

Friday 8 January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

Further to my letters of [31 December](#), [4 January](#) and [5 January](#), I write as promised to provide you with more information and detail about the Rapid Asymptomatic Testing programme that we are carrying out in College, about the actual tests being used and the testing process we have now established, and to explain the changes to isolation regulations and requirements as a result. I am also writing again in light of the country's move into the [National Lockdown](#) to afford you the opportunity to confirm your consent for your child to participate in the testing programme or not, or, indeed, to withdraw any consent you have already given, if you so wish.

Preparing for Testing

I am happy to confirm with you that everything required of us to begin the testing programme with students and staff is now in place. Staff have worked tirelessly since the Secretary of State for Education [announced](#) the 'rollout of coronavirus testing for secondary schools and colleges' on the afternoon of 17 December, and I want to thank them publicly here for their unrelenting commitment to the children, their families and the community we serve. We have set up our testing site rigorously according to NHS specifications; we have established our routine and close contact testing workforce, with each member of staff fully completing all NHS training; and — after a run-through to quality assure the effectiveness and security of our processes — we have started the routine weekly testing of staff. I am happy to report that we are confident that we are now able to begin testing students.

However, since we obtained consent from all staff and most parents and carers for their children to participate in the testing programme, we have, of course, moved into the [National Lockdown](#), so plans for testing in schools have obviously changed.

Firstly, HM Government have [confirmed](#) 'that the testing programme can continue in secondary schools'. In an email to all schools and colleges this week the Department for Education (DfE) also confirmed that the 'testing programme should be continued to enable weekly testing for staff and daily close contact testing for those staff and pupils attending secondary schools and colleges', i.e. currently vulnerable children and children of critical workers. The asymptomatic testing programme 'allows schools and colleges to test pupils on return', which — as [confirmed to Parliament this week](#) — the Secretary of State 'wants' to by '22 February,' while noting that this return is dependent on 'scientific and health advice'.

In a further email to all schools and colleges today, the DfE also clarified that 'Secondary schools should now offer initial testing of vulnerable children and children of critical workers who are on school and college sites (two tests, three to five days apart)'.

The Testing Schedule

As such, if your child is currently attending school as part of our provision for vulnerable children and children of critical workers, and if you have provided your consent, s/he will be tested twice next week, 3-5 days apart, as part of the asymptomatic testing programme. If your child is completing remote education at home, and again if you have provided consent, s/he will be tested twice the first week on return to school, which, to reiterate, is currently planned to be 22 February.

After that, and again if you have provided consent, students will be tested if they are identified as a close contact of a person who has tested positive for COVID-19.

Key Information about the Tests

- 1 The test is a self-administered test.
 - The swabbing and processing of tests will be conducted at the dedicated testing site we have set up in school, with supervision and guidance from trained staff.
 - The test is a nose and throat swab, as described in [this leaflet](#), that produces results in around 30 minutes. You may also wish to watch [this video](#) with your child in advance of their test. (We will also share this video with students in school.)
- 2 Schools will be using a Innova SARS-CoV-2 Antigen Rapid Qualitative Test, which is a Lateral Flow Viral Antigen detection device (LFD) tests.
 - We know that these tests are not 100% accurate, and [studies suggest](#) that the test is more accurate when asymptomatic people have higher viral loads. In addition, we also know that the sensitivity of the test reduces when not used properly.
 - In mitigation we have ensured that all members of the Testing the workforce we have established have been trained using the materials provided by NHS Test and Trace, have been through a run-through, and have been through the process several times already supporting staff testing. As such, staff will be able to advise and guide students.
 - It is important to note that tests do not eliminate risk, and that LFD testing is a risk reduction intervention only — that aims to identify *asymptomatic* cases — and it is recognised that a negative test result does not remove the risk of transmission. There may be some ‘false negative’ results, as [emphasised by the DfE](#), where ‘in some cases, someone who has tested negative may still have the undetected disease and be infectious’. To this end, it remains essential for everyone — whether they have been tested or not — to continue to use the measures that we have in place to reduce viral spread, including hand hygiene and wearing face coverings.
 - In addition, it is important to note that there will be two initial asymptomatic tests taken between 3-5 days apart, and any required contact testing will take place daily — which should reduce the probability of any presence of the disease being undetected.

Actions after test results

- 1 If the LFD test provides a negative result, no further action is required, and the person (student or staff member) can continue to attend school as normal.
- 2 If the LFD test provides a positive result:
 - The person must isolate immediately and have the result confirmed via a lab-based polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test.
 - If a PCR test returns negative, the person can stop isolating and return to school.
 - If the PCR test returns positive, the person must isolate along with all other members of their household.
 - Close contacts of the person will be identified and:
 - If consent has been given, will be tested daily for 7-days, and will continue to attend school if their test is negative.
 - If consent has not been given, will be required to isolate for 10 days (members of the household will not be required to isolate).

Further Considerations

I must reiterate and stress that this testing programme is to detect *asymptomatic* cases. Any person with symptoms of COVID-19 should follow exactly the same procedures that were in place in the autumn term, i.e. in short, they should not attend school, must isolate at home and arrange a test.

It is also worth remembering that the purpose of this rapid testing and self-isolation of positive cases is to avoid individuals carrying the infection unknowingly and potentially spreading it in the College setting or the wider community. In summarising the [benefits](#) of LFD testing, the DHSC state that 'LFDs deliver a rapid assessment of whether someone is likely to be infectious or not and provides the ability to limit infection spread earlier than with PCR testing.' And as explained in the [COVID-19 Winter Plan](#), HM Government's rationale for the roll out of LFDs is to provide 'the rapid testing of certain occupational groups [and] community testing as an alternative to self-isolation following exposure to the virus'. [This post](#) on the UK Parliament website discusses how well validated have these tests been.

I think it is also worth acknowledging that while some studies suggest that asymptomatic people are less likely to transmit the virus than symptomatic people, they can still nonetheless spread it. Indeed, a synthesis of some early research in [Nature](#) back in November suggested that while asymptomatic people were less likely to transmit the virus than symptomatic people, they may still present a significant public-health risk because they are more likely to be out in the community than isolated at home.

Confirming your consent

I attach to the email accompanying this letter for your information further terms consent provided by the DfE. When confirming or giving your consent, you are giving consent to these terms as well. I also attach again for your information the DMAT privacy notice we have already shared with you, along with the DfE privacy notice subsequently produced and distributed to schools. Both notices outline how the personal data we will need to process is to be used in the event of both positive and negative tests, and the rights that individuals have.

Once you have read this letter and the detail contained, may I ask that:

- If you have already provided your consent in the survey distributed over the Christmas break, and do not wish to change anything, please [complete this short 'confirmation' survey](#) to confirm such and provide us with any further information if you wish.
- If you have already provided your consent in the survey distributed over the Christmas break, and wish to change such, please [complete this 'update' survey](#), and we will of course honour your latest decision.
- If you have not yet completed the consent form, please [complete this 'update' survey](#).
- Please note that we will use the main mobile phone number and email address that we hold on SIMs on registration for tests, but we are asking you to confirm these details in the surveys you complete as these will be the contact details used by NHS Test & Trace to inform you of results.

Thank you, once again for finding the time to read this letter and for your ongoing support. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require any further information, but we will, of course, keep in touch.

As ever, keep safe, and keep looking after yourself and each other.

Yours sincerely,



Derrick Brett (Principal).



Important

Advice for schools

CORONAVIRUS SYMPTOMS IN CHILDREN

A CHILD WHO DEVELOPS ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING SYMPTOMS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A POTENTIAL CORONAVIRUS CASE:



NEW CONTINUOUS COUGH

This means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if the child usually has a cough, it may be worse than usual)



FEVER (TEMPERATURE OF 37.8°C OR HIGHER)

The child will also feel hot to touch on their chest or back



A LOSS OR CHANGE TO SENSE OF SMELL OR TASTE

this means the child has noticed they cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.

MOST CHILDREN WITH CORONAVIRUS HAVE AT LEAST ONE OF THESE SYMPTOMS.



If a child is unwell with one or more of these specific symptoms they should be told not to come into school or sent home as soon as possible and advised to get a coronavirus test. **ONLY** those children with one or more of these symptoms or those advised by their clinician or Local Authority should get a test.



Children reporting other symptoms such as a headache, sore throat, runny or sniffly nose, earache, itchy eyes, lethargy or tiredness **WITHOUT** a fever should **NOT** be treated as potential coronavirus cases or advised to take a test.

If the national guidance on symptoms of coronavirus in children changes, updated information will be provided at a local level as soon as possible. This information about coronavirus symptoms in children can be shared with all school teaching and administration staff as well as parents and carers where necessary.

For further guidance on coronavirus testing for schools, please read the letter from PHE and NHS Test and Trace to school and college leaders at: bit.ly/phe-schools

ENGLAND LOCKDOWN

STAY AT HOME

**THE NEW VARIANT OF CORONAVIRUS IS SPREADING FAST.
WE ALL NEED TO PLAY OUR PART TO STOP THE SPREAD.**

▶ LEAVING HOME

You must not leave, or be outside of your home or garden, except for a very limited set of exemptions e.g. to shop for basic necessities, exercise, go to work if you cannot do so from home, or to escape risk of harm.

▶ MEETING OTHERS

You cannot leave your home to meet socially with anyone, except with your household or support bubble (if eligible to form one). Stay 2 metres apart from anyone not in your household or support bubble.

▶ EXERCISE

You may exercise on your own, with your household or support bubble, or with one person from another household (when on your own). Stay 2 metres apart from anyone not in your household or support bubble.

▶ BARS, PUBS AND RESTAURANTS

Hospitality closed aside from sales by takeaway (until 11pm), click-and-collect, drive-through or delivery. Alcohol cannot be purchased through takeaway or click-and-collect from hospitality venues.

▶ RETAIL

Essential shops can open. Non-essential retail must close and can only run click-and-collect and delivery.

▶ WORK AND BUSINESS

Everyone must work from home unless they are unable to do so.

▶ EDUCATION

Early years settings open. Primary and secondary schools and colleges move to remote provision except for vulnerable children and children of critical workers. Most university students to move to remote learning.

▶ LEISURE AND SPORTING FACILITIES

Closed, with limited exceptions.

▶ ACCOMMODATION

Closed, with limited exceptions.

▶ PERSONAL CARE

Closed.

▶ ENTERTAINMENT

Closed.

▶ OVERNIGHT STAYS

You must not stay overnight away from home. Limited exceptions apply e.g. to stay with your support bubble.

▶ WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS

Funerals of up to 30 people permitted. Weddings up to 6 people permitted in exceptional circumstances. Wakes and other linked ceremonial events of up to 6 permitted.

▶ PLACES OF WORSHIP

Places of worship can remain open and communal worship is permitted, but you must not mix with those outside your household or support bubble.

▶ TRAVELLING

You must stay at home. If you do leave home for a very limited set of exemptions, you should stay local in the village, town, or part of the city where you live where possible. Do not travel abroad unless an exemption applies.

▶ CLINICALLY EXTREMELY VULNERABLE

Shielding reintroduced across England. You should not travel to work, school, college or university and should limit the time you spend outside the home. You should only go out for medical appointments, exercise or if it is essential.

▶ CARE HOME VISITS

Visits can take place with arrangements such as substantial screens, visiting pods, or behind windows. Close-contact indoor visits are not allowed. No visits will be permitted in the event of an outbreak but end of life visits are permitted in all circumstances.