

Schools, colleges and early years settings to close

Yesterday Gavin Williamson, the Secretary of State for Education, announced that as part of the country's ongoing response to COVID-19, schools, colleges and early years settings have been asked to close to everyone except children of key workers and vulnerable children from Monday 23 March.

A full list of key worker categories will be published by the Cabinet Office later today. We will share this with you once this information is made available.

Where schools are unable to provide this reduced provision, local authorities will work with the Department for Education's regional teams to ensure an alternative option is available.

Further details on this announcement can be found here:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/schools-colleges-and-early-years-settings-to-close>

The Department is working through the policy implications of this announcement and, over the coming days, will be sharing with you the further information that you need.

Update on assessments and examinations

Yesterday, we confirmed that we will not go ahead with assessments or exams, and that we will not be publishing performance tables for this academic year. Tomorrow we will provide greater clarity on how students and young people will be awarded the examination results that they deserve.

New free school meals guidance

We have confirmed that we will give schools the flexibility to deliver meals or provide shop vouchers to children entitled to free school meals if they are no longer attending school, either due to closures or as a result of self-isolating at home.

Schools will be able to provide meals or vouchers for supermarkets or local shops, which can be sent directly to families who are either self-isolating at home or whose schools are closed on government advice. Final rates will be confirmed in the coming days, but we have confirmed that the voucher value for each eligible child will exceed the rate that schools are paid for free school meals, recognising that families will not be buying food in bulk and may therefore incur higher costs.

Full guidance can be found here:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance>

Update on school funding

We will put in place new measures, to reimburse schools for reasonable, additional costs that they face in order to stay safely staffed as a result of the coronavirus outbreak.

Funding for all schools and colleges (including maintained and academy special schools, non-maintained special schools, independent special schools, pupil referral units, general further education colleges and special post-16 institutions), whether from local or central government, will be maintained and not reduced because many pupils are not in attendance (either because of self-isolation, or where the institution has closed). This includes top-up funding in respect of individual children and young people, which will still be needed by the school to keep their staff in employment.

Handwashing advice

The most important thing individuals can do to protect themselves is to wash their hands more often, for at least 20 seconds, with soap and water. Public Health England recommends that in addition to handwashing before eating, and after coughing and sneezing, everyone should also wash hands after using toilets and travelling on public transport.

The latest guidance and video on hand washing can be found here:

- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>

Department for Education coronavirus helpline

The Department for Education coronavirus helpline is available to answer questions about COVID-19 relating to education and children's social care. Staff, parents and young people can contact this helpline as follows:

Phone: 0800 046 8687

Opening hours: 8am to 6pm (Monday to Friday), 10am to 4pm (Saturday to Sunday)

Please note, we are currently experiencing high volumes of calls. We appreciate your patience at this time and apologise for any wait that you may experience. To ensure that we answer your calls as quickly as possible, we have now extended our opening hours to cover weekends and are increasing the number of call handlers available to answer your calls.

If you work in a school, please have your unique reference number (URN or UK PRN) available when calling the hotline.

Where to find the latest information

Updates on COVID-19:

- <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

Guidance for educational settings:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19>

Guidance for social or community care and residential settings:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-social-or-community-care-and-residential-settings-on-covid-19>

Travel advice for those travelling and living overseas:

- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus>

Educational resources:

- <https://campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/resources/campaigns/101-coronavirus-/resources>
- <https://campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/schools>

Latest Department for Education information:

- <https://twitter.com/educationgovuk>
- <https://www.facebook.com/educationgovuk/>