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- Department for Education (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>)
- Department of Health & Social Care (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health-and-social-care>)

Guidance

Use of the NHS COVID-19 app in schools and further education colleges

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Introduction

This guidance is for leaders and staff in schools and further education (FE) colleges in England¹.

The NHS COVID-19 app (<https://covid19.nhs.uk/pdf/introducing-the-app.pdf>) ('the app') is a key part of the country's ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) response, aiming to extend the speed, precision and reach of NHS Test and Trace (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works>) in England, as well as NHS Test, Trace and Protect in Wales. The app will complement the overall service by automating some aspects of the process of contact tracing. Working together, NHS Test and Trace and the app are designed to slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) by alerting people who may have been exposed to infection so that they can take action.

The app is available to download for anyone aged 16 and over if they choose to do so. For some young people, particularly those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), parents will need to decide whether or not their use of the app is appropriate. This aligns with wider NHS services which are generally offered to those aged 16 and over as routine. This will mean that some students in year 11, and the majority of students in years 12, 13 and in FE colleges will be eligible to use the app and benefit from its features. Staff members will also be able to use the app. This document is intended to provide information to senior leaders in education about the app and how it works, and to set out guidance for its use within schools and FE colleges in England.

This guidance should be read alongside:

- Guidance for full opening: schools (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>)
- Guidance for full opening: special schools and other specialist settings (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-full-opening-special-schools-and-other-specialist-settings/guidance-for-full-opening-special-schools-and-other-specialist-settings>)
- Actions for FE colleges and providers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision>)
- Providing apprenticeships during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-apprenticeship-programme-response>)
- Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>)

Required action: leaders and staff should familiarise themselves with the features of the app

The app has 6 key features that will help to reduce personal and public risk:

- Trace – alerts the individual if they were in close contact with a confirmed case
- Alert – provides the individual with the risk level associated with coronavirus (COVID-19) in their local area, based on the postcode district they enter
- Check in – allows the individual to check in to locations via the app and official NHS QR codes
- Symptoms – allows the individual to check symptoms against government guidance and to get advice
- Test – allows the individual to order a free test and to receive results and advice via the app

- Isolate – provides an isolation ‘companion’, which counts down how many days they have left to isolate and provides links to useful advice

Bluetooth needs to be enabled on the phone as the app uses Bluetooth low energy to anonymously assess the distance, over time, between people who have downloaded it.

If an individual with the app tests positive for coronavirus (COVID-19), the app will ask them to allow those that they have been in contact with to be alerted. If so, the app will then alert relevant individuals if they have been in close contact with a positive case. ‘Close contact’ is based on an algorithm, but generally means you’ve been within 2 metres of someone for 15 minutes or more. Individuals are not informed who the positive case is.

It is possible to pause the contact tracing function (‘trace’) in the app. If paused, the phone and Bluetooth remain on but the phone does not record contacts. Pausing contact tracing is only recommended in 3 situations:

- when an individual is not able to have their phone with them, for example because it is stored in a locker or communal area – this is to avoid the app picking up contacts when the individual is not with their phone
- when an individual is working behind a perspex (or equivalent) screen, fully protected from other colleagues and members of the public, as the individual is considered to be adequately protected from contracting coronavirus (COVID-19)
- in a health or care setting where staff are wearing medical grade PPE (for example, a surgical mask) as these individuals are also considered to be adequately protected

Further information about how the app works is available on the NHS COVID-19 app support (<https://covid19.nhs.uk/>) page, alongside frequently asked questions for younger users.

Required action: leaders should understand how the app relates to their setting’s process for managing a positive case and/or an outbreak

The agreed process for ensuring a setting is aware of a positive case, as set out in the guidance for full opening for schools (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>) and further education colleges in the autumn term (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision/what-fe-colleges-and-providers-will-need-to-do-from-the-start-of-the-2020-autumn-term>), is still in place and is not changed by the introduction of the app. If a setting becomes aware that a student or member of staff has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19), they can contact the new Public Health England service, delivered by the NHS Business Services Authority, if they need support on the action they should take. It can be reached by calling the Department for Education’s existing coronavirus (COVID-19) helpline number on 0800 046 8687, and selecting option 1. The advice service is open Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm and 10am to 4pm on Saturdays and Sundays. The call will be with a dedicated team of advisors who will inform the setting of what action is needed based on the latest public health advice. They will work through a risk assessment to identify close contacts. Depending on the setting’s local arrangements, they may also want to inform their local authority of a positive case in their setting. Where more detailed local arrangements are in place with the local authority, and are working, the setting can continue to receive support through that route to take action in response to a positive case. The app complements, rather than replaces, existing processes.

Required action: leaders should understand how the app’s ‘Trace’ feature relates to their setting’s existing process

Use of the app does not replace the requirement of individuals to social distance or to report positive cases to the setting. Neither does the app change the processes of escalation if there any positive cases linked to education settings.

It is possible that whilst in their setting, students or staff could receive a notification via the app that they have been in close contact with a confirmed case and should therefore self-isolate. Close contacts are likely to have taken place at least 1-2 days previously. The app uses the minimum amount of personal data possible, which means it will not know if that contact took place in an education setting.

We recommend that settings inform all of their students, in particular those who are under 18, to inform a member of staff if they receive a notification during the day that they had been in contact with a positive case. To support this, the notification itself will advise them that if they are under the age of 18, they should show the message to a trusted adult and self-isolate. The staff member should then put in place the setting's agreed process, including making appropriate arrangements for the student to leave the setting at the earliest opportunity to begin self-isolation.

If a staff member receives this notification, they should also follow the usual process of informing an appropriate person at the setting before self-isolating. Settings will want to consider what action they would need to take if a number of staff members were informed at the same time that they had been in close contact with a positive case, to ensure continuity of education.

No further action is needed unless the student or member of staff goes on to become a confirmed case themselves.

Required action: consider how the app relates to your setting's mobile phone policies

There is no requirement for settings to change existing policies on the use of mobile phones by students due to their use of the app. Manual contact tracing through NHS Test and Trace will continue to be used when a positive case is identified in an education setting and local health protection teams will continue to support settings if an outbreak is confirmed. The app will complement this process, but is not required for it to work.

There are likely to be benefits to settings, if a number of students and staff have the app and make use of it during the day. This is because the information it provides may help to limit the number of other students and staff who are required to self-isolate when there is a positive case. Whilst we do not require settings to change their mobile phone policies, settings may want to do so if they currently do not allow mobile phones on site, require mobile phones to be switched off during the day or require phones to be left in lockers or similar. Settings choosing to allow mobile phones to be switched on and with students during the day can still require phones to be on silent and in pockets or bags that are with the student at all times, as the app will work in the background.

Where mobile phones are allowed to be on and with the student at all times

If this is the case, it is recommended that contact tracing is left on by students, to be consistent with general guidance on the use of the app. There are still likely to be times when students and staff are not near their phones, such as during physical education or in some work placements in EE. In these situations contact tracing should be switched off, and settings might want to issue reminders to pause contact tracing for these sessions and turn it back on afterwards.

Where mobile phones are required to be switched off at all times

The app will not work when the phone is switched off.

Where mobile phones are required to be left in lockers or bags in communal areas at all times

It is recommended that settings advise or require students to pause contact tracing whilst on the premises under these circumstances, to avoid the app misidentifying close contacts. When someone switches it off, the app will give the user the option to set a reminder for 4, 8 or 12 hours, after which they will receive a notification to remind them to switch contact tracing back on.

Required action: communicate with staff about use of the app

Staff will need to be aware that students may have the app on their phones and may be informed by the app, whilst at the setting, that they have been in close contact with a positive case. Staff therefore also need to be aware of what to do if a student reports receiving such a notification to them, including who to inform. If the student is a child in care, a care leaver or adopted, we would recommend informing the virtual school head, who can then ensure appropriate professionals are also alerted.

Settings should also discuss with staff their own use of the app, including pausing it if there are periods of time when they will not be near their phone, and appropriate processes to follow should they receive a notification themselves. Settings might wish to recommend that staff download and use the app, if they think this would be beneficial.

Desired action: consider communicating with students and parents about the use of the app

Not all students aged 16 and over will have mobile phones or use the app and there is no requirement for them to do so, but it is likely that many will. It is therefore advisable to ensure all students in the setting are aware of the approach the setting is taking to the app. Where the setting recommends pausing the contact tracing feature on the app some or all of the time, processes may be put in place and supporting materials, such as posters, used to help remind students to do so, and to reactivate it as soon as they retrieve their phone. NHS Test and Trace will shortly publish posters on the pause function.

It is also possible that younger students will use the app despite the lower age limit being 16. Settings should make clear to those students, and if necessary parents, that use of the app is not recommended for students younger than 16. However, should a student below the age of 16 use the app and receive a notification that they have been in contact with a positive case, the setting should follow their usual process.

We recommend that settings ask all students to inform a member of staff if they receive a notification stating they have been in close contact with a positive case, and that this should be done before leaving the premises. Students should also be informed about what the setting will do with the information provided and, as is the case whenever a positive case or contact is identified in a setting, how privacy will be managed and balanced with the need to inform people affected. Settings are advised to review their existing privacy notices to check whether this is covered.

Settings might also want to consider how the app features in their behaviour policies, for example making clear how they expect students to use the app in the setting and at what points it is appropriate for them to check their phone for notifications. It might also cover how intentional misuse of the app (such as logging symptoms they do not have in order to receive a recommendation to go home and self-isolate) or checking the app during lessons, in contravention of mobile phone policies, will be handled. Settings may want to think about whether it remains appropriate to confiscate phones as part of their behaviour procedures if a student has the app. If phones are confiscated, staff should ask students with the app to pause contact tracing before the phone is removed.

Settings may also want to consider discussing the app and some of its features, such as informing individuals of the risk in their area, in wider pastoral discussions with students about their feelings and any anxieties about coronavirus (COVID-19).

Communication with parents may be useful, so they understand how the app is used by their children or their children's peers and how the app will work alongside the setting's processes. An information pack for parents, further information about the app, and frequently asked questions are available on the NHS COVID-19 app website (<https://covid19.nhs.uk/>). It may be particularly useful to explain how the app and existing identification processes complement each other and situations where the app may identify contacts that the setting's process does not. They may also wish to understand how any information their child receives from the app and is reported to the setting will be handled. A factsheet for parents and carers will be published by NHS Test and Trace shortly.

Desired action: consider whether to use the check-in function for any activities or provision in your setting where members of the public take part or make use of premises

The app has a check-in feature (<https://covid19.nhs.uk/pdf/user-qr-guide.pdf>) which enables a venue to register for an official NHS QR code and allows users to 'check-in' to participating venues on their app by scanning that code. The information stays on the user's phone. It provides the user with a 'digital diary' of where they have been which can support contact tracing if they develop coronavirus (COVID-19) and also means that app users can receive public health advice if necessary if they might have come into contact with coronavirus (COVID-19) at a venue they have visited.

Schools and FE providers are not expected to create NHS QR code posters for their normal day to day operations. NHS QR posters will be put up by various businesses, organisations and for certain activities that are open to the public, and therefore where customers come into contact with people they do not know.

If a setting has premises on site that are within the scope of the current guidance for maintaining records of staff, customers and visitors to support NHS Test and Trace (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/maintaining-records-of-staff-customers-and-visitors-to-support-nhs-test-and-trace>) then they will be expected to have a NHS QR poster for this space, in line with the working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>). This is most likely to be relevant to FE providers. Examples of these premises include public facilities such as libraries or close contact services such as beauty therapy services.

NHS QR posters could also be considered in the following circumstances:

- if a setting hosts an event with external guests on the premises, such as a nativity or student art show – depending on the registration arrangements in place, NHS QR check-in would be for people visiting rather than students and staff in these contexts
- if the premises are let out during evenings, weekends or holidays to external providers
- if a setting thinks that use of NHS QR codes and the app is more effective than their existing process for recording external visitors, and providing those visitors' details to NHS Test and Trace in the event of a positive case at the setting

When needed, schools and colleges can create NHS QR code posters (<https://www.gov.uk/create-coronavirus-qr-poster>) online for free.

Further information

Further information about the app is available:

- [Accessibility statement \(https://covid19.nhs.uk/accessibility.html\)](https://covid19.nhs.uk/accessibility.html)
 - [Android guide for downloading NHS COVID-19 app \(https://covid19.nhs.uk/pdf/android-download-guide.pdf\)](https://covid19.nhs.uk/pdf/android-download-guide.pdf)
 - [iOS guide for downloading NHS COVID-19 app \(https://covid19.nhs.uk/pdf/iphone-download-guide.pdf\)](https://covid19.nhs.uk/pdf/iphone-download-guide.pdf)
 - [How to use QR codes to check into a venue \(https://covid19.nhs.uk/pdf/user-qr-guide.pdf\)](https://covid19.nhs.uk/pdf/user-qr-guide.pdf)
 - [Terms of use \(https://covid19.nhs.uk/our-policies.html\)](https://covid19.nhs.uk/our-policies.html)
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1. Further education colleges includes: sixth form colleges, general further education colleges, independent training providers, adult community learning providers, special post-16 institutions, designated institutions. ↩