

Coronavirus

Covid absences in schools in England triple in two weeks

Data shows 202,000 pupils off sick on 17 March, raising fears of disruption before summer exams

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The number of children in state schools in [England](#) who were absent last week because of Covid has more than tripled in a fortnight, confirming headteachers' predictions of growing disruption in classrooms as pupils prepare for summer exams.

Figures published by the Department for Education (DfE) on Tuesday showed 202,000 pupils were off school on 17 March because of the virus - a dramatic jump from 58,000 two weeks earlier, when attendance was described as returning to "something approaching normal".

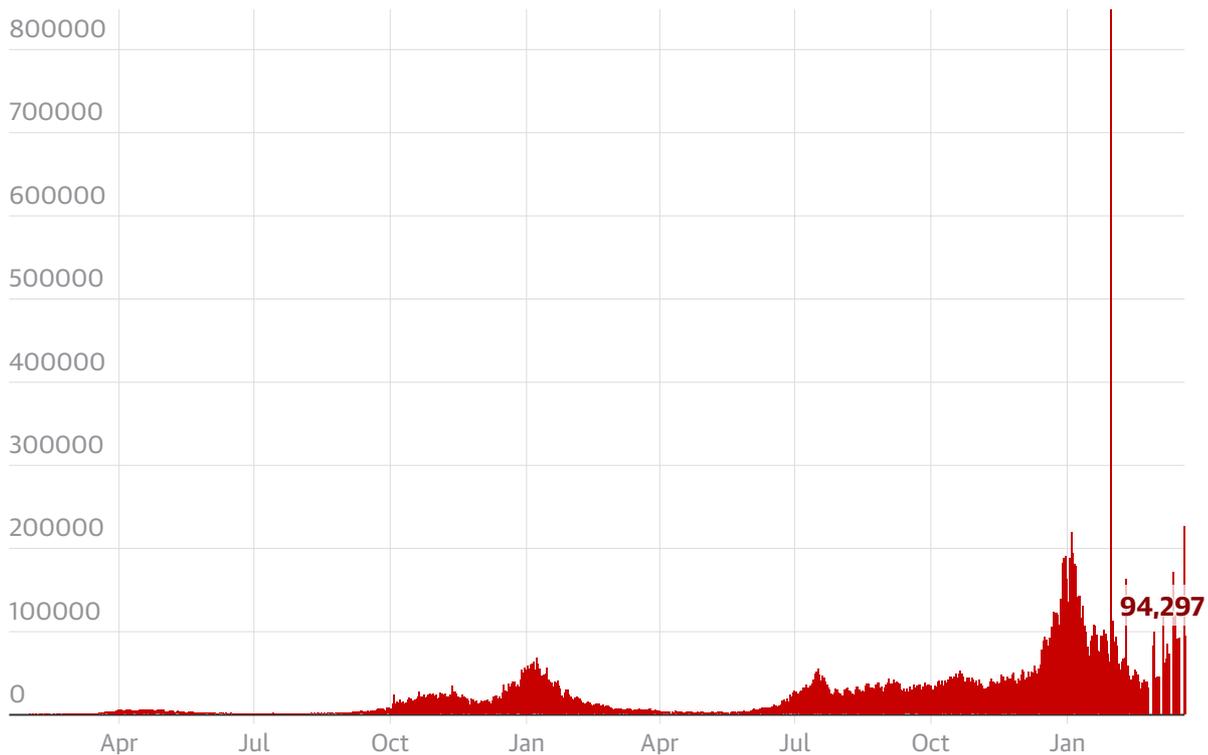
According to the latest government data, 159,000 pupils were off with a confirmed case of the Covid last week, up from 45,000 on 3 March, with a further 16,000 pupils absent with a suspected case of coronavirus, up from 6,000 earlier in the month.

Overall, attendance in state schools in England dropped from 92.2% two weeks ago to 89.7%, with Covid-related absence up from 0.7% to 2.5%. The government would like to see attendance in schools return to pre-pandemic levels of about 95%.

The latest figures also show increasing absence among staff, with almost one in 10 teachers and schools leaders (9.1%) off on 17 March, up from 5.8% two weeks earlier. About 48,000 teachers and 60,000 teaching assistants were absent last week, with schools struggling to secure supply cover for those missing.

UK: number of new coronavirus cases per day

Starting from day of first reported case



Data from Johns Hopkins University at 07:02 UTC 23 Mar 2022

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers said: “These figures are absolutely in line with what we have been hearing from our members. Covid cases have been spiking again in many schools over the past week or so - in line with the rising numbers nationally. The government urgently needs to remind people that just because the legal requirement to isolate has been removed, there is still a duty to take appropriate action to reduce the spread of Covid - just like any other illness.”

Whiteman said plans to remove free access to lateral flow tests from the start of next month amid rising cases was irresponsible. “The government cannot just let Covid rip through schools. Covid hasn’t gone away and we need a proper plan for how to live with it long term that is focused on keeping levels low and reducing disruption.”

A key concern is pupils preparing for GCSEs and A-levels this summer. “Many schools are still finishing teaching the specifications as there has been so much disruption over the two years of exam courses,” said Whiteman. “More disruption now could be seriously damaging to pupils’ exam chances and education recovery.”

The Department for Education said: “Thanks to the hard work of teachers and school staff, over 99.9% of schools have consistently been open this term. We are now moving to living with - and managing - the virus, while maintaining good ventilation and hygiene as the norm, and continuing to use vaccines to build the population’s wall of protection.”

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