

Education attendance restrictions to remain in place

The Prime Minister has confirmed today that schools and colleges will not return to full face-to-face education after the February half-term and that the current attendance restrictions will remain in place until 8 March at the earliest.

Children of critical workers and vulnerable children and young people will still be able to attend schools and colleges, including special schools and alternative provision. Early years settings also remain open. All other pupils will continue to receive high quality remote education at home.

The Prime Minister made clear that while schools and colleges remain safe, keeping them partially closed will continue to help minimise the spread of the virus in communities and protect public health and save lives.

It is hoped that if the target of vaccinating everyone in the top four prioritisation cohorts by 15 February is met, then those groups will have developed immunity three weeks later, by 8 March. The government will therefore look at fully re-opening schools from this date.

He also committed to providing a programme of catch up into the next financial year, involving a further £300m of new money to early years, schools and colleges for tutoring, as well as working in collaboration with the education sector to develop specific initiatives for summer schools and a Covid premium to support catch up.

In recognition that extended school and college attendance restrictions will have a huge impact on children's learning, the government will work with parents, teachers and schools to develop a long-term plan to make sure pupils have the chance to make up their learning over the course of this parliament.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The pandemic has had a truly terrible impact on the lives of so many people and while covid rates are falling, it remains of the utmost importance to minimise the spread of the virus in our communities and take action to respond quickly to the new variant.

It is this country's priority to get all children and young people back into face-to-face education and apprenticeship training, but it is crucial we do this at the right time and I want to assure parents, teachers, children and young people that schools, colleges and universities will be the first to fully return as soon as the public health picture allows it.

I know that this virus will have had a significant impact on children and young people's learning and that is why we are

providing an additional £300m for tutoring programmes and developing a longer term plan to help all pupils catch up.

We will continue to engage with schools, colleges, universities and the wider sector on the pathway to full returns.

Last year the government announced a £1 billion catch-up programme, including a 'Catch-up Premium' of £650m to help address lost teaching time and support pupils' social and emotional needs; and a £350m National Tutoring Programme that will provide additional, targeted tuition support for disadvantaged pupils who need the most help to catch-up. The announcements made by the Prime Minister today are additional to this existing investment.

To support children and young people to learn at home, the government is providing extensive support to help teachers and pupils access quality remote learning, delivering 1.3 million laptops and tablets for those children and young people who need them most, with over more than 875,000 of these issued already, alongside access to free mobile data for disadvantaged families.

Education attendance restrictions are to be reviewed again in mid- February and the government has committed to publishing a plan for leaving lockdown by the end of February.

In universities, currently only those on critical courses such as medical, clinical and healthcare subjects should be receiving face-to-face teaching and all remaining students should continue their studies remotely until 8 March at the earliest. Students and staff on campus should take part in twice weekly testing on offer to help limit transmission and identify asymptomatic cases.

Further education providers will similarly be able to provide some on site teaching to a small number of critical worker students and apprentices who have upcoming assessments.

The rapid testing programme for secondary schools and colleges will continue for those on site. All secondary schools and colleges will be expected to test their students as they return to school/college – two lateral flow tests, three to five days apart – to help identify and isolate asymptomatic students before they circulate in the school/college community. Staff in primary and secondary schools, and in all colleges, now have access to two tests per week.

The government will also continue to provide support for pupils eligible for Free School Meals through vouchers or lunch parcels to those learning at home during term time next half term, and support during the half term holiday for vulnerable families through the Covid Winter Grant Scheme.

Attendance in early years provision should continue to remain available throughout and should continue to allow all children to attend full time or their usual timetable hours. This includes early years registered nurseries and childminders, maintained nursery schools, as well as nursery classes in schools and other pre-reception provision on school sites.

Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 27 January 2021

When we look at the toll of this pandemic

it must be measured

not only in the tragic loss of life that we have endured with over 100,000 deaths

and once again I offer my condolences to the families and friends of everybody who has lost loved ones –

but I'm afraid we must also remember not just the damage to the economy, but the lost weeks and months of education

and the real risk of damage to the prospects of our young people.

And so I share very much the frustration of pupils and teachers who today want nothing more than to get back to the classroom.

And I understand the stress and the anxieties of parents coping heroically with the pressures of homeschooling.

And I know that everybody across the country wants us to get schools open as fast as possible

And I can assure you that is the ambition of this Government.

But I also know, we all know, that with 37,000 people in hospital suffering from covid

and the infection rates still forbiddingly high

you, we all, must be cautious and we all want only to open schools when we can be sure that this will not cause another huge surge in the disease.

Because the problem is not that schools are unsafe

teachers and headteachers have worked heroically to make sure that they are safe, that they are covid secure

The problem is that by definition, schools bring many households together

And that contributes to the spread of the virus within the community,

and drives up the R.

And so it follows that if we are to get schools open – and keep them open – which is what we all want

then we need to be clear about certain things.

We need to be sure the vaccine roll-out is continuing to be successful as it is

and most important, we need to see the impact of our vaccines on those graphs of mortality, we need to see that they really are saving lives and preventing people from becoming seriously ill.

Now we are confident that will happen and vaccines will have that effect

but to be responsible we must see the proof.

And our current estimates say that the proof will only become visible in the middle of February.

And since we need to give schools two weeks' notice to re-open

it is sensible now to serve notice that we will not be able to re-open schools immediately after half-term on 22nd February.

But if we continue to make the progress that we want to see, and that we believe we can see,

Then we hope to begin opening schools on Monday 8th March.

And to help parents and teachers with this extended period of remote learning

We will extend the arrangements for providing free school meals for those eligible children not in school

including food parcels and the national voucher scheme –

until those pupils have returned to the classroom.

And as we did this financial year, we will provide a catch-up programme over the next financial year,

with a further £300 million of new money to schools for tutoring,

and we will work with the education sector to develop, wherever appropriate, specific initiatives for summer schools

as well as a Covid Premium for catch-up and to support pupils to catch up

We will work with parents, teachers and schools to develop a long-term plan

to make sure all pupils have the chance to make up their learning over the

course of this Parliament, so we tackle that issue of differential learning and kids who may have fallen behind through no fault of their own

And so with every jab that goes in we are becoming more confident

that we will reach our target of offering a first dose to everyone in the top four priority groups by the middle of February.

And at that moment we will be able to review our progress,

judge the state of the pandemic, and the effectiveness of the vaccine,

and then in the week beginning 22nd February we will set out our plan not just for re-opening our schools

but gradually to re-open our economy and our society and to get our lives back to as close to normal as possible.

Now this will be a timetable that is inevitably going to be subject to adjustment

But I believe it will provide clarity and certainty about the way ahead, a roadmap that we can take together and use as a country to defeat the virus and begin steadily to reclaim our lives.

[Readout – Foreign Secretary call with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken](#)

News story

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab has spoken with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken



A spokesperson from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office said:

In their first phone call, the Foreign Secretary congratulated Secretary Blinken on his confirmation to the role. They discussed the opportunities to work together on a shared agenda, to reinforce democratic values across the world and to strengthen the two countries' global alliance. They spoke about the UK's presidencies of the G7 and COP26, the need to tackle Iranian destabilising behaviour and cooperation to hold China to its international commitments.

The Foreign Secretary welcomed President Biden's commitment to tackling climate change, including by re-joining the Paris Agreement, as well as the US re-engaging with the World Health Organization.

They agreed to speak again soon and continue the ongoing conversation.

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[GCA Webinar – 4 February 2021](#)

On 4 February 2021, Mark White, the Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA) delivered his first webinar talking about:

- The role of the Adjudicator
- His first impressions and market observations
- His outlook for the role, work to date and priorities
- Working with suppliers and trade associations
- Introduction of the [‘Tell the GCA’](#) reporting platform

You can watch a recording of the [GCA Webinar](#) on YouTube.

Tougher border controls to protect public health

News story

Further action to minimise travel across international borders.



Photo: Getty Images

The government has announced further action for outbound and inbound passengers to minimise travel across international borders and reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission.

While the focus is on protecting the UK's world-leading vaccination programme, this action will reduce the risk of a new variant of the virus being transmitted from someone coming into the UK.

The measures announced today include:

For those wishing to travel out of the UK

- Declaring reason for travel: anyone who does not have a valid reason for travel will be directed to return home and may face a fine. The reason for travel will be checked.
- Increased police enforcement: there will be an increased police presence at ports and airports, fining those in breach of the stay at home regulations. Anyone without valid reason for travel will be directed to return home and may face a fine.
- Reviewing travel exemptions: the list of travel exemptions will be urgently reviewed so that only the most important and exceptional reasons are included.

For those seeking to enter the UK

- Managed isolation in hotels: this will be for those arriving from countries where we have imposed international travel bans and who cannot be refused entry. They will be required to isolate for ten days without

exception and more details will be provided in due course.

- Police checks: police are carrying out more physical checks at addresses to make sure people are self-isolating.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

There are still too many people coming in and out of our country each day. The rules are clear – people should be staying at home unless they have a valid reason to leave. Going on holiday is not a valid reason.

As we have done throughout this global health emergency, we will continue to take all steps necessary to protect the public and help prevent the spread of the virus.

These new measures are on top of the restrictions already in place, all of which help reduce the risk of importing a new variant.

- Refusing entry: we will continue to refuse entry to non-UK residents from red list countries which are already subject to a UK travel ban.
- Entering the UK: passengers arriving in the UK need to provide evidence of a negative pre-departure Covid test. There is also the requirement for people arriving from abroad to self-isolate on arrival, and the requirement to complete a passenger locator form, with fines for those who fail to comply.
- Detecting new variants: we will help other countries to access to the UK's world-leading gene sequencing capabilities to help with early identification of any new and dangerous variants of the virus.

All measures will be kept under review and further action will be taken to protect the public if needed.

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