25 April 2022

Dear Parent/Carers,

Learning to live safely with COVID-19 in our schools

Firstly, thank you once again for your effort in supporting our local communities by helping to keep children and staff in our schools safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are writing to you to ask for your support in continuing to promote good infection prevention in schools.

As you are aware, following the Government's announcement on 21st February 2022, and the success of vaccinations, access to free testing is now only for people working in health and social care and for people who are still vulnerable to serious illness.

The living with COVID-19 guidance contains safety measures which are actions we can all take to help reduce the risk of catching COVID-19 and passing it on to others. As we start a new term, these actions will help schools provide children with vital education and social skills which have been impacted by the pandemic, so children can continue to benefit with minimal disruption.

Learning to live with COVID-19 does not mean that the virus is no longer harmful, particularly to the most vulnerable. Also, outbreaks of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases may still cause some disruption.

The UK Health Security Agency recently warned that there have been more children in England sick with scarlet fever, chicken pox, acute hepatitis, vomiting and diarrhoea than we usually see at this time of the year. These illnesses had reduced during the COVID-19 pandemic because there were less people mixing, more people washing their hands and using good respiratory hygiene. For example, it is likely that many more children have not been exposed to chicken pox compared to previously when around 65% of children in the UK were expected to be immune to chickenpox by age 5, so more children in Reception and Year 1 are likely to still be at risk from chickenpox infection. It is important that parents are aware of these illnesses and seek medical advice if your child has symptoms that are not improving as indicated in the guidance.

Therefore, we are all being encouraged to continue to follow the national guidance that help to reduce spreading most respiratory infections such as COVID-19, flu and other diseases whilst we go about our daily lives.

Symptoms of COVID-19, flu and common respiratory infections
- Symptoms of respiratory infections including COVID-19 include continuous cough, high temperature, fever, or chills, loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell, shortness of breath, unexplained tiredness, lack of energy, muscle aches or pains that are not due to exercise, not wanting to eat or not feeling hungry, headache that is unusual or longer lasting than usual, sore throat, stuffy or runny nose, diarrhoea, feeling sick or being sick.
- Children who are unwell, have loss of taste or smell, or have a high temperature or diarrhoea or vomiting should be kept away from school, stay at home, and avoid contact with other people until 48 hours after these symptoms have stopped.
- Children can return to school, college, or childcare when they no longer have a temperature, and two days after diarrhoea or vomiting and are well enough to attend.

Testing for COVID-19 is no longer free or recommended
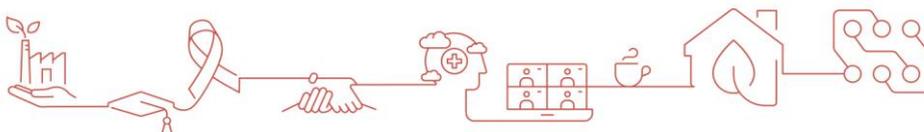
- Schools will no longer be able to provide free COVID-19 tests and although routine testing is not available, if you have access to tests, it is helpful to test your household if you have COVID-19 symptoms listed above especially if you have been in contact with someone with COVID-19.
- Children who test positive for COVID-19 should not come to school. They should try to stay at home and avoid contact with others for 3 full days whilst adults stay at home for 5 days after a positive test, because this is when they are most infectious and can spread the virus. For example, if your child tests positive on a Monday, they can return to school on Friday.
- Children and staff who live with someone who has tested positive can continue to attend school provided they have no symptoms and have not tested positive themselves.

Simple actions to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections
- Good handwashing and respiratory hygiene are important for everyone particularly those who have symptoms of respiratory infections.
- Children should be encouraged to cover their mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when coughing and/or sneezing and wash their hands afterwards using soap and water.
- When indoors, allow good ventilation by letting in fresh air through opening doors and windows for 10 minutes every hour providing it is safe to do so.
- If there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in the school, there may be a need to introduce further measures, such as wearing face coverings or masks on advice from public health.
- Vaccination provides protection against hospitalisation, death and reduces the risk of long-term symptoms from COVID-19. Current COVID-19 vaccines are safe and are now available to children aged 5 to 15 years old.

World Immunisation Week 24th to 30th of April 2022
This week is an important time to remember to book appointments for both adults and children in your household who are eligible as shown in the NHS vaccination schedule. People who did not manage to book any of their children's routine vaccines during the pandemic are also encouraged to contact their GP to make an appointment.

Please always remain vigilant and be aware of symptoms of respiratory infections such as COVID-19 and what you can do to stop the spread. There is more information here:
https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-and-treatment/when-to-self-isolate-and-what-to-do/

Parents should seek medical advice if concerned about their children's health and symptoms, or if they are worsening, by contacting NHS 111. In an emergency dial 999.

Thank you for all you continue to do to keep our schools and communities safe.

Yours sincerely

Ruth du Plessis   Jim Leivers

Director of Public Health   Interim Director of Children's Services