

20 October 2021

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Dear Parents and Carers

Re: COVID-19 measures in schools

In the last few weeks, we've seen a huge increase in the number of children and young people testing positive for COVID-19. At the time of this letter, around 1 in 50 of our secondary school children in Wakefield District currently have COVID. The case rate in secondary school students stands at 2000/100,000 which is 50% above the peak of cases in July, and means that education is being badly disrupted in many of our schools.

Unfortunately, we are now also seeing rising rates in adults, who are more vulnerable to the effects of the virus. This increase in COVID-19 cases in adults in Wakefield is almost certainly driven by children, who are catching it in schools and passing it on to their families and friends. This is very different from the situation last year, when we were seeing transmission in communities but very little in schools.

We are seeing the number of admissions to our local hospital increase. Our rates of infection in people over 60, who are more vulnerable to severe illness, remain high and are also starting to increase. Even if adults are not ill enough to need hospital care, many are absent from work because they have caught COVID from their children, or because they need to care for unwell children.

Staff absence is putting severe pressure on local NHS and social care services and risks affecting their ability to care for people with COVID-19 and other illnesses.

This means we now need to consider what we can do to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 in our schools and in the community.

Following a recommendation from our COVID-19 Health Protection Board last week, and discussions with our schools since the beginning of term, we are advising all schools in Wakefield District to consider implementing the following additional measures when they return following the half term break.

- 1. If someone in the household has tested positive for COVID-19 (on LFD or PCR),** advise pupils/students to stay at home. If they develop symptoms, they should get a PCR test straight away. If they don't have symptoms, they should get a PCR test 3-5 days after their household member started with symptoms (or took their test if they had no symptoms). If this test is negative, the child can return to school but must stay at home and arrange another test if they go on to develop symptoms.

Some children are exempt from this advice:

12–16-year-olds who have had at least one dose of the vaccine more than 14 days ago

Any child aged between 5 – 16 who has tested positive for COVID-19 via a PCR test within the past 90 days.

Parents/carers who still want their child to continue to attend school have the right to do so. We do hope that most families will understand why they are being asked to do this and will feel able to keep their child at home for a short period, especially as at least one other household member will be at home self-isolating after testing positive.

2. **Recommend the use of face coverings** in classrooms and communal areas for secondary age and post-16 education settings, and the use of face coverings by adults in all schools in communal areas, including on dedicated school transport.
3. **Ensure windows are open in the classroom** to facilitate good ventilation, as much as is practicable and particularly in areas that have been shown to have poor air quality (if your school has access to CO2 monitors).
4. **Reduce mixing between year groups and classes** as much as possible to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.
5. **Wherever possible, suspend whole-school or year group events** e.g. assemblies. Revert staff and governors' meetings to virtual format.
Limit visitors to the school and consider carefully whether events that bring parents into the school can be managed safely or should return to online.
6. **Carefully consider whether educational trips and residential visits should go ahead.** This is especially important because being on transport together for long periods, and/or sharing overnight accommodation, increases the chance of transmitting COVID-19.

Schools may choose not to follow all of the above advice. Their decision will be based on infection rates in school and in the local area, and the measures they feel are likely to be most effective in their setting.

We understand the above will be frustrating to some of you, and welcome to others. We all want our children in school and having as full an educational experience as possible. However, we believe that the best way of achieving this is to recommend simple measures that will bring down the number of cases in school, and reduce the pressure on our health and social care services.

We will review this advice to schools in two weeks' time, and again at the end of November when we hope that the vaccine offer for 12-15 year olds, and the booster programme for vulnerable adults, will be more advanced.

Further advice will be based on the rate of infection in schools along with the pressure on NHS services at that time.

On top of the measures that schools are taking, there are some measures you can continue to support your school with:

1. Continue to support your child to undertake lateral flow testing twice a week if they attend a secondary school
2. Support your child to wear a face covering if they attend secondary school, both in school and in enclosed indoor spaces in public.
3. Consider carefully the benefits of the vaccination programme for children between the ages of 12-15. You should receive information from your school very shortly if you have not already done so.

4. If you or your child develop symptoms of COVID-19 you should book a free NHS test as soon as possible (www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test). You can also phone 119. Stay at home until it is time to take your test.

Finally, we would like to thank you for everything you've done to keep your family and community safe, and for your patience in supporting schools at this difficult time.

Kind regards,



Anna Hartley
Director of Public Health



Beate Wagner
Director of Children and Young People's Services