

Headteachers and Principals  
Primary, Secondary and Special Schools

25 November 2021

Dear Headteachers and Principals

Levels of COVID-19 infections in school aged children are currently high in East Sussex. We recognise that schools are facing a number of challenges this term, not least with staff absence. We are confident that you have well-developed plans in place to mitigate the worst effects of the continuing pandemic and ensure that children can maintain their focus on learning. We really do appreciate all of this work by school leaders on behalf of their communities.

As with previous phases of the pandemic, there are some key actions that schools can take to reduce the impact of COVID on our lives and help us prepare for Christmas and the winter months ahead.

In particular, we would like your help with:

- the reintroduction of face coverings within communal areas of secondary schools
- promoting the continued testing for COVID-19 using PCRs and LFDs
- the contact tracing process for children who test positive
- planning for Christmas events

**We have also attached a letter for parents and carers and would ask that you share this with your families.**

### Face Coverings

As COVID rates are now highest amongst children and young people, we feel the time is right to endorse the reintroduction of face coverings in communal areas of secondary schools. This is in line with the latest government guidance for schools, and we very much welcome your support in implementing this additional preventative measure until the end of term. We would ask that you implement this from Monday 29 November, and we will review the situation at Christmas in line with the latest data.

### Testing for Covid 19

Secondary school pupils should continue to test twice weekly at home, with lateral flow device (LFD) test kits, 3 to 4 days apart.

It is important that pupils with a positive LFD test result self-isolate in line with the stay-at-home guidance for households with possible or confirmed COVID-19 infection. Schools are reporting high levels of LFD test positives, but these aren't always being followed up with a confirmatory PCR test. **All pupils with a positive LFD test result need to get a free PCR test to check if they have COVID-19.** Whilst awaiting the PCR result, the individual should continue to self-isolate. If the PCR test is taken within 2 days of the positive lateral flow test, and is negative, it overrides the self-test LFD test and the pupil can return to school if the individual doesn't have COVID-19 symptoms.

Anyone can order a PCR test with COVID-19 symptoms, which include:

- a high temperature,
- a new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot, for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours
- a loss or change to sense of smell or taste

### **Contact tracing process**

Schools no longer have an active role in contact tracing, and this is now undertaken by NHS Test and Trace. Current tracing arrangements for those aged under 18 requires parents and guardians to complete the process for their children.

**Completing contact tracing helps break chains of COVID-19 transmission, reduces disruption to work and education, illness and saves lives. It also helps those who are vulnerable to get the help that they need.**

More information is available at [The Local Tracing Partnership: supporting NHS Test and Trace | East Sussex County Council](#)

### **Christmas Events**

We are aware that you will be wanting to make decisions on whether to go ahead with Christmas events. Those of you in large outbreak situations may already have been advised by UKHSA to cancel indoor events which involve further mixing. There is currently no national guidance on this issue and so we would encourage you to use your local knowledge of rates in your area alongside your individual risk assessments to make an informed decision. The local authority will support your decisions if you do have to cancel events. Given the fluctuation of rates, we would advise that you have plans in place to make any last-minute changes that might be required.

The hands, face, space and fresh air guidance was crucial to bringing us out of previous restrictions. Following these health protection measures is vital in helping reduce the numbers of positive cases.

We would welcome any additional reminders and communications you can share with your school community about regular testing and [taking up the vaccine](#) that pupils, staff and families are entitled to. These are the best ways to protect the whole community this winter and the attached letter for families covers these points.

We would like to thank you for your continued support for our children and young people and in supporting our response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yours faithfully,



Darrell Gale FFPH  
Director of Public Health



Alison Jeffery  
Director of Children's Services