



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Information provided in responses to the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) is correct at the time of publication and is provided in good faith and in general terms. Whilst we have aimed to provide as much information as possible, they cannot address every situation that our children and families face in relation to COVID-19 and, if the responses do not sufficiently address your circumstances, please contact your school office in the first instance.

The questions have been collated from several sources and include a number gathered from consultation with Parent Councils with assistance from the Western Isles branch of the National Parent Forum of Scotland. Where multiple questions have been received on the same theme, they have been combined.

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1. **What is the latest advice in relation to children with illnesses attending school?**

If your child is displaying any of the symptoms of COVID-19 and they have not had a PCR test, please isolate immediately and seek a test via the NHS Western Isles COVID-19 Helpline on 01851 601151.

The key message remains that children and young people who are sick should not be in school.

We appreciate that the understanding of 'sick' is a matter of judgement and it can be very difficult when children are suffering from extended cold-like symptoms for some time.

Children and young people should not attend school or nursery if any of the following apply.

- They have recent onset of any of the symptoms of COVID-19. Recent onset would be considered to be within the last 5 days.
 - a new cough;
 - a fever (including high temperature or chills/shivers);
 - loss of sense of taste and smell;
 - sore throat;
 - unexplained headache;
- They have had a negative PCR result but have any of the above symptoms, which developed within the last 5-7 days. In this case, children should remain absent for a further 48hrs or until symptoms have reduced. In these circumstances, there can be a risk that the first PCR test was administered before the virus was detectable.



- They are showing recent symptoms that could relate to any seasonal infectious illness. Infectious periods for illnesses can vary but are usually 5-7 days. If in doubt, please seek advice.
- They are sufficiently ill as to require the use of pain relief medication such as paracetamol or ibuprofen.

Children and young people can attend when:

- They are not displaying any of the primary symptoms of COVID-19.
- Any symptoms of illness they do have are not recent and have been present without getting worse for at least 7 days. This includes persistent coughs, runny noses etc. It is important that symptoms are stable and not worsening.
- They are believed to be clear of any infectious period of their illness.
- The symptoms do not stop them from participating fully in their education.

We strongly encourage the use of Lateral Flow Device (LFD) testing on a routine basis, at least twice a week. Secondary-age pupils can access test kits by registering at their school office. If parents/carers feel it is appropriate, LFD tests can be very effectively used for primary-age children too. Test kits can be ordered online here: <https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests> or are available at your local pharmacy.

2. What are the reasons for the current Comhairle advice about school attendance?

The current advice about illness and school or nursery attendance is mainly to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 but is also to reduce transmission of other infectious illnesses that have similar symptoms to COVID-19. The spread of these other illnesses can cause families to have to isolate and places additional demand on testing services for illnesses that are not COVID-19.

With high numbers of confirmed cases across the islands, it is important that children with recent illness, as described in Q1, do not attend school.

3. Why is it advised that children who have received a negative PCR result should be free of symptoms for 48hrs before returning to school?

Where a child or young person with recent symptoms has received a negative PCR result, they should not attend school as there is a risk that they were too early in the incubation period of COVID-19 for the test to detect the virus. It is advised that a longer period of absence is taken to allow time to track symptoms.

This advice does not apply to those who are free from symptoms or where symptoms have been stable and long-standing.



4. **What should you do if your child continues to recover from routine cold symptoms that can linger for weeks?**

The focus of advice relates to recent development of illness. If your child has stable symptoms that are not worsening, then they can return to school or nursery. If you are in doubt, please talk to your headteacher. Parents/carers should be confident that children returning are free from any infectious period.

5. **How long will these measures be in place?**

The measures will be in place for as long as schools and nurseries are linked to positive cases of COVID-19. The Comhairle is working daily with the NHS Health Protection Team and meet regularly to review the latest guidance for education. When changes are made, parents/carers will be informed.

6. **Who should decide when a child is well enough to return to school?**

Parents/carers are in the best position to assess the wellbeing of their child but, when symptoms continue to be present, it is important to discuss these with school staff before return so that there is a clear agreement about the nature of the presentation of symptoms.

If your child is displaying any of the symptoms of COVID-19 and they have not had a PCR test, please isolate immediately and seek a test via the NHS Western Isles COVID-19 Helpline on 01851 601151.

7. **Can it not be considered to let this run its course naturally to allow people to build up immunity?**

Whilst children tend to have a low level of illness when infected by COVID-19, they do risk spreading the virus to other family members and members of the community that are much more vulnerable to serious illness.

Allowing an unchecked higher spread of virus also risks more significant and widespread disruption to important services in our community.

In addition, COVID-19 is designated as a notifiable disease under the Public Health (Scotland) Act 2008, this means that public health actions are required in law to reduce harms caused by the illness.

8. **Would it not be better to close schools for a period of time when case numbers are high to prevent spread of COVID-19 and make sure of equal access to online learning?**

The closure of schools can help to reduce the spread of the virus but doing so causes significant disruption to the learning and support available to children that can attend, who continue to be the vast majority. Closures also cause other disruption to our communities, such as affecting the ability of parents/carers to attend work.

The Comhairle is committed to maintaining school services wherever possible but will also act on the latest public health or Scottish Government advice about operating schools safely.



9. **Could an area approach be used where schools are closed in areas where cases are higher and others remain open and operating normally?**

The Comhairle aims to keep all schools operating where it is assessed as being safe to do so for the reasons listed in Q8.

It is also important to consider that 19 of our 22 schools have been linked to confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the last four weeks, indicating that it is affecting communities across all areas of the Western Isles. In that context, we are of the view that it is important to keep the advice the same for the whole authority area at this time. If circumstances change in the future, an area approach may be considered.

10. **Is it possible to determine how much is community transmission and how much is directly relating to schools?**

Where there is reliable information about the sources of infection, it can be possible to determine how much transmission is related to community or schools. We know that, so far, the vast majority of cases in schools relate to household, family or community contacts.

11. **Will there be access to online learning for children having to isolate or stay at home due to illness?**

Yes, schools will work to provide access to remote or online learning where children are required to stay at home due to illness or isolation requirements. The type and availability of remote or online learning will be different to what was offered during the lockdowns as schools are also continuing to work with children that are attending and there are significant staffing shortages in some areas where staff are ill or required to isolate.

Home learning will not be provided where an absence relates to a parental choice to keep a well child at home as a precaution and no instruction has been given to isolate.

12. **Are there any options or considerations to have a constant livestream from classrooms for children who cannot attend?**

The provision of constant livestreams from classrooms is not possible at this time.

13. **What steps are taken to make sure children having to isolate or stay at home due to illness do not fall behind in their learning?**

Teachers keep records of learning covered in school each week and which children are in attendance to complete that work. Information is also kept about remote learning issued to children at home. When children return to school, teachers will work with them to check what learning has been missed, assess any gaps and support them to complete any missed learning.

14. **How will absences be classified for children not attending due to Covid-19 related illness?**

A national system is place for all schools in Scotland that uses different absence codes depending on the reason for absence. Where a child is required to isolate at home but is undertaking learning, a code can be used that counts this as an attendance. Where learning cannot be undertaken for COVID-19 related absences a code is used that records this as an



authorised absence.

Where well children are kept at home as a precaution, this is recorded as an unauthorised absence.

15. Is the Comhairle reporting to SQA about absence rates from secondary schools?

Schools complete daily registers that include detailed reasons for absence. Data from these registers is gathered every day by Scottish Government for tracking of COVID-19 absences. There is no separate requirement to report absences to SQA.

16. Are fees reinstated or not charged when a child is not able to attend Sgoil Àraich/Nursery?

Where a child is required by the NHS to isolate at home but has no symptoms of illness, it may be possible to request refund of fees. This will depend on individual circumstances and must be discussed with nursery staff in your setting. It is not possible to reimburse fees when a child is absent due to illness.

17. With requirements for increased ventilation at this time, there are increased risks of children catching colds. What steps are being taken to reduce this risk and keep classrooms warm?

Maintaining the highest possible levels of ventilation is an important element of risk assessments for all schools. The vast majority of colds and illnesses in schools relate to the spread of viral infections and do not relate to room temperatures but the maintenance of fresh air is known to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.

Schools are required to keep room temperatures at a safe level for children and staff to use and, if a room becomes too cold, steps should be taken to adjust ventilation or heating. Schools have been encouraging children to wear additional layers of clothing during the winter to reduce the effect of colder temperatures but they will not be expected to sit in rooms with temperatures below minimum requirements.

Schools have access to CO² monitors that measure air quality and can be used to assess the level of ventilation needed in a room, allowing for them to make adjustments to balance ventilation and temperature during the day.

18. What steps are education taking to ensure the wellbeing of parents and children?

Education staff are working every day to ensure that the wellbeing of our children is their main priority and the safe operation of schools is essential to that. Every school has a risk assessment in place that records the steps being taken to keep the school as safe as possible and school staff take into account the wider wellbeing needs of pupils as a matter of course.

If a parent/carer has a personal wellbeing concern, schools may be able to provide individual advice and your school's headteacher can be the first point of contact if you are looking for wellbeing advice.



19. **With high numbers of cases, is there any option to provide accelerated or rapid PCR testing for children to minimise absence from school?**

Access to PCR testing is a matter determined by NHS Western Isles and there is a maximum capacity for the number of tests that can be administered in a day. This has to be carefully managed to ensure appropriate access to testing for the whole community. NHS try to make sure test results are returned as soon as possible but this will vary depending on how busy the service is on any given day. It is not possible to provide a higher level of priority to school pupils than to other members of the community.

20. **Is the Comhairle providing any financial support or allowances, such as furlough, for parents who cannot attend work when staying at home to look after children who can't go to school?**

The Comhairle currently does not have access to direct funds to support parents who need to take time off work to look after ill children but we are able to provide advice or signpost to other services in the community that may be able to offer help. Please discuss any concerns with your headteacher in the first instance.

21. **What events or activities will be permitted in schools in the build up to Christmas?**

Schools will not be permitted to hold any Christmas concerts, events, parties, dances or other activities that involve the gathering of people beyond the pupil groups already in the school. There will continue to be a high level of restrictions in place in school risk assessments throughout December.

Schools will be using different creative ways to mark the Christmas season in the same way as they did in 2020 and will do so in ways that can be shared with parents/carers. Your school will be able to provide more information about what activities they are planning.