 'Time for Us' pack](#) to help manage those worries.

It's often good to have these discussions while you are doing something else, like playing with Lego, drawing, cooking or travelling in the car rather than sitting face-to-face as that can feel quite intense.

It's been a hugely disrupted year, and it might take a little while for children to get used to the change, and that's normal. There'll be ups and downs. Try your best to support, reassure and comfort them, without putting pressure on yourself to make it better.

If your child experiences difficulties while they're at school, please contact their school to make them aware, so that you can work together to support your child. If you're concerned about your child's mental health, speak to the school and your GP.

- [NHS Every Mind Matters website](#) has lots of useful information about looking after your children's mental health during the coronavirus pandemic.
- [Young Minds offers advice about mental health](#) for children and young people up to the age of 25. [They also have a Parent Helpline](#) on 0808 802 5544.
- Childline offers a confidential telephone counselling service, so your child can speak to someone anonymously. They can call 0800 1111 any time, free of charge, or have an [online chat with a counsellor](#), or check out the [Childline message boards](#).



Changes to breakfast, after-school and out-of-school clubs

From Monday 8 March, out-of-school settings and wraparound childcare providers will be able to offer indoor and outdoor provision to all children. However, parents and carers will only be able to access settings for certain essential purposes, including to work, undertake education or training or attend a medical appointment. [You can find out more on the government's website.](#)

From Monday 29 March, and in line with schools closing for the Easter holidays, out-of-school settings and wraparound providers will be able to offer outdoor provision to all children, without restrictions on the purpose for which they may attend. There will still be restrictions for access to indoor settings for certain essential purposes.

The government's intention is then for out-of-school settings and wraparound childcare providers to be able offer provision as normal, to all children, from the start of the school summer term. This will be no earlier than Monday 12 April, and will be confirmed as part of step 2 of the [COVID-19 response spring 2021](#) roadmap.



Free school meals, holiday support and funding

All children automatically get free school meals if they're in reception class, year 1 and year 2. However if you get certain benefits, your child could also be entitled to additional support such as [supermarket vouchers during the school holidays](#) and other free activities such as holiday club as well as free school meals beyond year 2.

Don't miss out on this additional support. Make a quick application, where your eligibility can be assessed and an outcome given instantly, [on our website](#). Alternatively, please call our education helpline on [0345 155 1019](#).

Any child that is found to be eligible for free school meals will also get additional funding for their school, this is known as pupil premium funding, which can be used to support your child in school or with the costs of uniforms or trips. Pupil premium funding can't be paid directly to parents or carers, but it makes a big difference to schools and eligible pupils.



Don't forget to apply for 30 hours funded childcare

Working parents with three and four year olds could get up to 30 hours funded childcare. You'll [need to apply now to claim for next term](#). If you're already claiming, don't forget to reconfirm your eligibility every three months. [Check the government website for full eligibility criteria](#) to find out if you can claim.

All parents get up to [15 hours funded childcare per week for their three and four year olds](#).

You could also [access funded childcare for your two year old](#) if if you receive certain benefits or they have an Education, Health and Care Plan.

[Please visit our website for more information about funded childcare.](#)



The latest national advice on coronavirus (COVID-19) is available on the [government website](#) and [NHS website](#).

You can find local guidance and information about the impacts on our services on the [Devon County Council website](#).

Please forward this email to anyone you think would find it useful and [encourage them to sign up](#). Previous editions are [archived on our website](#).

Please note that all of our sites and offices are closed to the public, except for necessary prearranged visits, but you can still [contact us if you need to](#).

For the latest coronavirus advice in Devon:
devon.cc/covid-19

Stay at home | Protect the NHS | Save lives

Stay connected

with the latest information from other local authorities in Devon