

COVID-19 & schools

Friday 17th December 2021



Dear Parents and Carers

We would like to thank you for helping us slow the spread of COVID-19 in Lewisham. However, with increasing case numbers and the new Omicron variant, face coverings, keeping windows and doors open and hand washing are more important than ever. We have included the latest COVID-19 information here; please take the time to read this letter carefully as following these guidelines will help keep everyone in school safe.

Contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases

On Tuesday 14th December the government gave [new advice for contacts of people with COVID-19](#).

People who are told by NHS Test and Trace that they are a contact of someone with COVID-19 should take a lateral flow device (LFD) test every day for **seven days** and do not need to self-isolate **as long as tests are negative and if the following apply:**

- Fully vaccinated adults – people who have had at least two COVID-19 vaccinations. You must have had your final dose at least 14 days prior to any COVID-19 contact to avoid self-isolation.
- All children aged 5 to 18 years and 6 months, regardless of their vaccination status.
- People who can prove they are unable to be vaccinated for clinical reasons.
- People taking part/who have taken part in an approved clinical trial for a COVID-19 vaccine.

Everyone who meets the above criteria and does not have symptoms is strongly advised to:

- Do daily rapid LFD tests (one a day for seven days) and report the results through the [online reporting system](#) and to their school/setting.
- Follow advice on [how to avoid catching and spreading COVID-19](#).
- Consider limiting contact with [people who are at higher risk from COVID-19](#).

Anyone over the age of 18 years and 6 months who is not fully vaccinated must self-isolate in line with government guidelines, if they are a close contact of a positive case. For more information on what you have to do whilst self-isolating please see [here](#).

You may be entitled to a one-off payment of £500 through the NHS Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme if you are legally required to stay at home and self-isolate or you are the parent or guardian of a child who has been told to self-isolate. Please find more information on this [here](#).

Under-5s are exempt from self-isolation and do not need to take part in daily LFD testing.

You can find out about [ordering LFD tests here](#) or visit Lewisham Council's website for [local information](#).

Daily testing by close contacts will help to slow the spread of COVID-19 by finding cases with no symptoms, or before they begin showing symptoms and help keep pupils in face to face education.

If the daily tests are negative, contacts of cases can continue to attend school, college or work. If any of the daily tests are positive, they should self-isolate and [get a PCR test](#) to confirm the result. If the PCR is positive, they must self-isolate for 10 days. If the PCR test is negative, they no longer need to self-isolate but should continue to carry out the remainder of the daily LFD tests.

We realise it is not always possible for all children to undertake daily LFD tests due to risks to physical and mental wellbeing or for some children with special needs and/or disabilities. In such a case, you should discuss this with the school to consider if it would be sensible to continue with ten day isolation. In Lewisham, asymptomatic testing sites (ATS) and pharmacies which provide supported testing to adults will provide assisted testing to children and young people with special educational needs and children under 11 years ([more details](#))

[here](#)).

Regular LFD testing and returning to school in January

It is important to continue regular twice weekly, at-home testing for adults and children/young people of secondary age and above, including during school holidays.

With social mixing during the holidays, it is vital that we support a successful start to the new term. Secondary schools and colleges will offer an onsite test to pupils before they can start school in January. Schools will let you know their approach to this but may stagger their start dates for the beginning of the new term.

COVID-19 symptoms and self-isolation

We are receiving reports of high numbers of cases of COVID-19. Please continue to look out for the three main symptoms:

- 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 – this means they cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal

It is important that anyone displaying any/all symptoms self-isolates immediately and has a PCR test. It is not appropriate to use LFD tests when individuals have symptoms likely to be COVID-19. Check government websites for information about [PCR test booking](#) and [COVID symptoms in children and young people](#).

Returning from holidays abroad

If your child will be traveling abroad during the holidays, please let your school know and confirm that you have followed the advice about [travel to England from another country](#) before they return to school. Any absence from school due to going on holiday must be authorised by the headteacher in advance.

Vaccinations

COVID-19 vaccination is now available free to everyone aged 12 years and over, unless they are medically exempt. It is never too late to get your first, second or booster jab! You can find national and local details of where to get vaccinated [here](#).

More information for parents and carers

It is really important for your children to attend school unless they are ill or self-isolating and for our schools to continue to teach children in school. Our schools are working hard to be able to do this safely. There may be times when schools need to put in additional protection and prevention measures if there are high numbers of COVID-19 cases or to take action if there are staff shortages. Your school will inform you of these as early as possible. Further information on what parents and carers need to know about schools and settings can be found [here](#).

We are sure you will join us in thanking our school leaders and staff for all they have done to keep children and adults safe in school this term. We wish them, you and your families happy and safe holidays and all the best for the New Year.

Thank you for your cooperation.



Angela Scattergood
Director of Education



Dr Catherine Mbema
Director of Public Health

