



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

**Office of the Clinical Director of Health Protection, Health Service Executive**

**TO:** All Principals

**FROM:** Dr Abigail Collins, HSE Public Health Schools Response Lead,  
Dr Kevin Kelleher, Assistant National Director, Public Health and Child Health

**RE:** Updated FAQs, general information and Infection Prevention Control webinar date

**DATE:** 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021

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Many thanks for your continued support with all the necessary Public Health Measures since the phased re-opening of schools in February. Since schools returned in August 2020, Public Health schools teams have supported the work you are undertaking by responding to cases of Covid-19 notified to us, and undertaking the public health risk assessment and required onward testing. Many thanks for your co-operation with this. It has been a busy return to on-site education for yourselves, and it has been a busy time for Public Health, so we appreciate your patience and courtesy with the teams contacting you. All data relating to the close contact testing within educational facilities, and the total number of children who have tested positive for Covid-19 are presented in the weekly data reports available on the HSE website below. Although very early days, the findings so far are consistent with what was seen before Christmas. More details on this are in the reports and the FAQs. <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/covid-19-schools-mass-testing-report.html>

The FAQs have been updated to reflect recent changes and some of the queries coming in to the Departments of Public Health. For queries relating to cases or potential cases of Covid-19 within your setting, please continue to use the '**HSE live Covid-19 Principal school line**' on **(01) 240 8785**. The phone number will operate 7 days a week, from 8am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday and from 10am to 4.30pm Saturday and Sunday. The operator will take basic details and provide these directly to the relevant Schools team in the Public Health department.

**Update on Close Contact Testing:** National close contact testing recommendations changed earlier this year to a Day 0 and a Day 10 test. If both of these are not detected, then restricted movements end and staff or students may return to school. If testing is not undertaken, the 14 day restricted movements continue to apply. If anyone tests positive for Covid-19, then they are managed as a case of Covid-19. If anyone develops symptoms whilst restricting their movements, they should discuss with their GP and isolate until results of testing are known. It may occur that after the results of the Day 0 tests, the date of the Day 10 tests needs to be pushed out, and the restricted movement period therefore extended. Close contacts will be informed of a change in date of D10 testing through the HSE.

**Close contacts of close contacts:** We have had several queries as to whether siblings of close contacts identified within schools need to be routinely excluded. There has been no change to this national recommendation and close contacts of close contacts do not require routine exclusion, and therefore siblings can still attend school. If there are particular concerns following the case and school PHRA being undertaken, the public health doctor may sometimes request siblings also restrict their movements, but this will be a specific clinical recommendation. It is not routine and siblings of schools close contacts identified should not be excluded by schools.

**Singing:** There has been no change to the recommendations on singing, as were sent out prior to Christmas. For Primary schools, singing (practice or performance) should only take place within pods, socially distanced and outside.

**Travel:** Travel is not recommended unless for essential purposes. Nationally the recommendations have changed and are different depending on whether someone travels from category 1 or category 2 countries. Up to date information should be got from the link below. HSE schools teams have no different advice on this. <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b4020-travelling-to-ireland-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

**Infection Prevention Control Webinar:** Professor Martin Cormican and his team have kindly organised a webinar for Principals to explain, outline and answer questions with regard to Infection Prevention and Control within educational settings. **This is at 12pm Friday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2021.** You can register here: <https://hse-webinar.webex.com/hse-webinar/onstage/g.php?MTID=ec78b74e41f6b589c0cd9fed99e263029>

This webinar will be recorded and can be viewed at a time convenient to individual principals.

### **Public Health Messages:**

The Public Health Schools teams would like to thank you for communicating important messages to your school community. It is important to regularly reinforce these messages for your school communities to help keep everybody safe.

#### **1) Before attending school:**

- **Symptoms** - Please make sure all staff and families are aware not to attend your facility if they have any symptoms of Covid-19 infection.
- **Symptomatic household members** - Please remind all staff and children that no-one should be attending school if they have any household member who has signs or symptoms of Covid-19; they should be restricting their movements until it is clear whether the household member has Covid-19 infection or not.
- **Close contacts** - Please remind all staff and children that they need to restrict their movements and undergo testing if they have been told by their doctor / HSE services that they are a close contact of a case of Covid-19; they should not be attending any school.
- **Re-enforcing general public health messages** - Please ensure all staff and children attending your facilities are reminded of the importance of keeping your facilities safe by abiding by the national public health measures currently in place at all times e.g. restricting movements and social contacts, social distancing, use of facial coverings and hand hygiene.

## 2) Within your school

- **Mitigation measures** - Please ensure all mitigation measures as recommended by Public Health in the return to school guidance are attended to and considered how best to implement within your specific school setting. These measures include physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and the use of face-coverings.
- **Break times** – please continue to ensure all mitigation measures have been maximally adhered to within break times, or when arriving / leaving schools. Whilst we appreciate it is difficult to maintain at all times, it is vitally important that processes are in place to facilitate adherence to these measures whilst staff/children are taking breaks
- **Movements** –essential only movements of staff and children between or across pods / classes is critical to protect from onward spread of infection if a case of Covid-19 within the school is identified.

## 3) If informed of a case of Covid-19 within your school

- Please ring 'HSE live Covid-19 Principal school line' if you haven't already heard from Public Health

For more information on Covid-19 and the education sector please see the HPSC website

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/educationguidance/>

For education specific guidance, please see usual website

<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/a128d-back-to-school/>