

News in Focus

Tuesday 1 September 2020

"Our priority is to get children back to school safely"



As Storm Francis lashed the UK last week, another storm was brewing as the government took a late U-turn regarding the use of face coverings in schools in England. From the beginning of September, secondary pupils and adults in local lockdown areas of England and in areas facing extra government restrictions, will be required to wear face coverings when moving around the school, in corridors and communal areas.

In addition, any secondary school in England will have discretion to introduce the use of face coverings in communal areas, where social distancing is not possible, a move which has prompted criticism from some teachers, with the announcement last Tuesday being made just hours before schools reopened in Leicestershire.

The guidance does not include the use of face coverings in the classroom during lessons, where the government says they could *'inhibit learning.'* The guidance extends to further education colleges but not to primary schools. Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said the new policy follows updated advice from the World Health Organization, *"Our priority is to get children back to school safely. At each stage we have listened to the latest medical and scientific advice... I hope these steps will provide parents, pupils and teachers with further reassurance."*

Secondary schools in Scotland are set to start using face coverings in corridors or shared areas from 31 August. Northern Ireland has followed suit. In Wales, schools and councils need to decide if

face coverings are used, local authorities will need to conduct risk assessments, but the government is recommending those aged 11 and over wear them when social distancing cannot be maintained, including in schools and school transport.

The government issued guidance last Friday, which details contingency planning for schools in areas in England where local lockdowns are in place.

Eat Out success prompts extension

Some restaurants are keen to continue offering discounted meals in September, following the success of the Eat Out to Help Out initiative in August. The scheme ended on 31 August, but nationwide chains including Prezzo, Harvester, Toby Carvery, Bill's and Pizza Hut are amongst those due to take part, although the eateries will have to cover the costs themselves.

Support for those self-isolating on low incomes

From Tuesday (1 September), workers on low incomes living in parts of England where there are high coronavirus rates will be able to claim up to £182 if they have to self-isolate. Strict eligibility criteria mean people claiming Universal Credit or Working Tax Credit, who are unable to work from home, will qualify for the £13 per day payment. The benefit is initially being trialled in parts of North West England.

Eligible individuals who test positive and are employed or self-employed, need to isolate for 10 days and will receive £130. Eligible members of the household, who would have to self-isolate for 14

days, will be entitled to a maximum of £182. In addition, anyone who is told to self-isolate by NHS contact tracers and meets the eligibility criteria will be entitled to £13 a day for the duration of self-isolation.

Renewed optimism

US stocks hit record highs last week after Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell outlined the central bank's strategy for avoiding future crises and inflation control measures. During the week, stocks rose amid renewed optimism about US-China trade tensions, with both Chinese Vice Premier Liu He and US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin renewing their commitment to a trade deal.

Quarantine list additions

Due to a rise in infection rates, quarantine rules were implemented on Saturday morning for travellers returning to the UK from Jamaica, Switzerland and the Czech Republic. Cuba has been added to the list of countries now exempt from quarantine.

In other news

The government is preparing to launch a campaign this week aimed at encouraging employees back to their workplaces.

Lockdown restrictions in parts of Greater Manchester, Lancashire and West Yorkshire will be lifted on 2 September due to *'positive progress'*, the government has announced.

Here to help

Financial advice is key, so please do not hesitate to get in contact with any questions or concerns you may have.