

# FAQs for Primary School Principals, Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) Managers or those hosting sports/social activities for children aged 3 months to less than 13 years

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## Version 8.0

Following a meeting on 20th January 2022, the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) advised that the prevailing profile of the disease in Ireland and the available evidence and experience of Omicron internationally allowed for a fundamental change in the management of COVID-19. The NPHE advised that this should entail a transition, in broad terms, from a focus on regulation and population wide restrictions to a focus on public health advice, personal judgement and personal protective behaviours. Specifically, following that meeting, the NPHE advised that there was no longer a continuing public health rationale for the majority of the public health measures that were in place at that time. It therefore advised that a range measures could be removed, with a small number of mandatory requirements remaining in place. This was agreed by Government and implemented on 22nd January 2022, please see [here](#) for more information.

The NPHE on 17th February 2022 considered these remaining requirements and concluded that there is no longer a continuing public health rationale for retaining them and advised that the measures as outlined in this document could be removed with effect from the 28th February. There is, however, a continuing requirement for clear public health advice and for targeted public health action to manage COVID-19 related risks.

It is important to note that in the months since the COVID-19 pandemic has occurred, we have learned that:

- Children seem more likely than adults to have no symptoms or mild disease. Please see [here](#) for information on [symptoms](#).
- Investigation of cases identified in school settings suggests that child-to-child transmission in schools is uncommon and not the primary cause of Sars-CoV-2 infection in children, particularly in preschool and primary educational settings.
- Children are rarely identified as the route of transmission of infection into the household setting.
- Children are not more likely than adults to spread the infection to other people.

These FAQs are to support Primary School Principals, Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) Managers or those hosting sports/social activities for children aged 3 months to less than 13 years, or in primary school.

## Summary of the current advice

### General Advice:

- Public Health advice remains the same: any child > 3 months to under 13 years of age with [symptoms](#) consistent with COVID-19 should immediately [self-isolate](#), not attend childcare or school or socialise, and follow current public health advice outlined below.
- It is important to adhere to good [respiratory etiquette](#), hand hygiene practice, and general public health measures.
- Please ensure that appropriate measures are taken to improve ventilation in facilities where ventilation is identified as being inadequate following a risk assessment. Adequate ventilation of indoor spaces, either through natural ventilation (i.e., opening windows and external doors) or by mechanical means (e.g., central air-conditioning unit), is extremely important.
- The continuation of mask wearing is advised on public transport. This is a setting where physical distancing can be difficult and where those who are more vulnerable to the severe impacts of COVID-19 do not always have a discretion to avoid.
- All children should attend for vaccination when eligible.

## Advice for confirmed cases (either by Rapid Antigen Detection Tests or by RT-PCR)

- All confirmed cases should self-isolate for 7 full days from the date of onset of symptoms or if asymptomatic, from the date of a positive test result (either an Antigen Test or RT-PCR test). On receipt of a positive test result, no further testing is required.
- Any individual with a positive antigen test result should regard it as confirmed COVID-19 and [register the positive test with the HSE](#). **A confirmatory PCR test is not required.** This individual should now be managed as a case and continue to self-isolate from the date of onset of symptoms or if asymptomatic, from the time of the positive test result.
- Confirmed cases can exit self-isolation after 7 full days; once symptoms have substantially or fully resolved for the final 2 days (48 hours) of the self-isolation period.

- All individuals aged over 12 years old with a positive COVID-19 test result should use a well-fitted medical grade (surgical) or FFP2 face mask for 10 full days except when they are alone in a room or alone outdoors. Children aged 9-12 years old should wear a well fitted mask as much as is reasonably practical during the 10-day period.
- On exiting self-isolation after 7 full days, cases should be advised to follow the below advice, especially during day 8, day 9, and day 10:
  - all individuals over 12 years old with a positive COVID-19 test result should wear an FFP2 mask or medical grade face mask (surgical mask) in crowded, enclosed, or poorly ventilated spaces and where they are in close contact with other people.
  - Children aged 9-12 years old should wear a well-fitted mask as much as is reasonably practical during the 10-day period. A medical-grade mask (surgical mask) is preferable if it fits the child well; otherwise, a well-fitting cloth mask can be worn.
  - avoid contact with anyone who is at higher risk of severe illness if infected with COVID-19
  - work from home unless it is essential to attend in person
  - follow all public health protective measures

## **Advice for symptomatic individuals (including symptomatic close contacts)**

- Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 or other viral respiratory tract infection, regardless of vaccination status, should immediately self-isolate until 48 hours after symptoms have substantially or fully resolved.
- Testing will no longer be needed for clinical or public health purposes for otherwise healthy people with symptoms, with the exclusion of the following, for whom PCR testing is recommended (through the HSE portal):
  - Those who have not had booster vaccination and are aged 55 years and older
  - Those with a high-risk medical condition
  - Those who are immunocompromised
  - Those who live in the same household as a person who is immunocompromised
  - Those who provide care or support for person they know to be immunocompromised
  - Those who are pregnant
  - Healthcare Workers

- All symptomatic individuals should use a well-fitted medical-grade (surgical) or FFP2 face mask.
  - Children aged 9-12 years old should wear a well-fitted mask as frequently as is reasonably practical.
  - A medical-grade mask (surgical mask) is preferable if it fits the child well; otherwise, a well-fitting cloth mask can be worn.
- Any individual with a positive antigen test result should regard it as confirmed COVID-19 and register it with the HSE. A confirmatory PCR test is not required. This individual should now be managed as a case.
- If a child aged less than 3 months is symptomatic, contact your GP for advice.

## Asymptomatic close contacts

- Asymptomatic close contacts do not need to restrict movements, regardless of age or vaccination status.
- If they develop symptoms, they should self-isolate until 48hrs after the symptoms have fully or substantially resolved.
- Asymptomatic individuals, including close contacts, other than healthcare workers who are household close contacts, do not need PCR or Rapid Antigen Detection Testing (RADTs).
- Any asymptomatic individual who has a positive RADT result should consider this result definitive and self-isolate.

## Early Learning and Care settings i.e. Crèches and Mainstream Primary Schools

- Asymptomatic close contacts aged under 13 years are no longer required to restrict movements or undergo testing
- When a Principal is notified that a child has a positive COVID-19 test result, school principals are no longer asked to text the other parents in the pod. Contact tracing will no longer take place in Early Learning and Care Settings and Mainstream Primary Schools.
- Free antigen testing for children is available. The Antigen Freephone number is: 1800 110055 or parents may order antigen test online via [www.hse.ie/schooltest](https://www.hse.ie/schooltest). This is a voluntary antigen testing programme which advises three antigen tests be performed.
  - **All children in the pod/class can continue attending school** as long as they remain asymptomatic and do not have a positive COVID-19 antigen or PCR test result.

## Special Classes attached to Mainstream Schools

- Asymptomatic close contacts aged under 13 years are NOT required to restrict movements or undergo testing.
- When a Principal is notified that a child has a positive COVID-19 test result, school principals are no longer asked to text the other parents in the pod. Contact tracing will no longer take place in Early Learning and Care Settings and Mainstream Primary Schools.
- Free antigen testing for children is available. The Antigen Freephone number is: 1800 110055 or parents may order antigen test online via [www.hse.ie/schooltest](http://www.hse.ie/schooltest). This is a voluntary antigen testing programme which advises three antigen tests be performed.
- **All children in the pod/class can continue attending school** as long as they remain asymptomatic and do not have a positive COVID-19 antigen or PCR test result.

## Special Schools/Residential Care Settings

- Once you are notified of a case, classes do not need to be sent home or told not to come to school. Cases and outbreaks in special schools and respite care should have a public health risk assessment (PHRA).
- Depending on the risk assessment, the clinician may advise:
  - No restricted movements or antigen testing for the class, or
  - Antigen testing and no restricted movements as long as they remain asymptomatic and do not have a positive COVID-19 antigen. COVID-19 antigen testing can be ordered online via [www.hse.ie/schooltest](http://www.hse.ie/schooltest). This is a voluntary antigen testing programme which advises three antigen tests be performed.

## Rationale for current policy

- 1) Effective vaccines against COVID-19 are now available, and a robust vaccination programme is underway in Ireland for children aged 5 years and older. Although precautions to prevent the introduction and spread of the virus are still required, vaccines have been proven to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and reduce the risk of severe disease and or hospitalisation.
- 2) As well as vaccination, the primary way to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus is by implementing a series of non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs), such as ventilation and frequent hand hygiene. Increasingly the importance of improving ventilation in reducing transmission, especially in closed environments, has been

understood and implemented either through natural ventilation (i.e., opening windows and external doors) or by mechanical means (e.g., central air- conditioning unit). These recommendations still stand and are required for implementation in all settings.

- 3) Social, sporting, ELC/SAC, and educational facilities are communities providing not only for the care and educational needs of children, but also many of their holistic, health, and pastoral needs. Within these settings, social interaction and physical activity can be learned and occur in a place of safety, support, and warmth. Therefore, routine exclusions of asymptomatic children should now not be undertaken in light of the impact of the national vaccination programme, our continued understanding of the effectiveness of the NPIs, and the impact of infection on children and disease transmission between children; and between children and adults.
- 4) It is important to remember that the confirmed cases will have been excluded and will no longer be in the school. The risk of onward transmission from those cases has therefore been removed from the school setting.

## **Will any close contacts be identified from a case of COVID-19 in a child aged 3 months – 13 years, or in primary school/special class attached to mainstream school/childcare facility?**

No, household close contacts of the case in a child between these ages will no longer be identified through the HSE contact management programme. Household contacts who have an underlying condition associated with very high risk or high risk of severe COVID-19 disease, should be extra vigilant in relation to symptom development and if they develop any symptoms, they should get PCR tested as soon as possible, as anti-viral treatment may be indicated.

## **What should I do if I am aware that someone has tested positive for COVID-19 in my school / facility?**

If you are aware that someone 3 months to 13 years, or a child attending primary school has recently tested positive for COVID-19, you should ensure that:

- 1) You are vigilant to anyone developing new symptoms or becoming unwell within your facility with symptoms of COVID-19 and isolate them as normal until a parent can safely collect them.

- 2) You are no longer required to inform the parents of children sitting in the same pod/class as a confirmed COVID-19 case
- 3) Free antigen testing for children is available. The Antigen Freephone number is: 1800 110055 or parents may order antigen test online via [www.hse.ie/schooltest](http://www.hse.ie/schooltest). This is a voluntary antigen testing programme which advises three antigen tests be performed.
- 4) **All children in the pod/class can continue attending school** as long as they remain asymptomatic and do not have a positive COVID-19 antigen or PCR test result.
- 5) Continue to remind all members of your school community of the importance of not attending your educational setting if they have any symptoms of COVID-19, however mild.

## Should I tell parents of the class / School / Group if I am aware that someone has tested positive for COVID-19?

You are no longer required to inform the relevant parents of pod members when there is a case of COVID-19 in their class

## Reminder of core important information: Vaccination:

### **Q. Who are recommended to have COVID-19 vaccines?**

**A.** The National Immunisation Advisory Committee makes recommendations for vaccinations to the Department of Health. Currently, all those aged 5 years and above are eligible and recommended for Covid-19 vaccination. Further information on national COVID-19 vaccination recommendations are available at <https://www2.hse.ie/screening-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccine/>

### **Q. What happens if someone is identified as a close contact but is fully vaccinated? (This will apply to staff in settings)**

Please see '[Public Health advice for the management of COVID-19 cases and contacts](#)' and guidance for symptomatic and asymptomatic close contacts of COVID-19 for further information.

### **Q. Are Principals / Managers / Sports / Social activities providers expected to know who is vaccinated amongst their attendees?**

**A.** No. This is private health information, and the HSE ascertains this information as required and keeps it confidential.



## **Do children/staff who have no symptoms need to restrict their movements if someone in their house has symptoms of COVID-19 and is awaiting testing or a result?**

No, Please see '[Public Health advice for the management of COVID-19 cases and contacts](#)' for further information.

### **Pods:**

#### **Q. Do 'pods' still need to be organised and implemented?**

**A.** No. As of February 28<sup>th</sup> 2022, updated Public Health Guidance for the management of cases and contacts of COVID-19 advises physical distancing measures such as pods, and mask wearing are no longer mandatory in early learning settings, school-aged childcare, primary and secondary schools. It is recognised that there will be some children who will wish to continue wearing masks. It is important that any child who wishes to wear a mask should not be discouraged.

Further information can be found at:

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/educationguidance/>

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/>

For education-specific guidance, please see:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/a128d-back-to-school/>