

## **Guidance to childcare and educational settings about COVID-19**

Updated 17 February 2020 at 12:45

This guidance will assist schools and educational settings in providing advice for pupils, students, staff and parents or carers regarding:

- the novel coronavirus, COVID-19,
- how to help prevent spread of all respiratory infections including COVID-19,
- what to do if someone confirmed or suspected to have COVID-19 has been in a school or other educational setting, and
- what advice to give to individuals who have travelled from China, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Malaysia, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Taiwan or Thailand within the last 14 days

With regards to travel information to China or other countries for pupils or students resident or boarding in the UK, we recommend following the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) [country advice](#) pages. At present, FCO advises against all travel to Hubei Province due to the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak. The FCO also advises against all but essential travel to the rest of mainland China (not including Hong Kong and Macau).

### **1. INFORMATION ABOUT THE VIRUS**

A coronavirus is a type of virus. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world. COVID-19 is caused by 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.

The following symptoms may develop in the 14 days after exposure to someone who has COVID-19 infection:

- cough

- difficulty in breathing
- fever

Generally, these infections can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease. There is no evidence that children are more affected than other age groups – very few cases have been reported in children.

## **2. HOW COVID-19 IS SPREAD**

From what we know about other coronaviruses, spread of COVID-19 is most likely to happen when there is close contact (within 2 metres or less) with an infected person. It is likely that the risk increases the longer someone has close contact with an infected person.

Droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes (termed respiratory secretions) containing the virus are most likely to be the most important means of transmission.

There are 2 routes by which people could become infected:

- secretions can be directly transferred into the mouths or noses of people who are nearby (within 2metres) or could be inhaled into the lungs
- it is also possible that someone may become infected by touching a surface or object that has been contaminated with respiratory secretions and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes (such as touching a door knob or shaking hands then touching own face).

There is currently no good evidence that people who do not have symptoms are infectious to others.

## **3. PREVENTING SPREAD OF INFECTION**

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus.

There are general principles anyone can follow to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including:

- washing your hands often, preferably with soap and water. Only use alcohol sanitiser if handwashing facilities are not available. This is particularly important after taking public transport
- covering your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throwing the tissue in a bin. See [Catch it, Bin it, Kill it](#)
- people who feel unwell should stay at home and should not attend work or any education or childcare setting
- pupils, students, staff and visitors should wash their hands:
  - before leaving home
  - on arrival at school
  - after using the toilet
  - after breaks and sporting activities
  - before food preparation
  - before eating any food, including snacks
  - before leaving school
- if soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser that contains at least 60% alcohol
- avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- avoid close contact with people who are unwell
- clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces
- if you are worried about your symptoms or those of a child or colleague, and feel you or they may be at risk, please telephone your GP for advice. Do not go directly to your GP or other healthcare environment
- see further information on the [Public Health Agency website](#).

The Public Health Agency website contains advice on how you can help stop the spread of viruses, like those that cause COVID-19, by practicing good respiratory and hand hygiene.

Face masks for the general public, pupils or students, or staff are **not recommended** to protect from infection, as there is no evidence of benefit from their use outside healthcare environments.

People who have returned from Hubei Province, including Wuhan, in the last 14 days should avoid attending school, work or university until 14 days after they leave Hubei Province.

People who have returned from China, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Malaysia, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Taiwan or Thailand in the last 14 days, are advised to stay at home if they develop symptoms. All other pupils or students and staff should continue to attend school or university.

#### **4. WHAT TO DO IF CHILDREN, PUPILS, STUDENTS OR STAFF BECOME UNWELL AND BELIEVE THEY HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO COVID-19 (EITHER THROUGH TRAVEL TO CHINA AND OTHER AFFECTED COUNTRIES OR CONTACT WITH A CONFIRMED CASE)**

People who become unwell should be advised **NOT** to go to their GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital but to telephone their GP, or 999 if an emergency (i.e. if they are seriously ill or injured or your life is at risk), and explain which country they have returned from in the last 14 days. You can do this on their behalf if this is easier.

Whilst you wait for advice from the person's GP or an ambulance to arrive, try to find somewhere safe for the unwell person to sit which is at least two metres away from other people. If possible, find a room or area where they can be isolated behind a shut door, such as a staff office. If it is possible to open a window, do so for ventilation. They should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects and be advised to cover their mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when they cough or sneeze and put the tissue in the bin. If no bin is available, put the tissue in a bag or pocket for disposing in a bin later. If you don't have any tissues available, they should cough and sneeze into the crook of their elbow. The room will need to be cleaned once they leave.

If they need to go to the bathroom whilst waiting for medical assistance, they should use a separate bathroom if available.

**Make sure that children know to tell a member of staff if they feel unwell.**