



Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

Education and Inclusion Service Directorate

Coronavirus (COVID-19): FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs) FOR PARENTS/CARERS ON THE RETURN TO SCHOOL IN SEPTEMBER 2020 VERSION 2 (28.08.20)

Mae'r ddogfen yma ar gael yn y Gymraeg / This document is available in Welsh.

INTRODUCTION

This guidance is intended to support parents and carers in relation to the 'back to school' plans for September for Rhondda Cynon Taf schools. The Minister for Education in Wales (Kirsty Williams) confirmed on 9th July 2020 that all pupils will be able to return to school in September. The Welsh Technical Advisory Group, which provides scientific and technical advice to Government during emergencies, recommended to the Minister that schools should "plan to open in September with 100% of pupils physically present on school sites, subject to a continuing, steady decline in the presence of COVID-19 in the community". Further information is available at <https://gov.wales/technical-advisory-group-advice-return-school>

These FAQs are informed by Welsh Government guidance:
<https://gov.wales/operational-guidance-schools-and-settings-autumn-term-covid-19>

The Minister has announced that from September 2020:

- Schools will return to full capacity, with only limited social distancing within contact groups.
- In primary schools a contact group should be class size.
- In Key Stage 3, contact groups should be class size where possible. Where this proves to be challenging, larger sized contact groups of half-year or full year size will be necessary.

- Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 contact groups are likely to be the size of a full year group to ensure access to specialist teaching and resources.
- Some direct or indirect mixing between children in different contact groups will be unavoidable, such as on transport, when receiving specialist teaching or interventions or due to staffing constraints.
- Social distancing for adults should remain in line with regulations and guidance, where possible
- Schools will be required to minimise the risk of transmission by taking other mitigating measures using a hierarchy of risk controls.
- Every school will be 'COVID-controlled' - having carried out risk assessments and mitigated them with a combination of controls such as hand and surface hygiene, one-way systems and so forth.
- If early warning information shows a local incident or outbreak then experts from the Council, University Health Board and Public Health Wales (PHW) will work together to investigate the incident and implement any necessary measures to prevent spread of the infection in the school.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. Why can more children now return to school?

Since the decision was made to close schools for statutory provision, our understanding of the virus and its longer-term impacts has continued to develop. We know that we are going to have to live with it for some time and it will remain our biggest challenge for the foreseeable future. Although it is not possible to ensure a totally risk-free environment, research tells us that staff in educational settings tend not to be at any greater risk from the disease than many other occupations.

Also, the [latest scientific advice](#) is that the risk to children of becoming severely ill from COVID-19 is very low. Furthermore, the Welsh Technical Advisory Group report that transmissibility in children under the age of 12 seems to be particularly low with emerging evidence showing limited child to child transmission.

Taking into account the improved situation we now find ourselves in, the balance of risk is now overwhelmingly in favour of children returning to school. Being out of school is detrimental for children's short and long term academic development and their health and wellbeing, particularly for disadvantaged children. We know that lower academic achievement also translates into long-term economic costs. We also know that school closures have affected some families' ability to work. Getting our learners back into school as quickly and as safely as possible will bring positive benefits on a number of fronts not least their mental and emotional wellbeing.

2. When can my child return to school?

Schools will start the next phase on 1st September 2020 and schools will be open for the phased return of learners from 3rd of September 2020.

The first two weeks of term will be a period of flexibility to allow for planning and reorganisation. It is expected that this will mean that at least 33% of pupils will be present during the first week in September; 50% from Monday 7th September; with 100% of pupils returning to school by Thursday 10th September.

Schools will inform parents/carers of the return date applicable to their child(ren).

3. Will all age groups be returning to school in the autumn term?

The autumn term will start on 1st September and schools will accommodate learners from the 3rd of September onwards on a phased basis. There will be a period of flexibility in recognition that schools may want to focus on priority year groups. This will also allow time, up to a fortnight, for any planning and reorganisation. Planning and preparation days will take place at the start of term to enable schools and settings to work with their staff on reviewing their risk assessments, processes and associated systems.

Some specific groups of learners may need to be prioritised during the first week of term, such as learning support classes attached to mainstream schools, early years and year 6 in primary schools, and year 7 and examination year groups at secondary level.

From the second week of term schools and settings will look to maximise the number of learners in attendance leading to a full return of all learners by the 10th of September.

Your child's school will contact you to advise of the relevant return date for your child.

4. How will risks to children, teachers and families be managed?

Welsh Government have provided guidance and support to schools and childcare settings at <https://gov.wales/protecting-staff-and-under-5-year-olds-coronavirus-childcare> to help them to reduce the risk of transmission as more children and young people return.

To prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), schools and other settings will use a range of protective measures to create safer environments in which the risk of spreading the virus is substantially reduced. Whilst such changes are likely to look different in each setting, as they will depend upon individual circumstances, they are all designed to minimise risks to children, staff and their families.

Schools and other settings should communicate their plans to parents once they have had a chance to work through them in detail. Approaches we are asking schools and other settings to take include:

- carrying out a risk assessment before opening to more children and young people - the assessment will directly address risks associated with coronavirus

(COVID-19) so that sensible measures can be put in place to minimise those risks for children, young people and staff

- making sure that staff, children and young people and others do not attend if they or a member of their household has symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19)
- undertaking regular hand washing for 20 seconds with running water and soap or use of sanitiser and ensuring good respiratory hygiene by promoting the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach.
- re-enforce the message to pupils and staff of the need to maintain physical distancing where practical to do so
- use of foot operated / self-closing pedal bins for the disposal of used tissues / sanitiser wipes
- installing signage throughout the school building to remind all children and staff of the need for frequent hand washing and social (physical) distancing
- frequent cleaning of regularly touched surfaces, such as door handles, handrails, tabletops, play equipment and toys
- provision of antibacterial wipes to facilitate regular spot cleaning
- minimising contact through the creation of contact groups
- minimising the number of contacts between learners and staff by avoiding large gatherings such as assemblies
- altering the environment as much as possible, such as changing the layout of classrooms to avoid face to face contact
- reducing mixing between groups through timetable changes, such as staggered break times, zoning play areas and by introducing staggered drop-off and collection times
- pupils bringing and using their own school equipment
- no unnecessary external visitors to the school and visitors being admitted by appointment only.
- developing protocols around the use of toilets during break and lunch times.
- active engagement with Test Trace Protect; and
- formal consideration of how to reduce contacts and maximise distancing between those in school wherever possible and minimise potential for contamination so far as is reasonably practicable

How contacts are reduced will depend on the school's circumstances and should include:

- grouping learners together;
- avoiding contact between groups as much as possible;
- arranging classrooms with forward facing desks (where possible and appropriate); and
- staff maintaining distance from pupils and other staff as much as possible.

5. Is it compulsory for my child to attend school?

All children and young people and priority groups (such as vulnerable children) will be required to attend during the autumn term, as requested by their school unless they are self-isolating or there are other reasons for absence.

You should notify your child's school as normal if your child is unable to attend so that staff are aware of any sickness absence and can discuss with you.

Parents will not be fined for non-attendance at this time, although this will be reviewed and monitored over the first autumn half-term period.

6. **Should I keep my child at home if they have an underlying health condition, or live with someone in a clinically vulnerable group, or if I am anxious about my child returning to school?**

Any parent who has medical concerns about their child should seek and follow medical advice provided by their local GP or guidance from Public Health Wales in respect of accessing school during the current pandemic.

'Extremely vulnerable' or shielding learners

The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for Wales took the decision to pause his advice to shield from 16th August, because the infection rate in Wales is very low. Staff and learners who were shielding will be able to return to school in the autumn term if the environments are "COVID controlled". Every school will continue to carry out risk assessments and put in place controls to minimise risks, such as frequent hand washing, surface hygiene and one-way systems, as appropriate. Learners who have been advised that they no longer need to shield will be supported on returning back to school.

Where a learner is unable to attend school due to self-isolation, the schools will continue to provide support and resources in order for learning to take place. This may be through a variety of means, such as work packs and digitally sourced work through Hwb, etc.

Clinically vulnerable learners at 'increased risk'

In the context of COVID-19, individuals at 'increased risk' are at a greater risk of severe illness from COVID-19. This category includes children and young people who have a range of chronic health conditions. As the advice to shield is being paused, learners in this category can return to school if the environments are "COVID controlled". Every school will continue to carry out risk assessments and put in place controls to minimise risks, such as frequent hand washing, surface hygiene and one-way systems, as appropriate.

Living with a person who is either shielding or at increased risk

If a learner lives in a household with someone who is at increased risk or was previously "shielding", as the advice to shield has been paused, learners in this category can return to school. Every school will continue to carry out risk assessments and put in place controls to minimise risks, such as frequent hand washing, surface hygiene and one-way systems, as appropriate.

Parents/carers and learners who are anxious about returning to school and settings

Schools are aware that some pupils, parents/carers may be reluctant or anxious about returning and schools will have support in place to address this. This may include learners who have themselves been shielding previously but have been advised that this is no longer necessary, those living in households where someone is clinically vulnerable, or those concerned about the comparatively increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19), including those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds or who have certain conditions such as obesity and diabetes.

Parents/carers of learners with significant risk factors who are concerned can discuss such concerns with the school and the school will explain the measures they are putting in place to reduce the risk and provide the required reassurance. All children in Rhondda Cynon Taf are required to be back in school by the 10th September. Pupils of compulsory school age **must** attend school from the 14th September unless a statutory reason applies (for example, the pupil has been granted a leave of absence, is unable to attend because of sickness, is absent for a necessary religious observance, etc.).

7. Will education be provided as normal to children and young people who are attending?

Education settings still have the flexibility to provide support and education to children and young people attending school in the way they see fit during this time. Full curriculum access and delivery is expected.

Schools continue to be best placed to make decisions about how to support and educate their pupils during this period. This will include:

- consideration of pupils' mental health and wellbeing
- assessment of where pupils are in their learning in order to inform any targeted programmes and compensatory learning, if required
- delivery of broad, balanced and appropriately differentiated national curriculum
- provision for pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs

Schools will contact parents/carers regarding the arrangements for the start of the autumn term.

Schools will use their best endeavours to support pupils attending as well as those remaining at home, making use of the available remote education support.

SCHOOL BUILDINGS

8. What measures have been taken to ensure safety on the school site?

Minimising contacts and mixing between people reduces transmission risk. Hence, schools will endeavour to keep groups separate and maintain distance between individuals where possible.

It is likely that for younger learners the emphasis will be on separating groups and keeping children in their contact groups throughout the school day; and for older learners (for example, in secondary schools where pupils need to access a broad curriculum) the emphasis will be on physical distancing, where practical.

Adults are to maintain a 2 metre distance from each other, and from pupils (whenever possible). This will not always be possible, particularly when working with younger learners, learners who have complex needs or who need close contact care; however, adults maintaining distance when circumstances allow, even if only for some of the time, will help.

All schools have installed signage to facilitate social (physical) distancing and remind all staff and learners of the need to maintain social distancing.

One-way systems will be in operation (where possible) and floor / wall markings will be used to identify one-way routes.

Timetables will try to ensure that movement around the site is kept to a minimum and congested corridors are not created.

Classrooms are being rearranged so that space is optimised; surplus furniture removed and the layouts ensure face to face contact can be avoided where possible.

Schools will avoid large gatherings such as assemblies with more than one group.

School start / end times and lunch and break periods may be staggered.

Where possible, separate toilets will be allocated to different contact groups. Toilets will be regularly cleaned throughout the day.

Hand sanitiser and hand soap will be readily available with regular reminders of the importance of good hand hygiene.

Schools will have a good supply of foot operated pedal bins for the safe disposal of tissues and wipes – the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach will be promoted and will be part of each school's culture.

Windows will be opened (where possible and safe to do so) to improve natural ventilation.

All schools will have updated risk assessments in place ensuring the safety of their settings - the assessment will directly address risks associated with coronavirus (COVID-19) so that sensible measures can be put in place to minimise those risks for children, young people and staff.

9. Will there be regular hand-washing facilities for staff and pupils?

Pupils and staff will be encouraged to wash or sanitise their hands upon arrival at school / when leaving school and regularly throughout the day, especially before and after handling food, when using the toilet facilities and when someone has sneezed or coughed. Foot operated pedal bins with self-closing lids will be available for the disposal of used tissues and sanitiser wipes.

These routines will be built into the school's culture, along with behaviour expectations. Younger learners and those with complex needs will be further assisted to help them get this right.

Signage will be in place throughout school buildings identifying hand sanitiser locations and each sink area will have signage reminding all of the need for frequent hand washing. Plentiful supplies of hand soap and hand sanitiser will be available throughout all school buildings.

10. How often will schools be cleaned?

Daily cleaning frequencies / durations are being greatly increased at every school. Cleaners have received instructions regarding enhanced cleaning requirements and the identification of surfaces, which require additional / more frequent cleaning, such as door handles, tabletops, handrails, play equipment, toys etc.

Resources that are shared between contact groups, such as sports, art and science equipment will be frequently and thoroughly cleaned, especially where it is necessary for them to be used by more than one contact group.

Antibacterial wipes will be readily available to facilitate regular spot cleaning.

11. What if a parent wants to enter the school building to speak to a teacher?

No parents will be permitted within any school building unless they have re-arranged visit. Should teacher / parent contact be required, this should be by appointment and arrangements for audio and / or video communication explored as an alternative.

External visitors to the school will be admitted by pre-arranged appointment only.

12. Have school buildings been maintained?

Routine maintenance has been undertaken on school buildings throughout the period that schools have been closed. Caretakers have continued to undertake statutory testing and this will continue to be kept up to date.

THE SCHOOL DAY

13. What will the contact group sizes be?

In secondary schools, particularly in the older age groups at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5, the contact groups are likely to need to be the size of a year group to enable schools to deliver the full range of curriculum subjects and for students to receive specialist teaching or interventions. If this can be achieved with small groups, they are recommended.

At primary school, and in the younger years at secondary (Key Stage 3), schools may be able to implement smaller groups the size of a full class. Where this proves to be challenging in Key Stage 3, larger sized contact groups of half-year or full year size will be necessary. Where class sized groups can be achieved, it is recommended, as this will help to reduce the number of people who could be asked to isolate should someone in a group become ill with COVID-19.

Whatever the size of the group, they should be kept apart from other groups where possible and older learners should be encouraged to keep their distance within groups.

14. What will the arrangements be for pupils using the toilet?

Hand sanitiser and hand soap will be in plentiful supply and where possible schools will provide separate toilets for different contact groups.

Where it is not possible to provide separate toilets for different contact groups, the plentiful supply of hand sanitiser and hand soap and encouragement of good hand hygiene practices before and after entering the toilet area, will help. Toilets will also be cleaned frequently throughout the day.

15. Will my child be with the same group at all times?

Consistent groups help reduce the risk of transmission by limiting the number of pupils and staff in contact with each other to only those within the group. It is accepted that pupils and especially the youngest pupils, cannot socially distance from staff or from each other and consistent groups provide an additional protective measure. Maintaining distinct contact groups that do not mix makes it quicker and easier, in the event of a positive case, to identify those who may need

to self-isolate and to keep that number as low as possible.

16. **Can my child bring in their own hand sanitiser, and wear a face covering?**

All schools will have hand sanitiser throughout the building and this will be fully available for the use of all pupils and staff.

In light of the revised advice on this matter by the World Health Organisation, the Council is strongly recommending that from the 10th September 2020, face coverings be worn by all secondary mainstream pupils when moving around common areas of school buildings including corridors, lifts, stairwells, toilets, canteen areas where physical distancing is unlikely to be maintained.

Face coverings are not a replacement for far more effective measures such as social (physical) distancing and hand hygiene. The wearing of face coverings must not be used as an alternative to any of these other precautions but are recommended where social distancing cannot be maintained.

Secondary age learners travelling on dedicated school transport will have to wear a face covering, as learners cannot sit together in their year groups, but they are not a substitute for good hygiene. Not only will this measure help reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 but also common colds and flu, which will also be a benefit.

One re-usable face covering per learner will initially be delivered to the schools to be handed to those in year 7 and above for their first return trip home (**please note that for the initial trip into school, drivers will issue a disposable face mask for pupils to wear until they collect their reusable mask**). Replacements for lost or damaged face coverings will be available from a stock in schools.

Learners who travel to school or college on **public** transport must wear a three layer face covering as mandated by the Welsh Government. Further information can be found here <https://trc.cymru/school-transport>.

Learners must not touch the front of their face covering during use or when removing them. They must wash their hands immediately on arrival at school or home, dispose of temporary face coverings in a covered bin or place re-usable face coverings in a plastic bag for washing.

Parental support is essential in ensuring that your child wears a face covering on school transport. It is essential that all secondary school age pupils wear a face covering on dedicated school transport (unless there are medical or health reasons)

Please see the Transport section - questions 33 to 42 for more information on Home to School Transport.

17. **Will my child have their temperature taken on arrival at school?**

All schools have been provided with temperature checking devices (infrared forehead thermometers). This is being managed at a local level at each school, although it is not a mandatory requirement to screen for a temperature.

18. **Can my child bring a pencil case/rucksack to school?**

Children can bring a pencil case / rucksack to school as required. This should be solely for their personal use and equipment / stationery must not be shared. However, please note that fabric pencil cases can be difficult to clean. It is recommended that learners limit the amount of equipment they bring into school each day, to essential items only. Transfer of items to and from the home should be minimised where possible.

19. **How will break / lunch times be managed and monitored?**

Pupils will eat lunch in identified dining areas in their contact groups. Dining may also be undertaken outdoors (weather permitting) again, with pupils remaining in their contact groups wherever possible.

Break times and lunch times will be staggered so that the numbers of children at break / lunch at the same time will be the lowest number possible.

20. **How can social distancing be maintained in relation to pupils with Additional Learning Needs or pupils who require physical assistance?**

In circumstances where social distancing is difficult (such as attending to the needs of a pupil with additional learning needs or physical needs), additional PPE will be provided for staff if a risk assessment deems that this is appropriate. The Local Authority has provided all schools with supplies of PPE.

Schools have also been provided with mobile screens enabling them to provide 1:1 educational / pastoral / emotional support to pupils who require it without the need to wear PPE.

21. **How can the Foundation Phase be delivered safely?**

Foundation Phase pupils will still have the opportunity to learn through play. Additional use will be made of available outdoor areas and classroom spaces can be zoned to create safe areas for writing activities; creative activities; building activities; play activities etc.

The evidence shows that youngest learners are in the least at risk group. Early years' educational practitioners are experienced in caring for the needs of young children and will apply professional judgement.

We recognise that provision and learning experiences may not be exactly the same as they were in March, however, early years' educational practitioners are experienced in caring for the needs of young children. Continuing with a child centred approach means a high-quality delivery of the Foundation Phase and the same learning outcomes of social and personal development and well-being can still be achieved with safe modification and adaptation of learning spaces and resources.

Resources used will be easily cleanable and cleaned frequently.

22. **What work will be provided to pupils if there is a local lockdown?**

Every school will also need to plan for the possibility of a further local lockdown and a blended learning style of learning will be used to ensure all pupils continue to engage in educational activities even if their school is not open.

Distance learning activities will continue to be provided for those children who are unable to attend school due to the need to self-isolate.

23. **How will school pick up and drop off be managed?**

School start and end times will be staggered.

Parents /carers dropping off children must maintain a 2 metre distance from other families wherever possible. Markers will be in place on the ground to help parents / carers queue and remain 2 metres apart. Parents / carers will not be permitted to enter the school building and must leave the school site immediately and not congregate.

Afternoon pick up arrangements will vary depending on the school site layout. Schools will make appropriate arrangements to ensure 2 metre social distancing is maintained wherever possible. Parents / carers / pupils must leave the school site immediately and not congregate.

CATERING

24. **Will breakfast clubs and after school clubs run?**

In line with Welsh Government guidance, consideration will be given to the recommencement of breakfast clubs and after school provision following the phased return of all learners to school over a two week period in September. A staged approach to the re-introduction will be adopted following a review of the capacity of schools to meet demand whilst maintaining discrete contact groups and safe social distancing, where possible.

There will be no breakfast clubs or after school club provision for the first two weeks of term. Portable breakfast provision will be made available for pupils entitled to free school meals only during this period.

Parents will be required to complete an E Form via the Council's website (www.rctcbc.gov.uk) to apply for a breakfast club place. Spaces will be available from the week commencing Monday 14th September. The form will be available for completion from 1st September to 6th September. A link to the form will be provided to schools for distribution to parents. The completed applications will be reviewed centrally and an assessment will be made on the dining space available and breakfast club staffing numbers to ensure that health and safety and appropriate social distancing requirements are met.

25. What will the arrangements be for lunch time?

Kitchens will be fully open from the start of the autumn term and food will be available to all pupils who want it, including for those eligible for free school meals. Pupils will eat lunch in identified dining areas in their contact groups, with surfaces used for dining being cleaned between groups / uses. Dining may also be undertaken outdoors (weather permitting), again, with pupils remaining in their contact groups wherever possible. It might be required in a small number of cases for learners to have their lunch in their classroom to enhance social distancing.

To minimise the risk of transferring infection via cash handling, schools are encouraged to become "cash and cheque free" once reopened with the aim of becoming cash free during the autumn term. This will apply to all items purchased for cash or cheque within a school and includes (but not limited to) purchases such as schools meals, uniform, kit and equipment. Online payments are well established within Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC with all schools being enabled for dinner money payments. Please contact bankrec@rctcbc.gov.uk to set up appropriate options.

26. Will older students be able to leave school to have lunch in the community?

No children will be permitted to leave the school site during the school day.

27. Will Free School Meals continue?

One final transitional BACS payment will be made to parents/carers of pupils entitled to free school meals for the period to 9th September.

Meals will also be provided at school on the days that your child attends school.

28. Will water be available during the day?

All pupils should bring filled water bottles to school that can be refilled during the day. The refilling of water bottles will be managed and supervised by the school

to ensure that the safe refilling of water bottles is available to pupils who need/or request it.

UNIFORM

29. Will school uniform have to be worn, and how often must clothes be washed?

Learners will need to wear school uniform in September.

Daily washing of school uniform is strongly recommended to ensure that risks are mitigated.

30. Will I need to send in outdoor learning clothing/gym clothes?

Your child's school will advise as this will be dependent on the learning activities planned. Outdoor learning will be encouraged.

ILLNESSES AND POSITIVE TESTS FOR COVID-19

31. What happens if there is a suspected or confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) in my child's school or childcare setting?

If a child, young person or staff member develops symptoms compatible with coronavirus (COVID-19), they will be sent home and advised to self-isolate for 10 days and arrange to be tested. Their fellow household members should self-isolate for 14 days. If the result of the test is negative the other members of the household can end their self-isolation.

All staff, children and young people and members of their households, will have access to testing if they display symptoms of coronavirus, and are strongly encouraged to be tested in this scenario. Where the child, young person or staff member tests negative, they can return to their setting and the fellow household members can end their self-isolation.

Where a child, young person or staff member displays symptoms the school setting will engage with the Test, Trace and Protect strategy. See the link for further details.

<https://gov.wales/guidance-testing-and-contact-tracing-education-settings>

Where the child, young person or staff member tests positive, the rest of their class/group within their childcare or education setting may be sent home and advised to self-isolate for 14 days.

Depending on the outcome of further testing, the rest of the class/group may be sent home and advised to self-isolate for 14 days. The other household members

of that wider class/group do not need to self-isolate unless the child, young person or staff member they live with in that group subsequently develops symptoms.

Where settings are observing guidance on infection prevention and control, which will reduce risk of transmission, closure of the whole setting will not generally be necessary.

32. When should I not send my child to school? For example, if they have a fever?

Under no circumstances should learners or staff attend schools/setting if they:

- feel unwell, have any of the four identified COVID-19 symptoms (a new continuous cough, a high temperature or loss of taste or smell) or they have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 10 days;
- live in a household or are part of an extended household with someone who has symptoms of COVID-19; or has tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 14 days.

TRANSPORT

33. Will school transport be provided when the schools re-open in September?

The Council is working to resume its dedicated school transport services for all learners, in line with the latest Welsh Government [guidance](#).

We are continuing to encourage parents or carers to take their children to school by walking, cycling, scooting or wheeling, or alternatively by private car, in order to reduce the capacity constraints. We understand that this will not be possible for some people.

While parents or carers may feel apprehensive about the risks in using school transport during the COVID-19 pandemic, they should decide whether to do so, or, if they prefer, they should make their own arrangements to transport their child to and from school.

34. Will my child's usual school transport route be running?

For most learners already in receipt of free school transport or for whom new arrangements have been put in place for September, all school transport routes will continue to operate as they did before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Every summer, it is necessary to make some changes to accommodate new learners onto school transport. You will have been notified by letter if your child's transport has changed.

Details of the timetable, including the school bus operator for your child's journey to school, along with additional information relating to the Mainstream School Transport Service can also be found at:

<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Resident/ParkingRoadsandTravel/Travel/SchoolandCollegeTransport/Schoolbusroutes.aspx> (*Timetables are subject to change and will be updated in August*).

Secondary learners will need carry their bus pass or where issued their temporary travel slips. They must show the driver their pass or slip in order to travel on the vehicle. Replacements for lost passes can be ordered and paid for by completing the on line form or by contacting the Council on 01443 425001.

Primary learners will have received an authorisation letter confirming their entitlement. Parents or carers must show the driver the letter in order to allow travel on the vehicle. If you have lost your authorisation letter, please contact the Council on 01443 425001.

If transport was not already provided or you have not received confirmation that your child has been allocated a free seat on school transport, you must make your own way into school.

35. My child has additional learning needs. What transport arrangements will be in place to Learning Support Classes, Pupil Referral Units and Special Schools?

All taxis and minibuses to Learning Support Classes, Pupil Referral Units and Special Schools will continue to operate as they did before the COVID-19 pandemic. If your child is new to additional learning needs transport, you will receive details of your home to school transport towards the end of August.

Every summer, it is necessary to make some changes to accommodate new learners onto school transport. You will have been notified by letter if your child's transport has changed.

Whilst social distancing is not required on additional learning needs school transport, we are working with schools and operators to provide proportionate safeguards to minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19 on school transport to ensure learners can attend school or college. These include;

- drivers and passenger assistants will wear face coverings or visors and personal protective equipment (PPE) as appropriate,
- vehicles will be cleaned regularly, including anti-bacterial wipe down of handrails, door handles and all surfaces that passengers may touch,
- anti-bac wipes and hand sanitiser will be available,
- on larger vehicles (minibuses), children will be directed to sit in the same seat (where possible) with the same child or children on every journey,
- windows will be open whilst moving to ensure the vehicle is well ventilated.

36. My child is not entitled to free school transport, can I pay for a seat?

In previous academic years, the Council has offered parents or carers whose children are not entitled to free school transport the chance to purchase spare seats on dedicated school transport. However, due to the exceptional challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council has been forced to suspend the discretionary provision of sale of seats for the foreseeable future in order to ensure that entitled students receive the transport in line with the latest Welsh Government [guidance](#).

The Council will keep the situation under review. Whilst the situation is so fluid, it is difficult to predict how school transport will evolve over the coming months. An improvement in the COVID-19 situation may mean that there is a remote possibility that we may be able to make seats available later in the academic year. Any change in the provision on sale of seats will be announced via the Council's website and social media channels.

Whilst some additional public transport journeys at school times are being funded by the Welsh Government, seating capacities remain reduced and in view of these potential constraints impacting on a learner's ability to attend school, all sustainable and active travel modes should be considered.

37. Will my child need to social distance on school transport?

Dedicated School or College Transport

Most learners travel on dedicated buses, coaches or taxis, which exclusively carry learners travelling to and from school or college.

The Welsh Government [guidance](#) acknowledges that it is not always possible to allow social distancing between learners accessing dedicated school or college transport. Therefore learners on most dedicated school transport will not be able to social distance.

Proportionate safeguards will be taken to minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19 on dedicated school transport to ensure learners can attend school/settings on the basis that;

- the overall risk to children and young people from COVID-19 is low,
- dedicated school transport carries the same group of learners on a regular basis, and those learners may also be together in school,
- learners will sit together in year groups where possible,
- siblings can sit together,
- there will be no face to face seating,
- there will be no contact between learners and other passengers
- windows and roof vents will be kept open where possible,
- contact will be minimised with individuals who are unwell,

- all passengers, including the drivers and passenger assistants should wash their hands or use hand sanitiser before boarding transport and when arriving at school or home,
- if there is a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19, then it will be easy to identify who was travelling on which vehicle, helping to test, trace and protect,
- there will be a rigorous cleaning and sanitising regime between before or after each journey.

Public Transport

Some learners use public transport as part of their home to school or college journey. For further information travelling to school/college by public transport can be found here <https://trc.cymru/school-transport>

To also help reduce the risk of transmission of Covid-19, learners should;

- minimise contact with individuals who are unwell,
- clean hands thoroughly and more often than usual,
- ensure good respiratory hygiene by promoting the 'catch it, bin it kill it' approach.

When waiting for the school bus it is a parent or carer's responsibility to ensure their child behaves responsibly while waiting for the vehicle. This includes social distancing.

38. Will my child be expected to wear a face covering?

Clear evidence remains that the most effective way to protect your child and others from infection is to follow social distancing rules, avoid touching surfaces and your face, and wash your hands regularly. The wearing of face coverings must not be used as an alternative to any of these other precautions but are recommended where social distancing cannot be maintained.

Primary age learners and those with special educational needs or who rely on lip reading to communicate may not be able to safely wear a face covering.

Secondary age learners travelling on dedicated school transport must wear a face covering, as learners cannot sit together in their year groups, but they are not a substitute for good hygiene. Not only will this measure help reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 but also common colds and flu, which will also be a benefit.

One re-usable face covering per learner will initially be delivered to the schools to be handed to those in year 7 and above for their first return trip home (**please note that for the initial trip into school, drivers will issue a disposable face mask for pupils to wear until they collect their reusable mask**). Replacements for lost or damaged face coverings will be available from a stock in schools.

Learners who travel to school or college on public transport must wear a three layer face covering as mandated by the Welsh Government. Further information can be found here <https://trc.cymru/school-transport>.

Learners must not touch the front of their face covering during use or when removing them. They must wash their hands immediately on arrival at school or home, dispose of temporary face coverings in a covered bin or place re-usable face coverings in a plastic bag for washing.

Please note that a refusal to comply with this requirement will result in your child's place on school transport being suspended. Your support in reinforcing this message with your child would be greatly appreciated.

39. What further precautions must my child take when travelling?

We ask that parents or carers help communicate to their children the importance of following good hygiene and social distancing, as this will play a key role in keeping everyone safe.

This means taking the following precautions;

- **do not travel** if your child or a member of their household has any of the four identified COVID-19 symptoms (a new continuous cough, a high temperature or loss of taste or smell).
- **do not travel** if anyone in the household is required to self-isolate as a contact of a case under Test, Trace, Protect (TTP) or is in quarantine having returned from a country specified by the Foreign Commonwealth Office,
- wash your hands for at least 20 seconds or sanitise your hands before leaving the house,
- use the hand sanitiser provided before accessing the vehicle,
- avoid physical contact with others,
- windows will be open for ventilation where possible,
- face away from other people when using school transport,
- minimise the number of surfaces you touch, and in particular avoid touching surfaces such as handrails and window ledges,
- do not touch your face,
- do not eat or drink whilst using transport,
- wash your hands for at least 20 seconds or sanitise your hands before leaving school.

Please note that a refusal to comply with health and safety requirements, good hygiene and where possible social distancing could jeopardise your child's place on school transport. Your support in reinforcing this message with your child would be greatly appreciated.

40. How will your child know where to sit?

Learners will board dedicated school transport on the basis of the distance to or from school. Those who live furthest will board first and sit at the back, while those who live closest will board last and sit at the front.

Learners will also be encouraged to use hand sanitiser on boarding the vehicle where provided. It is expected that learners will have washed their hands before boarding the vehicle and upon arrival at school.

Learners travelling on coaches or larger vehicles may be asked to use the same seat each day.

Learners using dedicated home to school taxis or minibuses will be asked to sit in the same seat each day.

41. How will you ensure that transport services are not overcrowded?

Only named passengers that have prior approval to travel, or those with secondary school bus passes for the route, will be allowed to use transport. Drivers will have lists of those primary school learners that will be allocated to their vehicle each day. No pass, no travel will be strictly enforced on secondary school vehicles, and those not eligible to travel will be turned away from the vehicle.

42. Will transport suppliers be following health and safety guidance?

We are asking transport suppliers to follow the Welsh Government guidance <https://gov.wales/restarting-public-transport-guidance-operators>. This guidance includes actions such as regular sanitising, the thorough cleaning of vehicles and the use of PPE.

EMERGENCY CHILDCARE PROVISION

43. Will emergency childcare provision for key / essential workers and particularly vulnerable learners be available?

There will be no emergency childcare provision in the autumn term. All pupils will return to their usual school setting over the period 3rd September to 10th September.

EDUCATIONAL VISITS

44. Will off-site educational visits be taking place?

In accordance with Welsh Government advice, no overseas education trips for children under 18 are to be organised by educational settings.

Non-overnight educational visits within the UK are able to resume in the autumn term providing appropriate protective measures are taken, such as ensuring that COVID-controlled measures are in place at the destination and risk assessments are undertaken prior to any visit. As part of the risk assessment, schools will consider what control measures need to be used; ensure they have taken into account wider advice on visiting indoor and outdoor venues; consider the ability of their learners to comply with COVID safety measures at the venue; and be mindful in all instances of the safety of supervising staff.