

Q&A School Reopening

When will schools be reopening?

Following guidance from the Government schools 88 schools in Northumberland are planning to be open in the week beginning 1st June for some or all of the identified year groups, with the remaining schools planning to open during the week beginning 8th June.

We are working with head teachers in schools across the county to support them in the implementation of appropriate health and safety measures based on their risk assessments, and in line with Government guidance. Once those safety measures are in place, schools will welcome back pupils in Year 6, Year 1 and Reception. Parents should stay in touch with their child's school for the latest information.

Which primary/middle children will be allowed back to school?

The re-opening of Primary schools will begin with children in the Nursery, Reception classes, Year 1 and Year 6. The three year groups within mainstream primary have been prioritised by Government because they are key transition years – children in Reception and Year 1 are at the very beginning of their school career and are mastering the essential basics, including counting and the fundamentals of reading and writing, and learning to socialise with their peers.

Pupils are likely to be asked to return to school on a part-time basis and continue with home learning activities.

How will schools be kept safe?

The Department for Education (DfE) has set out guidance which shows classes will be divided into groups of no more than 15 pupils - and these small groups will not mix with other pupils during the school day. Schools may have smaller groups depending on the size of classrooms and/or available staffing.

Will pupils have to stay 2m apart?

The DfE guidance says pupils should be kept two metres apart if possible - but it accepts that young children cannot always be expected to keep that distance apart, from each other or staff.

There will also be staggered break and lunch times, and different times for starting and finishing the school day.

What other safety precautions will children and staff take?

Children will be encouraged to wash their hands often and the cleaning of rooms will be more frequent.

The wearing of masks, however, is not recommended, for either pupils or teachers.

Schools will make sure that all staff and children are aware of the extra measures in place to ensure safety.

How else will risk of infection be reduced?

Thorough cleaning will take place each day with key areas being cleaned more frequently. Children will be encouraged to sit at the same desk each day and will be given their own resources such as pencils to use.

Shared areas such as toilets will be cleaned more frequently.

What happens if a child is unwell?

Staff and children or young people should not attend school if they have symptoms or are self-isolating due to symptoms in their household.

The most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are the recent onset of a new continuous cough and/or high temperature.

If a child or member of staff has these symptoms, they must stay at home for 7 days, and all other members of the same household must stay at home and not leave the house for 14 days (The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill).

What is the advice for families who have a parent who is shielding?

Children, young people and staff who have been classed as clinically extremely vulnerable due to pre-existing medical conditions have been advised to shield. If the child or member of the household is shielding, the child should continue to be supported to learn or work at home as much as possible.

Children, young people or staff who live with someone who is clinically vulnerable (but not clinically extremely vulnerable), including those who are pregnant, can attend their education or childcare setting.

Will there be a transition phase for children in middle school/three tier establishments?

From the week commencing 1st June 2020 at the earliest, primary schools are planning to welcome back pupils to Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 (including in some middle schools).

Transition activities in Year 4 will be provided by schools but this may be through virtual tours or online meetings. Each school will approach transition differently.

What's happening about pupils returning to secondary/high school?

Secondary/high schools will welcome back Year 10 and Year 12 pupils from 15th June onwards for short face-to face sessions. Further education colleges are likely to stay closed until September. Schools and colleges are, therefore, planning to begin some face-to-face contact with Year 10 and 12 pupils who have key exams next year. This will not be full time and each school will decide what is appropriate for their circumstances. Online learning will continue.

Will online resources continue to be available for homeschooling if parents choose to keep their children at home?

Yes, in most cases resources will continue to be available for homeschooling. Individual schools will work with children to decide what is most appropriate.

Is it compulsory for children to attend school if they're in Nursery, Reception or Year 1?

Parents are encouraged to send their children to school but are not compelled to do so.

Will parents be fined if they don't send their children to school?

Parents who decide to keep their children at home during the pandemic will not face fines for non-attendance.

Will schools be open during the summer holiday to gain back the time children have missed in school?

There has been no guidance from the Government on this yet.

Will school transport be provided?

School transport will be provided, but this is dependent on the number of pupils who wish to travel, the availability of drivers, and the start times schools may operate.

Parents should contact their child's school to discuss arrangements.

How long will the school day be? And will there be before and after school clubs?

Each school will make decisions based on their individual circumstances.

My child receives free school meals. Will meals be available at school once they reopen?

Pupils will continue to receive free school meals if they are eligible. Schools may continue to provide free school meal vouchers and/or food parcels for those pupils in Reception, Year 1, Year 2 and Year 6 that are not attending through parental choice. Each school will make its own arrangements.

Is my child at an increased risk of contracting COVID-19 by attending school?

The Government states, 'There is high scientific confidence that children of all ages have less severe symptoms than adults if they contract coronavirus and there is moderately high scientific confidence that younger children are less likely to become unwell if infected with coronavirus. Limiting the numbers of children going back to school and college initially then gradually increasing numbers, guided by scientific advice, reduces risk of increasing the rate of transmission.'

The reopening of schools is part of the Government's plan to ease the lockdown, based on progress towards the 5 steps laid down several weeks ago.

Useful links:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>