Department for Education

NHS Test and Trace

Contact Tracing for Step 4 Onwards

Frequently Asked Questions

Note: Throughout this document we refer to 'settings' – this relates to educational and childcare settings, including early years settings, schools, children's social care and FE providers.

Why are Test and Trace now assuming contact tracing duties from step 4?

Education and childcare settings have done a brilliant job in identifying contacts over the course of the pandemic, but this resource intensive. NHS Test & Trace already manage the contact tracing process for the rest of society and has expertise in supporting people to identify close contacts.

What happens from 19 July if a student tests positive with an LFD test?

If a student has a positive result from a lateral flow device (LFD) test after 19 July they and other members of the household should self-isolate. They, or their parent, should notify the setting that they will not be attending setting on the basis of the LFD test result. The student should order an immediate confirmatory PCR test.

If the confirmatory test is taken within two days and the result is negative, they and other members of their household can stop self-isolating (unless they have developed symptoms or been instructed to self-isolate by Test and Trace for other reasons). The student should inform the setting and return to face to face learning.

If the confirmatory PCR test is positive (or is taken more than two days after the LFD), they and other members of their household must self-isolate until 10 days after the date of the LFD test (or the date their symptoms began, if they were symptomatic). They should inform the setting that they have had a positive PCR test result and will not be attending the setting for the period of their isolation. They should learn remotely during this period if they are well enough to do so.

At what point and how might a setting be asked to support with contact tracing?

Settings will not be routinely contacted by NHS Test and Trace. Individual positive cases and/or their parents or legal guardians would instead be contacted by NHS Test and Trace and their close contacts would be traced and asked to follow relevant public health advice.

Contacts in an educational setting will be traced if the positive case specifically identified an individual as having close, prolonged contact which will normally have occurred in a social setting e.g. sleepovers.

A setting will not routinely be contacted to provide details of close contacts. However, education and childcare settings may be contacted, if deemed necessary, by local health protection teams in response to a local outbreak, as currently happens in managing other infectious diseases.

Does the fact that settings can be contacted in exceptional circumstances mean that they need to be available in the first week of the summer holidays?

We expect settings to continue to fulfil their contact tracing responsibilities up to Step 4 (or six days after term ends - whichever is earlier). From that point onwards, close contacts will be identified directly by NHS Test and Trace and education and childcare settings will no longer be routinely involved in contact tracing. Education and childcare settings may be contacted, if deemed necessary, by local health protection teams in response to a local outbreak, as currently happens in managing other infectious diseases.

How will a child or young person know what a 'close contact' is?

NHS Test & Trace will contact those who test positive – or their parent or legal guardian – to identify close contacts. They will ask a series of specific questions to help the individual understand what is meant by a close contact, making it easier for them to be identified. Being in a setting with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19 will not necessarily mean a person is identified as a close contact. We expect there to be a very small number of close contacts on average for each case.

How will a setting know if a student, pupil or member of staff has tested positive?

Children. pupils, students and staff members who record a positive LFD or PCR test should let their setting know.

Staff, pupils or students (or the parent) are required to report the test result via the NHS Online reporting system for both negative, void and positive test results. They should also report positive, negative and void results to the setting.

There is a draft template letter available on the document sharing platform for settings to send to students, pupils and parents which sets this out.

What is the guidance to settings on whether they inform parents that a child in a class has tested positive or may be a close contact?

Settings should consider whether individuals in their setting (taking account of factors such as known vulnerability) need to be informed of a positive case. When informing individuals of a positive case, the setting should not disclose any information that could result in an individual being identified. Settings may make their own decisions on how they wish to communicate the information.

Individuals should only be asked to stay home for Covid-related reasons if:

- they or someone in their household is symptomatic
- they or someone in their household has tested positive with a PCR or LFD (they may return if a positive LFD result is followed by a subsequent confirmatory PCR within 2 days)
- (until August 16th) they have been notified by NHS Test and Trace that they are a close contact

Template letters are available on the data sharing platform. Settings can contact the DfE helpline if they need access to this.

What does a close contact have to do?

In line with current guidance, anyone identified by NHS Test and Trace must self-isolate for 10 days from the date of last contact with the positive case and not attend their education or childcare setting. They should also take a PCR test. If the PCR test is negative, they must continue to self-isolate for their full self-isolation period as they could still become infectious. If the result is positive the individual must self-isolate for 10 days from the date of the test.

From 16 August, in line with fully vaccinated adults, under-18s identified as close contacts will not need to self-isolate and instead will be advised to take a PCR test. Further guidance will be provided shortly.

Children who are aged under 5 years old who are identified as close contacts would only be advised to take a PCR test if the positive case is within their own household.

18 year olds will be given the opportunity to get fully vaccinated before being treated as adults. After this point, they will be subject to the same rules as adults and so if they choose not to get vaccinated, they will need to self-isolate if identified as a close contact.

What if settings are asked to provide contact details for close contacts to parents or NHS Test and Trace?

Settings must not provide any personal information if asked to by parents and/or close contacts that would be a breach of GDPR or data protection legislation.

In exceptional circumstances, education and childcare settings may be contacted by NHS Track and Trace if deemed necessary by local health protection teams in response to a local outbreak, as currently happens in managing other infectious diseases.

In this scenario settings may share proportionate and relevant information as requested by NHS Track and Trace without consent. The sharing of information in these exceptional circumstance does not require consent as it is enabled by specific legislation, but to support this, the existing privacy notices should continue to be in place and be easily accessible.

What if settings know they might have an outbreak as a result of several positive cases in a 14-day period, but haven't yet been contacted by NHS Test and Trace

If you are concerned that you might have an outbreak about case rates in your setting you should call the dedicated advice service who will escalate the issue to your local health protection team where necessary and advise if any additional action is required, such as implementing elements of your outbreak management plan. You can reach them by calling the DfE helpline on 0800 046 8687 and selecting option 1 for advice on the action to take in response to a positive case.

If a child knows their contacts names but not the details, does NHS Test and Trace disregard those contacts, or ask the setting for details?

As with the process for adults, NHS Test and Trace will work with the positive case or, depending on the age of the individual, their parent/legal guardian, to identify those who have been in close contact. We expect this to be a very small number of individuals for each case on average. Contact tracers are trained in supporting people to identify close contacts and also work with local authorities to help trace contacts where needed.

What if a setting doesn't agree with the close contacts that have been identified by one of their pupils, students or legal guardian?

NHS Test & Trace already manage the contact tracing process for the rest of society and have developed expertise in supporting people to identify close contacts. NHS Test and Trace will work with the person who has tested positive (or their parent or guardian) to identify close contacts, based on a series of questions.

In exceptional cases, settings may decide to refuse a pupil if, in the setting's reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect those within the setting from possible infection with COVID-19. The decision would need to be carefully considered in light of all the circumstances and current public health advice.

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- (until August 16th) they have been notified by NHS Test and Trace that they are a close contact

If settings are concerned about case rates in their setting, initial support may be sought from the DfE helpline: 0800 046 8687, option 1 or by referring to local arrangements.