

St Thomas' Federation

Coronavirus/ COVID-19 policy

March 2020

Introduction

The risks and consequences of COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) have been considered carefully following the news of a global outbreak. It is now appropriate to gather the information into a more coherent policy statement to which all staff may have access.

Summary of main points

- School will remain open unless instructed otherwise by Public Health England
- Some classes may be closed if there are not enough staff available to teach children and ensure their safety.
- If anyone becomes unwell or suspects they are unwell from coronavirus, he or she must not come to school – they must self-isolate and inform school of the steps they have taken. We will authorise absence and will not expect medical certificates. Staff will be paid.
- Hygiene – frequent handwashing is key. Coughs and sneezes should be caught in tissues. Hard surfaces to be cleaned and disinfected regularly.
- We will greet each other through gestures and words. We won't be shaking hands

1. Medical Aspects

General aspects

COVID-19 is a new illness that can affect your lungs and airways. For some people who contract the COVID-19 virus, known as novel coronavirus, the symptoms will be mild, and it is even possible that a person will not notice the infection. Others with COVID-19 will suffer no worse symptoms than those of seasonal flu. However, for others, the virus may lead to symptoms severe enough to require hospital care, most commonly due to its escalation to viral pneumonia.

Because it is a new illness, it is not known exactly how coronavirus spreads from person to person. Similar viruses are spread in cough droplets and between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).

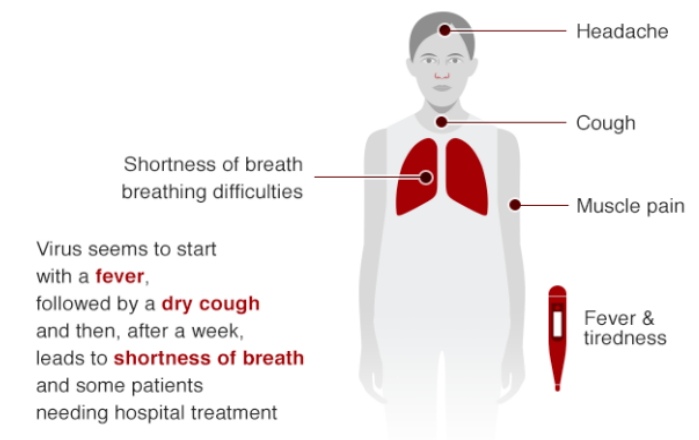
Symptoms of coronavirus

The common symptoms of coronavirus are:

- a cough;
- a high temperature;
- shortness of breath.

Less common symptoms include: limb and joint pain, headache, sore throat, tiredness, aching muscles or loss of appetite. These symptoms do not *necessarily* mean a person has COVID-19, being the same or similar to symptoms of other illnesses, such as seasonal colds and 'flu.

Symptoms of coronavirus (Covid-19)



Staff should send any person who shows symptoms to the school office immediately.

Risk groups: The groups at particular risk if they contract COVID-19 are:

- People with suppressed or compromised immune systems;
- Asthmatics;
- Diabetics;
- The elderly;
- Pregnant women.

Pregnant women: Although pregnant women are no more likely to catch COVID-19 than anybody else, in certain cases the consequences of the illness for somebody who is pregnant can be more severe and may require hospitalisation. The following will therefore need to be considered:

- If multiple cases of COVID-19 are reported, or a single case in a year group taught by a pregnant employee, whether to take advice as to if any such pregnant employee should be sent home during the infectious period.

- Notifying any pregnant employee of any primary contacts within the school community.
- If a high incidence of cases develops in London, considering whether a pregnant member of staff may be granted a temporary alteration to working hours, such that she may avoid travelling during busy periods 'rush hours' when the probability of infection is increased.

Vaccination: There is currently no vaccine available or imminently available for COVID-19.

Asymptomatic carriers: As mentioned above, even when a person is newly infected with COVID-19, certain carriers of the illness - 'asymptomatic carriers' - may show no symptoms at all or will merely feel mildly under the weather. However, such people will be infectious to others and therefore, if fever is present together with the other symptoms described above, members of staff who might otherwise feel prepared to work should nonetheless **stay at home** for the infectious period (see below).

Infectious period: People with COVID-19 are considered to be infectious for up to 14 days from the first day on which they noticed the symptoms. Although it has been the schools' practice to encourage staff back to work as soon as possible, where a head teacher suspects a COVID-19 infection of a member of staff, then that member of staff should **not return** to the workplace for 14 calendar days from the onset of symptoms, even if he / she feels recovered.

Infection control: Like any virus COVID-19 is spread by:

- Infected people passing the virus to others through large droplets when coughing, sneezing, or even talking within a close distance (one metre or less).
- Direct contact with an infected person: for example, shaking or holding their hand(s), and then touching one's own mouth, eyes or nose without first washing hands.
- Touching objects (e.g. door handles, light switches) that have previously been touched by an infected person, then touching one's own mouth, eyes or nose without first washing hands. Viruses in general are understood to survive for longer on hard surfaces than on soft or absorbent surfaces.

Hygiene and the disinfection of hard surfaces: it is not yet known how long the COVID-19 virus can survive on a hard surface. However, it is generally considered that the virus can quickly be rendered inactive using common disinfectants. The wiping down of hard surfaces with an appropriate disinfectant agent several times a day is highly advisable.

Regular cleansing of hard surfaces during the day is required to address the possibility of contamination of such surfaces by people who have arrived at school at the start of the day, and who are carrying the virus in an infectious state but are not yet aware of it.

During the period of heightened national awareness of COVID-19, all cleaning staff should be instructed to conduct an enhanced clean of all hard surfaces.

Computer and musical keyboards should not be overlooked, similarly, climbing frames, slides and other playground equipment should also be disinfected regularly and where feasible, after using this equipment children should wash their hands. The cloth containing the antiviral agent need not be particularly wet, a cloth damp with a disinfecting agent will be effective.

Washing hands: The washing of hands is proven to be a very effective way to control infections, whether bacterial or viral. The incidence and frequency of this basic hygiene precaution for both children and all employees should be high and heads are encouraged to review this practice regularly at staff meetings, etc.

Alcohol hand sanitiser gels: Although gels are less effective than washing hands, alcohol hand sanitiser gels may be used with children when it is impractical for the children to wash their hands to some reasonable effect against COVID-19. Many gels are effective, particularly ones that contain ethyl alcohol.

Cloth towels: No cloth towels should be used ANYWHERE for the drying of hands

Cloth towels provide an ideal breeding ground for bacteria and an excellent location where viruses may reside waiting for the opportunity to find a new host.

- The **only acceptable** method of drying hands in the school from now on should be with the installed hot air dryers or paper towels.
- Tea towels may continue to be used to complete the drying of crockery, etc, (rather than hands) but such towels should be replaced with freshly laundered linen each day.

What to do if an incidence of suspected COVID-19 is reported:

If a member of the school community reports COVID-19 symptoms whilst in the care of the school:

- The person should advise the head teacher, go home and self-isolate up to 14 days;
- NHS Direct 111 should be contacted and immediate advice taken and followed;
- The executive head teacher should provide clear and timely communication to all staff and all members of the school community.

If a member of the school community reports COVID-19 symptoms whilst away from the school

- The person should self-isolate for up to 14 days;
- NHS Direct 111 should be contacted and immediate advice taken and followed;
- The executive head teacher should provide clear and timely communication to all staff and all members of the school community.

Closure of schools: Current DfE advice states that no school should close in response to a suspected (or confirmed) COVID-19 case unless advised to do so by Public Health

England (PHE). It is unlikely that schools will be directed by the local office of the PHE to close but this option remains a possibility. In this connection, maintaining the schools' data for all methods of communication with families is paramount.

Should a case be confirmed within the school community, the school may be required to close temporarily whilst a deep and thorough clean of the premises is undertaken. It is not expected that this closure will last more than 48 hours. It will be appropriate to notify parents of a confirmed case of either a pupil or member of staff.

[PHE advice](#) states: 'In most cases, closure of the childcare or education setting will be unnecessary but this will be a local decision based on various factors such as establishment size and pupil mixing.'

The PHE Health Protection team would be in touch with the school, to carry out necessary assessments and to give advice. They will also identify who will amount to a 'contact', which will invariably include pupils and staff within the school, and advise those people on steps they should take, which may include self-isolation.

2. Communication:

Heads of school should contact the executive head teacher when the first case of COVID-19 is reported at the school.

Early communication to parents, children and staff: The experience of schools that have experienced a COVID-19 infection and / or had to close for a short period to counteract infection, is that early and effective communication with parents is vital.

Parents are to be texted and emailed in a proportionate, measured and informative manner, to notify the entire community of any such case and to remind parents that in addition to texts, families should also refer frequently to the school website for any COVID-19 updates and information.

This text notification will have to be sent very promptly because, in an age of emails and social networking, it will be important for the school to cause and retain the information initiative before misinformation abounds.

3. HR Aspects:

Feeling unwell: The advice from PHE is if an employee feels unwell with symptoms that correspond with those of COVID-19 they should self-isolate and call NHS 111.

Managing Sickness, Absence, Self-certification: It is important to retain the culture where any member of staff feels able to inform heads or senior leadership team that he or she feels unwell and takes the necessary time off to recover. Schools should communicate NHS guidance to staff and ensure it is followed to try as far as possible to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Current guidance is for individuals not to visit the GP for a diagnosis if he or she suspects he or she may have COVID-19, so **self-certification** in the case of a suspected case of COVID-19 will be the basis for most absence requests. Any employee stating that he or she believes he or she has contracted COVID-19 will be asked if he or she has called NHS Direct 111 and whether subsequent screening at a specialist 'assessment pod' has confirmed the employee has contracted COVID-19.

When absent from work due to any sickness, the normal procedure for reporting absence should be followed as set out in HSG absence of staff policy.

Please note the **infectious period** paragraph above. Some staff recovering from COVID-19 may wish to return to work as soon as possible particularly if he or she is feeling fit. Although it has been the schools' practice to encourage staff back to work as soon as possible, where a head suspects a COVID-19 infection of a member of staff, then that member of staff should **not return** to the workplace for 14 calendar days from the onset of symptoms, even if he / she feels recovered.

Sick pay: Staff taking time off due to COVID-19 will be entitled to be paid in accordance with the terms and conditions of each member of staff's contract of employment. Where a member of staff is not ill but is nonetheless directed to remain at home because of the risk of cross-infection either to the school community or to him or herself, this will be treated as sick leave.

Information notices: It is incumbent upon each school as an employer to take all reasonable steps to reduce the risk of infection by COVID-19. Please ensure the school has hygiene posters ('Catch it, bin it, wash it' etc) and other posters displayed prominently.

Helping staff to minimise the risks of contracting COVID-19: Please bring the following points to the attention of staff:

- Emphasising the PHE / NHS guidance, which highlights the importance of good respiratory and hand hygiene;
- Covering the nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing, using a tissue when possible;
- Disposing of dirty tissues, promptly and carefully;
- Maintaining good basic hygiene, for example, washing hands frequently with anti-bacterial soap to reduce the spread of the virus from hands to face or to other people;
- Ensuring the children follow this advice: if necessary, consider providing appropriate anti-viral gels for use by the children, most gels with ethyl alcohol in them are effective.

Awareness of staff: Please communicate that:

- All washing facilities contain soap and / or an antiviral hand wash;

- The cleaning staff have been required to intensify cleaning of door handles and banisters and other common hard surfaces;
- Hygiene will be regularly monitored;
- All wash facilities have notices to remind staff about good hygiene;
- Telephones and music and computer keyboards (and mice / trackpads): antibacterial wipes are available to wipe these over periodically during the day.

4. Sources of information and appendices

Department for Education Coronavirus helpline

Phone: 0800 046 8687 (Opening hours: 8am to 6pm (Monday to Friday))

Email: DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk

Local authority helpline:

Schools Standards Business Support Team during office hours on 0207745 6444

Tony Andrews, emergency planning manager

07817 055 070 07977 931 697

Official websites

Latest information: <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

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

NHS: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

The following appendices are part of this policy:

- Appendix I – Disinfection routine and responsibilities at the school
- Appendix Ia – Daily sign-off log sheet for disinfection at each school

5. Review of this policy

The policy will be kept under frequent review with any updates brought to the attention of staff as necessary.