



T: 0131-244 5176  
E: Jason.leitch@gov.scot

To Parents and Carers

Date: 16 September 2021

Dear Parents/Carers,

We are now well into the new academic year, and I have been delighted to see reports of children and pupils returning filled with enthusiasm and optimism for the year ahead. I hope that is reflective of the experience in your own household.

At this stage, I wanted to write to you so that I can help explain how cases of Covid-19 in childcare settings and schools are being managed, and how information that has been gathered since the start of term is helping to inform what arrangements need to be in place going forward.

Since early August, as you may have seen, levels of infection rose significantly, and they rose particularly sharply amongst younger people. Infection levels now appear to be declining again but levels are still high. We are taking this very seriously but I want to reassure you that children and young people still have a very low risk of health harm from Covid-19, and those without symptoms (asymptomatic) are also at a relatively low risk of transmitting Covid-19 to adults. Our Advisory Subgroup on Education and Children's Issues – which draws advice from scientific and public health experts, clinicians and academics, as well as experts in education, early learning and children's services - publish all their evidence as a matter of routine should you wish to explore this further.

We are fortunate that vaccine uptake is very high in Scotland, and the vaccines are highly effective at preventing severe disease. As the First Minister announced earlier this week, we will now be extending the universal offer of one dose of the vaccine to all 12 to 15 year olds. It is essential that those aged 12 - 15 and their parents are supported in their decisions to accept the offer of vaccination or otherwise, and information will be made available to you shortly to understand the risks and benefits as part of the informed consent process prior to vaccination. Please do look out for that and engage with it fully when you receive it in the post.

While we are now at a stage of the pandemic where we increasingly need to learn to live with the virus, it also remains important that we do what we can to reduce transmission. It is necessary for us all to play our part in that.

On that basis, the advice for people with symptoms of Covid-19 is unchanged. Any adult or child who develops a high temperature, new continuous cough or a loss or change to sense of smell or taste must self-isolate immediately in line with NHS Guidance. Those aged 5 and over who are living in the same household must also isolate while awaiting the outcome of the PCR test result for the unwell household member.



It is also important to remember that any pupil who is unwell (whether that's with symptoms of Covid-19 or with symptoms of other infections) should not attend. Schools and childcare settings will be able to advise on exclusion criteria for symptoms of other infections.

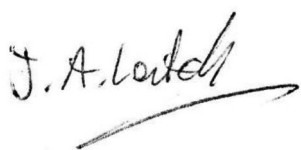
Guidance on contact tracing following a positive case in schools and registered childcare settings has been updated to improve the clarity of what is required. As has been the case since schools returned in August, all fully vaccinated staff and pupils who are identified as a high-risk close contact will be asked by Test and Protect to self-isolate until they have returned a negative PCR test. For children and young people, a high-risk close contact is most likely to be household members, or anybody who they have stayed overnight with. If you are contacted by Test and Protect, please assist them by both completing the online form quickly, and contacting your school and/or childcare setting as soon as possible to let them know why your child is absent. This will help us to minimise the risk of any onward transmission.

All other contacts are considered to be low-risk; this may include classmates, for example, but wouldn't typically extend as far as year groups or whole schools. For these low-risk close contacts, we know that they and their families will want to remain informed and take action to minimise the likelihood of wider outbreaks, and so schools and childcare settings will issue a targeted Information Letter with appropriate advice. For children attending childcare and primary school, these letters will confirm that they should continue to attend if well, and that parents can support children to take an LFD test before returning if they and their child wish to do so. Free at-home LFD test kits are available for you and your children by collection from COVID test centres or pharmacies, or delivery by ordering online. Parents may wish to ensure they have a pack of test kits available in case of positive cases in their child's class or childcare cohort. However, there continues to be no need to test regularly as part of attending childcare or primary school.

Secondary school pupils should also continue to attend if well, but the letter advises that they take a lateral flow test before they next return to school wherever possible, and continue with twice-weekly lateral flow testing and reporting of all results (positive, negative or void) thereafter. Free test kits are available to all secondary school children from the school. Please contact the school directly if they have any problems accessing tests.

In parallel, we continue to monitor and review the requirement for other mitigations within schools and childcare settings. Following expert advice, we have confirmed that the need for secondary school pupils to wear face coverings - along with maintaining other current mitigations in schools - must remain in place at least until the October holidays. I know that some pupils find this unpleasant or uncomfortable, and I am grateful to them for persevering with this. While I can't provide you with an accurate timescale, I can reassure you that we will not keep such mitigations in place for any longer than we believe is absolutely necessary.

I hope that this provides helpful clarification of the recent changes in approach to Covid-19. In closing, I'd particularly like to add my sincere thanks and recognition of the immense efforts by you and your families to protect yourselves and your communities during these challenging times.



Jason Leitch  
National Clinical Director