

# Statement from Minister for Education Norma Foley on sustaining the safe operation of schools during Level 5 measures

From [Department of Education and Skills](#)

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Minister for Education Norma Foley TD has this evening reaffirmed her commitment to supporting schools to sustain the safe operation of schools following the NPHET recommendation and subsequent Government decision today to move to Level 5 of the Plan for Living with COVID-19.

"A significant factor in the decision to move to Level 5 is that by doing so we can support our schools to continue to operate safely and sustainably during the pandemic.

"The decision recognises the overwhelming evidence from our public health experts, that schools are a safe environment for our school communities, children and staff members.

"Our school communities have put enormous effort and energy into reopening our schools and keeping them safe over the first half of this term. Transmission rates of COVID-19 in schools are low, much lower than the rate currently in the community. This is a result of the effectiveness of the public health guidelines for schools and the successful implementation and adherence of all in the school community to the guidelines.

"Schools have been supported in this by significant investment to support all infection prevention and control measures recommended by the public health authorities.

"The National Public Health Emergency Team has reviewed the national experience of school reopening to date, including the epidemiological data and information gathered through case and outbreak management. Having considered this evidence, NPHET has recommended that schools remain open during Level 5 restrictions, even in the current trajectory of the disease.

"Ensuring that our children can continue to attend school safely is a key objective for the government. The Department of Education and Skills has been meeting regularly with the education partners including management bodies, teachers' unions and representatives of the school communities, to provide them with up to date information and to offer an opportunity to discuss any concerns which they may have."

The Minister referred to recent evidence from public health, as follows:

- as of today, 19 October, latest data from public health shows that 10,513 students and teachers have been involved in mass testing. This has resulted in the detection of 246 additional cases. This equates to a positive detection rate of 2 per cent of additional detected cases
- in other words, where mass testing has been carried out of close contacts in the school setting of confirmed cases, this has only resulted in a small number of additional confirmed cases, not all of which are transmitted within the school setting
- this rate is remaining much lower than the comparable positive detection rate in the community, which is over 7%. Public Health has confirmed that they are casting their net wide with mass testing in schools to assess evidence of levels of transmission and that this low rate supports other evidence that schools are safe environment for staff and students
- there was no significant change in the proportion of total weekly COVID-19 cases attributable to school-aged children (4-18 years) before (August, weeks 32-35 inclusive) and after reopening of schools (14.3% and 14.1% respectively), supporting the hypothesis that children are not at increased risk from COVID-19 in the school setting

Minister Foley said:

"I want to express again my thanks to all those responsible in our school communities for working so hard to implement and keep to the guidelines. This work is paying off, and I urge everyone to remain vigilant.

"We are all aware of the importance to children of keeping schools open. We have learned through research and direct experience that closing schools has hugely adverse consequences at individual, family and societal level. For children, it impacts on wellbeing, learning, on social development, can worsen educational disadvantage and can impact on child welfare.

"While contingency measures are in place and considerable planning has happened to support remote learning in cases where that is needed, for example, classes having to restrict movements, everyone recognises that this is not ideal.

"At the end of this week, schools will close for one week. There is an opportunity for everyone to have a well-deserved break.

"When schools return on Monday 2 November, I urge everyone to continue to comply fully with the measures in place, knowing that we all have a real role to play in suppressing the virus and keeping it safe for children to attend school. Our schools are playing their part and working hard to stay safe. They need the support of us all. Stay safe: reduce your social contacts, stay distant, wash your hands."