

## Attendance Matters

All children will have days when they're not able to go to school, whether that's due to illness, holiday or a family emergency, and the occasional day off is unlikely to affect their education.

However, missing too much school can be seriously detrimental.

A child who misses school just twice per month will lose out on 18 days' education across the school year - that's nearly four weeks.

During the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years school attendance was not tracked or recorded in the usual way because of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the 2022-2023 academic year children are now expected to attend as normal. This means you could potentially be fined if your child is absent for unauthorised reasons (see *What happens if your child's absence is not authorised?* below). There are, however, circumstances in which pupils may be kept off school:

- If your child is self-isolating because they have tested positive for Covid-19.
- If your child is self-isolating because they have Covid-19 symptoms and need to take a PCR test. If they test negative and they feel well, they can stop self-isolating and return to school.
- If your child is self-isolating following trips overseas that require a period of quarantine.

The rules around [self-isolation have changed](#) and differ across the UK, but the NHS recommendation is to stay home and avoid contact with others if you have Covid-19. If your child does have to stay home for the above reasons, their absence will be marked as Covid-19 related or marked as 'illness', and their school may provide access to remote learning, as when we were in full lockdown. You must send your child to school if they are a registered pupil, except in the above circumstances or if they are otherwise unwell, otherwise you may be fined. You cannot keep your child off school because you or they are anxious about the risk of coronavirus. If you have concerns, speak to your child's school, which will hopefully reassure you about the Covid safety measures in place.

Missing a few days of school here and there may not seem a big deal, but research shows that it can have a significant impact on children's learning.

Children who miss a substantial amount of school fall behind their peers, and struggle to catch up.

Most of the work they miss is never made up, which can lead to big gaps in their learning.

Poor attendance often starts at primary school, and children who fall into this pattern are likely to underachieve at [secondary school](#). Pupils who miss between 10 and 20% of school (that's 19 to 38 days per year) stand only a 35% chance of achieving five or more good GCSEs, compared to 73% of those who miss fewer than 5% of school days.

[Friendships](#) can be affected by persistent absence, too: it can be hard for a child who misses lots of school to form relationships with their classmates. Poor attendance also reflects badly on your child's school. [Ofsted](#) expect all schools to have good attendance rates, and they are marked down in inspections if their absence figures are too high.

The Government doesn't set specific attendance targets, but schools are expected to set their own.

An attendance rate of 95% is generally considered good; this allows for children to miss 9.5 days across the school year.

Persistent absence (PA) is defined as an attendance rate of 90% or below.

The Department for Education (DfE) states that you can only allow your child to miss school if they are ill, or if you have advance permission from the headteacher.

The following types of absence may be marked as authorised:

- Leave of absence authorised by the headteacher (such as time off due to [bereavement](#)).

- **Holidays authorised by the headteacher**, who must specify how many days are approved. These should only be approved in exceptional circumstances.
- **Illness**: you must notify your child's school on the morning of their first day of absence. If your child has coronavirus, you **MUST** keep them at home from at least 10 days from the day after they developed symptoms or had a positive test.
- **Medical or dental appointments**, although you should try to arrange these outside school hours if possible.
- **Religious observance**.
- **Gypsy, Roma and Traveller absence** when the family is travelling for occupational purposes.
- **Offsite educational activities**: this could include music, dance or drama exams, or participation in a sporting event. Approval is at the school's discretion.

Certain types of absence will be marked as unauthorised. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, agreed by the headteacher, time off for holidays is always unauthorised.

Absences where the parents haven't given the school a reason are also recorded as unauthorised.

If your child is late to school and the registers have closed, they will be marked as an unauthorised absence, even if they turn up later in the day.

As a parent, it's your responsibility to make sure your child is at school, unless you're **home educating** or they have a long-term health problem. If your child doesn't go to school and you haven't phoned in your notification, you'll be contacted by the school to find out why they're absent.

If your child is persistently absent, you will be contacted by the council's **Education Welfare Officer**.

They will discuss your child's attendance with you, and help you come up with a plan to make sure they get to school.

The emphasis should be on providing support to help you improve your child's attendance.

You may be asked to sign a parenting contract: a voluntary written agreement stating that you will work with the council and/or school to improve your child's attendance.

Ultimately, if your child continues to miss school, legal action can be taken. Consequences include a parenting order compelling you to do what the court says to improve your child's attendance; a fine of £60, rising to £120 if you don't pay within 21 days; and prosecution, which could lead to a community service order, a fine of up to £2,500, or a custodial sentence of up to three months.

If your child is too ill to go to school, you must phone them in sick on the morning of the first day of absence.

If the school disputes the authenticity of their illness, they could ask you for medical evidence such as a doctor's note, an appointment card or a copy of their prescription.

Some children miss [long or recurrent periods of school](#) due to health issues. In this case, the local council is responsible for them getting a suitable education. This could include home tutoring or a hospital school or teaching service.

The NHS gives the following advice on how long children should stay off school if they're unwell.

Coronavirus (symptoms or a positive test)	Follow current Government and NHS guidance on isolation and testing. This can differ between <a href="#">Wales</a> , <a href="#">England</a> , <a href="#">Scotland</a> and <a href="#">Ireland</a> .
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Vomiting or diarrhoea	48 hours after the symptoms have stopped
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<a href="#">Chickenpox</a>	When all the spots have crusted over - usually five days after they first appeared
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Impetigo	48 hours after starting prescription medication, or when the patches have crusted over if they aren't taking medication
<u>Scarlet fever</u>	24 hours after starting antibiotics, or two weeks after the symptoms start, if they aren't taking medication
Hand, foot and mouth	As long as your child is feeling unwell - there's no need to wait until the blisters heal
Measles	At least four days after the rash develops
Scabies	24 hours after the first treatment
Shingles	When the last blister has scabbed - usually 10 to 14 days after they first appear
<u>Flu</u>	Five days

There's no need for your child to stay off school with these conditions, unless they're feeling unwell:

- Slapped cheek
- Headlice
- Coughs and colds
- Threadworms
- Ringworm
- Verrucas (although your child should cover them with a plaster for PE and swimming)