**Coronavirus COVID-19**

**School Employee Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

**17th March 2020**

**Please note that advice and guidance will change over time and therefore these FAQ’s will be updated on a regular basis in line with any new information.**

**The links below are regularly updated by the Government and Hartlepool Borough Council:**

[***Up to date Government advice for the public***](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public)

[***HBC Intranet***](http://hbcintranet/Pages/Home.aspx) (if you have access)

[**HBC Webpage**](https://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/)

[***Up to date NHS advice***](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/)

1. **What is COVID-19?**

A coronavirus is a type of virus that affects your lungs and airways. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world. COVID-19 is a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan City, China in January 2020.

The incubation period of COVID-19 is between 2 to 14 days. This means that if a person remains well 14 days after contact with someone with confirmed coronavirus, they have not been infected.

1. **What are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are recent onset of:

* a new continuous cough (this means you started coughing repeatedly) and/or
* high temperature of 37.7C or above, you feel hot to touch on your chest or back

For most people, COVID-19 will be a mild infection.

**3. How can I protect myself at work against COVID-19?**

Hand washing advice should be followed as this can help eliminate or reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading. You should wash your hands for the amount of time it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” twice (around 20 seconds).

Where personal protective equipment (PPE) is provided then you should ensure you use this as instructed.

**4. What can I do now in preparation?**

You should ensure your school has up to date contact details for you and agree appropriate contact methods in an emergency.

Where appropriate for your job, be prepared to work from home at short notice. For example, by taking your laptop and any other necessary equipment home with you at the end of each working day. You should ensure your home and equipment / network access is set up in preparation for home working.

**5. What should I do if I develop the symptoms of the virus at work?**

If you become unwell in the workplace then you should speak immediately to your manager/Headteacher and go home to self-isolate.

If you need medical assistance then you should be moved to an area which is at least 2 metres away from other people. If possible this should be a room or area where you can be isolated behind a closed door, such as a staff office. If it is possible to open a window, do so for ventilation.

You should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects and cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when you cough or sneeze and put the tissue in a bag then throw the tissue in the bin. If you don’t have any tissues available, you should cough and sneeze into the crook of your elbow. If you need to go to the bathroom whilst waiting for medical assistance, you should use separate toilet facilities. Your manager/Headteacher will then arrange for the area to be cleaned together with your working environment.

**6. I have concerns about attending a meeting/event or gathering as part of my work. Should I attend?**

The School will confirm what meetings, training and gatherings should be cancelled.

**7. What should I do if I develop symptoms of COVID-19 and I am unwell and not fit for work?**

If you have one of the symptoms of COVID-19 you should follow your normal school sickness procedures. This will be recorded as sickness absence and you will receive your normal sickness entitlements.

Government advice is:

* if you have one or more of the symptoms of coronavirus infection (COVID-19), however mild, stay at home and do not leave your house for 7 days if you live alone or 14 days if you live in a household with others from when your symptoms started.
* this action will help protect others in your community whilst you are infectious.
* plan ahead and ask others for help to ensure that you can successfully stay at home.
* ask your employer, friends and family to help you to get the things you need to stay at home.
* stay at least 2 metres (about 3 steps) away from other people in your home whenever possible.
* sleep alone, if that is possible.
* wash your hands regularly for 20 seconds, each time using soap and water.
* stay away from vulnerable individuals such as the elderly over 70 years old, pregnant women, and those with a weakened immune system or a long term health condition as much as possible.
* do not go to a GP Surgery, pharmacy or hospital.
* you do not need to call NHS111 to go into self-isolation. If your symptoms worsen during home isolation or are no better after 14 days contact [NHS 111 online](https://111.nhs.uk/). If you have no internet access, you should call NHS 111. For a medical emergency dial 999.
* there is no testing planned for people who develop mild symptoms.

**8. What should I do after self-isolating due to COVID-19?**

The Government’s message is that:

* if you live alone and you have symptoms of coronavirus illness (COVID-19), however mild, stay at home for **7 days** from when your symptoms started.
* if you live with others and you or one of them have symptoms of coronavirus, then all household members must stay at home and not leave the house for **14 days**. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill
* it is likely that people living within a household will infect each other or be infected already. Staying at home for 14 days will greatly reduce the overall amount of infection the household could pass on to others in the community
* for anyone in the household who starts displaying symptoms, they need to stay at home for 7 days from when the symptoms appeared, regardless of what day they are on in the original 14-day isolation period.

After the periods above, if you feel better and no longer have a high temperature, you can return to work. If you have not had any signs of improvement and have not already sought medical advice, contact [NHS 111 online](https://111.nhs.uk/). If you have no internet access, call NHS 111.

Please note that coughing may persist for several weeks in some people, despite the coronavirus infection having cleared. A persistent cough alone does not mean you must continue to self-isolate for more than 7 or 14 days.

**9. I have the symptoms of COVID-19 but I am fit for work. What do I do?**

You should contact your manager/school and inform them that you are self-isolating for 7 days if you live alone or 14 days if you live in a household with others. Your manager/school will arrange where possible home working. If this is not possible then you will be recorded as having an infectious disease (not sick) and you will receive normal pay. This will **not** be recorded against your sickness entitlements.

**10. I am in a ‘vulnerable group’ that has been identified at greater risk of COVID-19. Should I self-isolate?**

The Government has identified two groups of people who are at an increased risk of COVID-19.

Group 1 includes those people who are:

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

The Government advice is that these people should take greater care and introduce social distancing measures as below:

Social distancing measures are steps you can take to reduce the social interaction between people. This will help reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). They are:

1. *Avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). These symptoms include high temperature and/or new and continuous cough*
2. *Avoid non-essential use of public transport, varying your travel times to avoid rush hour, when possible*
3. *Work from home, where possible. Your employer should support you to do this. Please refer to*[*employer guidance*](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19)*for more information*
4. *Avoid large gatherings, and gatherings in smaller public spaces such as pubs, cinemas, restaurants, theatres, bars, clubs*
5. *Avoid gatherings with friends and family. Keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media*
6. *Use telephone or online services to contact your GP or other essential services*

*Everyone should be trying to follow these measures as much as is pragmatic.*

*For those who are over 70, have an underlying health condition or are pregnant, we strongly advise you to follow the above measures as much as you can, and to significantly limit your face-to-face interaction with friends and family if possible. This advice is likely to be in place for some weeks.*

Managers/schools should ensure that these people can work from home where possible. There is also guidance to confirm that if these groups live in a household with someone self-isolating displaying symptoms of COVID-19 then they temporarily try and find alternative accommodation if possible or implement social distancing in the household.

Group 2

There are some clinical conditions which put people at even higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (see list below). If you are in this category, next week the NHS in England will directly contact you with advice the more stringent measures you should take in order to keep yourself and others safe. For now, you should rigorously follow the social distancing advice in full, outlined above.

* people who have received an organ transplant and remain on ongoing immunosuppression medication
* people with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy or radiotherapy
* people with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia who are at any stage of treatment
* people with severe chest conditions such as cystic fibrosis or severe asthma (requiring hospital admissions or courses of steroid tablets)
* people with severe diseases of body systems, such as severe kidney disease (dialysis)

Action for Group 1 and Group 2

Your manager/school will need to undertake a risk assessment and consider any reasonable adjustments at work to reduce your exposure to the virus. If your manager/school does not consider that they can keep you reasonably safe at work then a decision may be taken to enable you to self-isolate.

For those who must self-isolate for 12 weeks, or who have been assessed as being at risk remaining at work, consideration will be given to alternative working arrangements or home working.

If alternative arrangements are not possible then you may be asked to self-isolate with normal pay. This will be automatic for those on the Government list for 12 weeks self-isolation, but for those who are risk assessed to self-isolate, then this decision must be approved by the Headteacher.

You should keep in touch with your manager/school regularly.

**11. I have caring responsibilities for someone who has an underlying health condition and am worried that I will place them at greater risk if I attend my workplace during the pandemic. Should I self-isolate?**

Your Headteacher will need the details of your personal circumstances and consideration will be given to alternative working arrangements or home working.

If alternative arrangements are not possible then you may be granted permission to take annual leave, flexi leave, time-off in lieu or unpaid authorised leave.

You should keep in touch with your manager/school regularly.

**12. What should I do if I have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 or is displaying symptoms who is not living in my family home?**

You do not need to self-isolate unless you have symptoms of COVID-19.

If you do not have symptoms but have an underlying health condition that places you at greater risk, then you may need to self-isolate following the advice provided regarding alternative working arrangements or home working.

If you go on to develop symptoms then you should follow the FAQ advice detailed above.

**13. What should I do if a family member who is living in my home has COVID-19 or is displaying one or more of the symptoms?**

The Government advice is that the whole family should self-isolate for a period of 14 days following any family member displaying one or more of the symptoms of COVID-19.

You will need to contact your manager/school to notify them of the situation. Where possible your manager/school will arrange for you to work from home. If this is not possible then you will be recorded as self-isolating due to an infectious disease (not sick) and you will receive normal pay. This will **not** be recorded against your sickness entitlements.

If you go on to develop symptoms then you should follow the FAQ advice detailed above.

**14. What should I do if my children’s school is closed?**

You will need to contact your manager/school to notify them of the situation. You are expected to make alternative childcare arrangements wherever possible in order to attend work. Consideration will be given to alternative working arrangements or home working. Only on exhausting these options will you be identified as self-isolating and receive normal pay.

**15. What happens if my school workplace closes?**

Currently the Government guidance is that schools should not need to close. However if there is a need to temporarily close to, for example, undertake a deep clean, then your manager will contact you to review alternative working arrangements e.g. alternative location or home working.

Where a workplace is closed by the employer then normal pay arrangements will apply.

**16. I’m pregnant and I can’t get a certificate of expected date of confinement (MATB1). What should I do?**

You should complete a Notification of Maternity Form following the School’s Policy and Procedure for Maternity and confirm your expected date of confinement and we will accept this as confirmation until such time as you can get a MATB1.

**17. I am a new mother and expressing breast milk in the workplace, can I continue doing this safely?**

There is no reason to suggest that you cannot safely continue to express breast milk. You should follow the guidance for all employees in relation to hygiene, for example, handwashing.

**18. What ICT guidance and support is there for me to use mobile devices while home working?**

(schools to enter information)

**19. How will sickness absence related to COVID-19 be managed?**

It is essential that managers/schools keep in contact with employees who have contracted COVID-19 in order to provide support. However in such cases and given the exceptional circumstances, the need for triggers / sickness absence management interviews are suspended.

Return to work interviews will still be required in line with normal procedures.

If there is reasonable belief that an employee is fraudulently claiming paid time off work then they will be disciplined for possible gross misconduct.

**20. How is my absence being recorded?**

All absences will be recorded as follows:

Sickness All employees unwell with COVID-19.

Infectious Disease All employees who are self-isolating, caring during a

school closure, or in quarantine.

If you are home working or undertaking other working arrangements then you will be recorded as still at work.

**21. I am worried about my own mental health. What advice and support is there for me?**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has released advice on protecting your mental health amid all the coronavirus news, posts and information. There is a lot of misinformation circulating and whilst it is important to stay informed it is important to use trusted sources of information such as the UK Government and NHS websites.

We are only taking our advice from the UK Government who take their information from Pubic Health England and the WHO.  We will continue to update the intranet on a regular basis to ensure that you have the most up to date information for your health, your family and your work.

WHO’s recommendations around mental health regarding the coronavirus include:

* Avoid watching, reading or listening to news that could cause you to feel anxious or distressed
* Seek information to take practical steps to prepare your plans and protect yourself and your loved ones
* Seek information updates at specific times and limit your news feeds to reliable sources. Be careful what you read
* Stay connected with people even if you are in self-isolation – check in with others at regular times to stay connected
* Continue to enjoy sunlight and nature wherever possible. Exercise, eat well and stay hydrated
* Wash your hands but not excessively, especially if you have types of anxiety that lead to OCD behaviours.

If you require any additional support, then please contact your manager/school.