

House of Commons: Written Statement

Department for Education

Written Statement made by: **The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson)**.

Education Updates

As a government we have made it a national priority that education and childcare settings should continue to operate as normally as possible during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, and we have continued to work with the profession to continue full-time face-to-face education.

We are therefore deploying the latest rapid-result coronavirus tests to schools and colleges from January. This will help us to find those with the virus and isolate them quickly to break chains of transmission. It will also help us keep close contacts of positive cases – whether staff or students – in education as we will test them every day rather than asking them to self-isolate.

Testing, along with existing infection prevention and control measures such as ventilation, increased hygiene, and wearing of face coverings in communal areas where appropriate, can ensure pupils are given the best chance of continuing face-to-face education.

The testing programme builds on the success of testing pilots in schools and colleges over the past few months. It will start with secondary schools and colleges, with staff eligible for weekly rapid tests.

This will help identify asymptomatic cases – which make up a third of all cases – limiting the spread of the virus.

Staff and students who are close contacts of positive cases will be eligible for daily testing, preventing the need for self-isolation. Only if a daily test returns a positive result will the person need to isolate.

Using daily testing for close contacts of positive cases will help tackle COVID-19 related absence among the workforce and students, allowing them to continue in face-to-face education, with all the benefits that this brings.

To support delivery of asymptomatic testing in schools and colleges, settings will be able to apply for reimbursement for reasonable administrative costs such as staff time.

We realise that this year has been incredibly difficult for staff, students, pupils and parents. I want to thank all involved in education for their tireless dedication. The hard work of our education workforce has already substantially reduced the risk of transmission of coronavirus within education settings and we will now use this new testing approach to ensure more young people are able to remain in education, benefitting from the national priority of keeping education open for all.

As with all policy, this will be kept under review in light of scientific evidence, and the government will provide further advice if necessary.