

# Public health guidance to support exams from January 2021

The following guidance is provided by the **Department for Education**. It has been reproduced below as presented on the DfE website.

The guidance was last updated on 9 February 2021. Please refer to the DfE website to check for further updates that may become available prior to the March 2021 examinations: [Public health guidance to support exams from January 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/public-health-guidance-to-support-exams-from-january-2021)

**IFE Note:** *Although the guidance that follows refers to schools and colleges, the guidance applies to, and can be used in the context of, all examination venues. It is designed for use by Examination Centre Managers.*

*The guidance has been provided specifically for exam centres in the UK. However, centres offering examinations outside of the UK are also requested to read the guidance as they may find it of assistance in planning and managing examinations in the safest possible way.*

*Please also note the final section about deferral arrangements which relates specifically to the IFE's March 2021 examinations.*

## Preparing for and running exams

### Engagement with NHS Test and Trace

You must make sure that you understand the NHS Test and Trace process and that you've read the guidance on [how schools should respond to any infections](#).

Your exam centre will need to collect and keep contact information for candidates and invigilators so that you can share it with NHS Test and Trace if needed. This is particularly important for any external visitors, including any non-school staff assisting with exams, and candidates not on roll at the exam centre. Every exam will have a seating plan, so you can add the names of the invigilators and cross reference them to the contact details you hold for candidates and invigilators.

Students taking exams from January 2021 should be encouraged to undertake a coronavirus (COVID-19) test prior to sitting their exam or assessment if available in their setting. However, as testing is not mandatory and is not available in all settings yet they should not be refused access to their exam if they have not already been tested. Students and staff are being prioritised for testing in schools and colleges. The rapid [asymptomatic coronavirus \(COVID-19\) testing programme](#) will continue to be used to support testing in settings over the coming weeks.

Anyone who displays symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) (fever, new and continuous cough, alteration or loss of taste or similar) should not attend the exam centre. They should stay at home and order a test through the routine NHS testing programme. They should do

so immediately and self-isolate. They should not wait to take one at the exam centre. Tests can be booked online through the NHS website or ordered by telephone via NHS 119 for those without access to the internet. Essential workers, which includes anyone involved in education or childcare, have priority access to testing.

### **Arrival and departure of candidates**

Candidates should read the [safer travel guidance](#) before planning their journey to their exam, especially where the exam is being held in a location to which the candidate does not normally travel.

As candidates arrive before the scheduled start time of exams, you will need to keep them separate from other students arriving at the exam centre.

You should identify a location where candidates will wait before the exam that can support social distancing between group 'bubbles' as well as between on-roll and off-roll candidates. You should also make sure that any candidates who arrive late for the exam follow social distancing measures.

You will need to make sure that there is a plan to manage safely candidates leaving the exam room and site, particularly as exams may finish at different times. As part of this, you will need to take into account any candidates who need extra time in exams.

These considerations apply wherever the exams are taking place - whether in a school, college, private exam centre or another venue booked specifically for the purpose of taking exams. Where alternative locations are used to run exams, you will still need to manage safely the arrival and departure of candidates to make sure they maintain social distancing as they wait for exams, including from other members of the public who may be present in entry lobbies.

### **Cleaning**

Exam rooms or other spaces used for external assessments (such as workshops or IT suites) should be kept clean. Frequently touched surfaces (for example, door handles, individual desks, any shared equipment) should be cleaned after every exam with the usual cleaning products, including the backs of chairs where candidates may pull chairs out to sit.

Equipment used for practical assessments must be cleaned after every usage with the appropriate cleaning products.

Rooms do not need to be left empty between exams, provided they are cleaned properly each time.

The [guidance for cleaning non-healthcare settings](#) sets out advice on general cleaning and on cleaning settings when there has been a suspected case of coronavirus (COVID-19).

### **Set up of the exam room**

Because of the practical nature of some assessments, not all external assessments will use an exam room. Where an exam room is used, desks should not be set up face to face. All candidates should be seated 2 metres apart from each other. These candidates can be seated in the same room.

Each setting will differ in its layout and build. There is, therefore, no specific overall limit that can be provided in this guidance on the number of candidates who can sit in a room, but desks must be correctly spaced and there should be adequate ventilation. The upper limit to

the number of candidates who can take an exam in a room together will depend broadly on the desk spacing requirements.

The importance of adequate ventilation should be carefully considered when selecting the room for exams. Good ventilation is important and you should maximise this wherever possible, for example, opening windows and propping open doors (not fire doors) where safe to do so (bearing in mind safeguarding in particular). For more advice, read the Health and Safety Executive guidance on [air conditioning and ventilation during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#).

Invigilators may walk up and down aisles between desks, but there must also be points in the room where an invigilator can stand at least 2 metres from the nearest desks and see all the candidates in the room.

### **Face coverings**

Candidates and invigilators do not need to wear face coverings during exams where social distancing can be maintained, but they may wear them if they wish to. Where social distancing cannot be maintained, for example, in some practical assessment situations, candidates and invigilators should wear face coverings.

Under national lockdown restrictions, candidates and invigilators should wear face coverings in communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained, or if the exam centre has chosen to require the use of face coverings in communal areas.

For more information, read the guidance on [face coverings in education](#).

Everyone who uses public transport to travel to exams should follow the requirements for wearing face coverings.

### **Invigilators**

Your school or college will have protocols in place for visitors and temporary staff. Invigilators can move between different schools and colleges. They should minimise contact and maintain as much distance as possible from other staff. Further guidance about supply and peripatetic staff is in the school workforce section of the [actions for schools during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#).

Before the exams, you will need to tell invigilators what they need to do to minimise contact and maintain as much distance as possible from other staff.

Invigilators do not need to wear gloves when collecting exam scripts from candidates but should wash their hands thoroughly and more frequently than usual and particularly after handling exam papers.

### **Maintaining distance between staff and candidates**

You should advise invigilators and other staff to stand alongside candidates when interacting with them, rather than face to face.

For all encounters, such as when scribes, readers or other individuals are supporting candidates, staff should maintain a 2 metre distance where possible, for example using a separate room from other candidates. If staff cannot maintain a 2 metre distance, they should wear a face covering, avoid close face to face contact and minimise time spent within 1 metre of others. These arrangements may not be possible when working with some

candidates who have complex needs, in which case these candidates' educational support should be provided as normal during exams.

If candidates need to leave the exam room and need to be accompanied, staff should maintain a 2 metre distance where possible. If this is not possible, staff should take mitigating measures, such as standing alongside the candidate and use a face covering.

### **Candidate health**

The [guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infections](#) applies throughout.

### **School and college action**

Schools and colleges must take swift action when they become aware that an exam candidate has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19). They must follow the guidance outlined in [actions for schools during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#). The guidance explains that schools and colleges can contact the dedicated advice service introduced by Public Health England (PHE) and delivered by the NHS Business Services Authority. This can be reached 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.

### **Candidates with symptoms or who have tested positive**

Candidates must not attend the exam centre if they have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms or have tested positive in the last 10 days. The most important symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are the recent onset of either a:

- new continuous cough
- high temperature
- loss of, or change in, their normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)

Candidates should stay at home and [arrange to have a test](#) to see if they have coronavirus (COVID-19).

Candidates will be unable to attend exams during their period of isolation. With or without a positive test, a candidate with coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms must isolate immediately and continue to do so for 10 full days counting from the day after the individual tested positive or first had symptoms.

### **Where candidates are isolating in line with public health advice**

Where a member of the candidate's household or someone they have been in close contact with has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19), the candidate must isolate immediately for 10 full days counting from the day after the individual tested positive. They cannot attend exams during that period. Candidates who are defined as close contacts but are taking part in a formal serial testing programme should follow the guidance given within the programme to determine if they can attend exams.

This also applies if the candidate is asked to isolate following contact with someone with the virus. Candidates cannot attend exams during their period of isolation.

Schools and colleges should contact the awarding organisation on the candidate's behalf to determine the next available assessment opportunity.

Candidates in quarantine following certain foreign travel must not attend exams during their period of quarantine. See guidance on [travel corridors](#) for an up-to-date list of countries where quarantine is not required in England.

### **Where a candidate has a negative test**

Candidates should follow guidance about their [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) test result](#) when they receive a negative test.

A candidate must self-isolate and not attend exams if their household has a confirmed case. Those candidates who are part of a formal serial testing programme and test negative should follow the guidance given within the programme to determine if they can attend exams.

### **Candidates who are clinically extremely vulnerable from coronavirus (COVID-19)**

Candidates who are clinically extremely vulnerable should refer to the specific guidance for the [clinically extremely vulnerable](#).

### **Reasonable adjustments**

Schools and colleges must, under their Equality Act obligations, continue to make reasonable adjustments for candidates with special educational needs and disabilities.

Each VTQ awarding organisation will have their own policy on reasonable adjustments, which we expect schools and colleges to be familiar with.

The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) will need to ensure that the access arrangement is still appropriate, practicable and reasonable.

In the event of a candidate's circumstances changing, the SENCo may (where required) need to produce evidence and process an online application.

### ***Additional IFE Note on Deferral Arrangements for March 2021 Examinations***

*The IFE will provide deferral arrangements for all candidates who are unable to attend their examinations due to Covid-19 ie candidates who are unwell themselves or self-isolating due to having been in contact with someone who has (or is awaiting the outcome of testing for) the virus on the day of their examination.*

*Centre Managers are requested to compile a list of candidates who fall into this category at their centre and to confirm the particular situation for each candidate and to submit this to the IFE. The candidates will not need to request a deferral arrangement themselves as long as details of the situation are provided (and can be verified by) the centre.*

*Where candidates and/or their situation are not known or can't be confirmed by the centre, candidates will need to contact the IFE to apply for deferral arrangements themselves.*

*All information should be emailed to [vicki.ball@ife.org.uk](mailto:vicki.ball@ife.org.uk)*

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