

Dear Mr John,

Thank you for your request for information which was received on 27 February 2021. You asked the following:

Information held by the Department in relation to Health and Safety of School Children and the Mandating of Face Masks For all School Lessons minus P.E.

Information and literature in relation to any Risk assessment being Carried Out (Passed and Present) at Secondary Schools in relation to the Wearing of Face Masks for Children aged 11 to 16, as The Health and Safety Executive States ;

In GB, CO₂ is classed as a 'substance hazardous to health' under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH). The HSE publication 'EH40/2005 Workplace exposure limits' provides workplace exposure limits (WELs) for CO₂. WELs are limits to airborne concentrations of hazardous substances in the workplace and are set in order to help protect the health of workers. Workplace exposure is calculated by taking an average over a specified period of time. The WELs for CO₂ are:

- Long-term exposure limit (8-hr reference period) of 5000 ppm
- Short-term exposure limit (15 minute reference period) of 15000 ppm

Whilst I apply the Above Statement refers to "The Work place" and would refer to those of working age the Information would Still be Applicable, More so Given the age Bracket Concerned given that the Childs body/lungs are not fully mature, if the Department would kindly supply any information it Holds on this Matter Such as Risk Assessments , Peer to peer reviewed Study's , Benefit to Risk Ratios Etc.

I have dealt with your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the Act").

We dealt with the first part of your request in our response to you with FOI reference number 2021-0015158. Please refer to this response as the answer to this request.

In response to the risk assessment part of your request, risk assessments are for individual schools to conduct – not DfE. Schools must regularly review and update their risk assessments as the circumstances at individual schools and the public health advice changes.

I would like to signpost you to our updated [guidance](#) where we have provided information on how the system of controls should be implemented in line with a risk assessment. We have also published [guidance](#) on how schools should undertake and review risk assessments during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

Everyone needs to assess and manage the risks from coronavirus (COVID-19), including school employers and leaders, who are required by law to think about the risks the staff and pupils face and do everything reasonably practicable to minimise them, recognising that they cannot completely eliminate the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19).

As the guidance outlines, schools must comply with health and safety law and put in place proportionate control measures. To meet these obligations they must:

- review their health and safety risk assessments in light of our refreshed guidance

- make any necessary changes to their control measures applying the [system of controls](#)

Schools need to take reasonable steps to protect staff, pupils and others from coronavirus (COVID-19) within the school. They must implement sensible and proportionate control measures which follow the health and safety hierarchy of controls to reduce the risk to the lowest reasonably practicable level. When the system of controls are implemented in line with a thorough risk assessment, this creates an inherently safer environment for staff and pupils where the risk of transmission of the infection is substantially reduced.

Schools must regularly review and update their risk assessments - treating them as 'living documents' - as the circumstances at the school and the public health advice changes. Schools should have active arrangements in place to monitor that the controls are:

- effective
- working as planned

For more information on what is required of school leaders we would recommend that you review [annex A](#), which sets out guidance on the risk assessment process. If parents or carers are concerned, we would recommend that you speak to the school so that you can discuss these concerns and for the school to explain the measures that have been put in place to reduce the risks.

In response to the exposure part of your question, we do not hold this information. You may wish to consider raising your question on workplace exposure limits to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Further information on how to raise an FOI can be found at the following link: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/foi/your-right-to-know.htm>

However, I would like to assure you that DfE recognises that it is important to ensure that education settings are well ventilated and that a comfortable teaching environment is maintained. DfE is collaborating with other government departments and a number of academic institutions on the implications of air quality on coronavirus (COVID-19). DfE also works closely with the NHS and SAGE, and following their research, we issued guidance on keeping spaces well ventilated. There are a number of tools beyond ventilation to reduce airborne transmission of COVID-19 (including engineering interventions), and research on these technologies is ongoing. The findings from all this developing work will, in due course, inform our guidance and standards for school buildings. Our guidance also signposts to further advice from the HSE on air conditioning and ventilation during the coronavirus outbreak. The guidance can be found here:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/equipment-and-machinery/air-conditioning-and-ventilation.htm>

Current evidence suggests that the way to control this virus is the same, even with the current new variants. The PHE-endorsed system of controls - which have been in use throughout the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic as set out in our published guidance and which includes ventilation - continue to be the right measures to take. We continue to work closely with PHE and other government departments to keep these measures under review, based on the latest evidence. Schools therefore need to continue to implement these controls to the fullest extent, in line with their wider risk assessment. The guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>

In our response to FOI 2021-0015158 I signposted you to the recently published evidence summary, which contains numerous sources of evidence and findings that you may find useful to explore further. For ease I have provided a link to this:
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/963639/DfE_Evidence_summary_COVID-19 -
_children_young_people_and_education_settings.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/963639/DfE_Evidence_summary_COVID-19_-_children_young_people_and_education_settings.pdf)

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If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me. Please remember to quote the reference number 2021-0015157_in any future communications.

If you are unhappy with the way your request has been handled, you should make a complaint to the Department by writing to me within two calendar months of the date of this letter. Your complaint will be considered by an independent review panel, who were not involved in the original consideration of your request.

If you are not content with the outcome of your complaint to the Department, you may then contact the Information Commissioner's Office.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Allen
Infection, Prevention and Control Team
Coronavirus Response Unit
Department for Education