

Children and Young People Returning to School - March 2021

Health information for parents and carers

Following the government's announcement that all children and young people will return to school and college full time on 8 March 2021, we are very much looking forward to welcoming pupils back to their schools.

As always, our priority is the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and we want to assure you that the Council has been working closely with schools to support them to create safer environments for reopening.

We understand that this is still a worrying time, but we hope that the information we are sharing in this guide will help with some of your questions or concerns.

Your questions answered

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I'm worried about my child going back to school...

It's understandable to be worried about children returning to school but since the lockdown in January 2021, the number of cases of coronavirus (Covid-19) in the borough has decreased, access to testing for the school community is better, and our understanding about how to keep schools safe has further improved.

As more children return, schools are putting in place a number of safety measures aimed at protecting children, staff and families and reducing the spread of the virus (see page 3).

And, while we know that school is important to learn and develop emotional and social skills, the health and safety of children, teaching staff and their families remains our top priority.

Please note that while we understand your concerns, as schools re-open on 8 March, school attendance will therefore be mandatory again. This means that it is your legal duty as a parent/carer to send your child (if they are of compulsory school age) to school regularly if they are registered at one.

EVIDENCE

There is good evidence that primary school age children are less likely to catch Covid-19. There is also clear evidence that the great majority of children and teenagers who catch Covid-19 have mild symptoms or no symptoms at all.

SHIELDING

Adults and children who are clinically extremely vulnerable to coronavirus are advised to shield and this includes not attending school. Your school or college will make appropriate arrangements for you to be able to continue your education at home.

[More information on shielding can be found on the gov.uk website.](#)

WHO TO CONTACT

If you're concerned about the risk for anyone in your family, talk to your GP or your school. You can also email the School Health Team on nem-tr.0-19universalspawf@nhs.net or [find local telephone numbers on nelft.nhs.uk](#)

What do schools have in place to keep children safe?

The Council has been working closely with schools to prioritise the safety of children, teaching staff and families. The government has designed a system of controls below to keep schools safe for everyone



Ensuring pupils and staff only come to school if they and other members of their household are well



Wearing face coverings in recommended situations



Implementing regular and thorough handwashing



Practicing good hygiene and the ‘catch it, bin it, kill it’ approach to coughs and sneezes



Keeping rooms well ventilated



Introducing enhanced cleaning including of high-touch surfaces



Limiting contact by keeping children, young people and staff who learn and socialise together within a ‘bubble’ and separate from other ‘bubbles’

Does my child need to be tested for coronavirus?

Testing is one part of the range of measures being introduced by schools and colleges to support the safe return of pupils.

Rapid testing using Lateral Flow Devices (LFD)s will help to identify people who may not have any Covid-19 symptoms but could pass it on to others.

In secondary schools, testing will be offered to pupils when they are in school.

- Pupils will be offered three tests at school.
- They will then be given test kits twice a week to take home.
- Support and guidance on how to take the tests will be provided.
- Those unable to take tests at home can continue to be tested at school.
- All staff in secondary schools are also being offered testing twice weekly at home.

In primary schools, children don't need to be tested regularly as they may find it unpleasant or they are unable to test themselves. However, staff will be taking part in the testing programme to help reduce transmission of the virus and keep everyone safe in primary schools.

TRAINED SCHOOL STAFF

Schools have received training and support to set up testing sites in school and these have been successfully offering testing to those in school already for several weeks.

NOSE AND THROAT SWAB

Testing consists of a nose and throat swab and results of the test are available within 30 minutes. A negative test result does not mean that other protective measures are no longer important.

VOLUNTARY TESTING

Testing is voluntary, but we strongly encourage you and your child to take part to help reduce the spread of the virus. If you choose not to take up the testing offer or your child cannot be tested, they will return to school as normal, however, the more pupils that can be tested the safer the school environment will be for everyone.

What if my child or school staff tests positive?

If a child or member of staff tests positive, then they will be required to self-isolate for 10 days (from when symptoms started or from the date of the test if they did not have symptoms).

The rest of their 'bubble' group will also be sent home to self-isolate for 10 days from the point of last contact.

The households of these other children in the 'bubble' do not need to isolate, unless their child also develops symptoms.

Does my child need to wear a face covering in school?

In secondary schools and colleges, face coverings should be worn by everyone (staff and pupils) when moving around corridors and communal areas. For the time being, face covering should also be worn in the classroom if social distancing is not possible.

In primary schools, adults should wear face coverings in situations where social distancing between adults is not possible. Children in primary schools should not be expected to wear face coverings.

What happens if someone has symptoms of Covid-19?

If your child or anyone in your household have symptoms (a temperature or a new, continuous cough, or loss of/change to their sense of taste or smell) please let your school know, and keep your child and the rest of your household at home.

If a child or member of staff gets these symptoms in school, they will be sent home with advice about what to do.

Anyone with symptoms needs to self-isolate along with all of their household and get a test as soon as possible at any of the following sites:

- Stanley Road car park, Leyton E10 7EQ
- Linford Road car park, Walthamstow E17 3LS
- Church Lane car park, Leytonstone E11 1HG
- Homebase, Walthamstow, E17 4EE

For full details and opening times, visit www.walthamforest.gov.uk/testing

If you have symptoms, do not travel to the test site by public transport.

If you can't get to a site safely, you can book an appointment or [get a test online from the NHS](#) or by calling 119.

How do parents and families access testing for coronavirus?

All families and households with primary, secondary school and college age children, including childcare and support bubbles, have access to rapid Lateral Flow Devices (LFDs) to also take tests at home. This will help to detect more coronavirus cases and make sure that cases in households are found and prevented from mixing in school.

In Waltham Forest, families can access LFD tests in the following ways.

Attend a community test site

If you don't have symptoms, you can get tested at any of our community test sites across the borough. You don't need to make an appointment, and you'll get your result within one hour.

For all locations and opening times, visit
www.walthamforest.gov.uk/testing

Collect test kits

You can collect free home test kits from one of our local test sites below.

Open every day, 1.30pm-7pm:

- Stanley Road car park, Leyton E10 7EQ
- Linford Road car park, Walthamstow E17 3LS
- Church Lane car park, Leytonstone E11 1HG

You can collect 2 packs of home test kits and each pack contains 7 tests.

Order test kits

If you're unable to go to a test site or collect test kits, you can order free home test kits to be sent to your home.

Order online at www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests

What can I do to keep everyone safe?

Check everyone at home is well before your child goes to school and stay at home if anyone has Covid-19 symptoms

If your child does develop symptoms, you should arrange for them to [get a test](#) and let their school or college know of the results.

Support schools and colleges

It's important that parents and carers help schools and colleges to carry out the [required safety measures](#). If your child is asked to self-isolate for 10 days after being in close contact with someone who has tested positive, it is important that they do so.

Social distancing outside school

Only one parent or carer should take a child to school. Do not stay and chat at the school gates, as there is a significant risk of spreading or catching the virus. Please be patient and help the school to ensure that children can be collected safely at the end of the day.

Outside of school, it's also important you follow guidance on meeting other individuals and households.

Travel outdoors to school where possible

The safest and healthiest way to travel to school is outdoors on foot, or by bike or scooter. Whether you want to walk, cycle or scoot we've got the infrastructure to make sustainable travel safe and enjoyable for you and your family. You can read more and get further advice on how to [get started on our Enjoy Waltham Forest website](#).

Hygiene and handwashing are vital

Wash hands regularly for 20 seconds with soap and running water, especially before and after school, before and after eating, and after using a tissue or the toilet.

Take up your Covid vaccination when invited to do so

The local NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) is working very hard to deliver jabs, and the Council is working to support the vaccination rollout. The CCG is now vaccinating people in groups 1-6. Parents and carers are encouraged to obtain the vaccination when contacted. The coronavirus vaccine is safe, free and painless and is your best defence against Covid-19. The vaccine works by teaching your immune system to defend itself against the attack of Coronavirus. If you have questions or are unsure about the Covid-19 vaccine, please visit walthamforest.gov.uk/covidvaccine to learn more.

Where can I get support for wellbeing?

The coronavirus outbreak has been difficult for children and young people, and we know that both fears about the virus and the knock-on effects of restrictions have impacted young people's mood. You can find ideas and useful resources for [supporting your child's mental wellbeing](#) on the Waltham Forest website. The government guidance on supporting children's mental health and wellbeing has [translated guidance in several other languages](#), including Bengali, Polish, Punjabi and Urdu.

Children aged 11-19 who are feeling low or anxious can use [Kooth](#), a web-based confidential support service available to young people. Kooth provides a safe and secure means of accessing mental health and wellbeing support designed specifically for young people. Young people can access self-help articles, counselling and moderated forums.

As well as looking after the children or young people in your care, it's important to look after your own wellbeing. Children and young people's wellbeing is influenced by what they see in the adults around them. Try the [5 Ways to Wellbeing](#) to improve your mental wellbeing, or [Good Thinking](#) which provides a range of NHS-approved wellbeing apps, as well as workbooks, guides, podcasts and blogs to help you and your family. Alternatively, you can [self-refer for support with Waltham Forest Talking Therapies](#).

Where can I find more information?

There is more guidance available on the gov.uk website on [what parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges during Covid-19](#)

You can also [find the latest information on schools and education the Council's website](#).

Visit our website to [keep up-to-date on Covid-19 news in the borough](#), or [subscribe to our regular resident email newsletter](#).

Thank you for your continued cooperation

We very much recognise some of the challenges that this change places on families and would like to thank you for your support and cooperation to help staff and pupils return to school as safe as possible.