



Date: 29<sup>th</sup> October 2021

Dear Head Teacher

## **COVID-19 Measures in Schools**

We would like to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to you and your teams for all you have done and continue to do to help us reduce the risk of COVID-19 in South Tyneside. We appreciate just how hard you have worked and how difficult it has been through all the different stages and challenges of this pandemic.

We all want to see as many of our children and young people in school as possible and having as 'normal' and positive a school experience as we can manage. Unfortunately, I know that for many of our schools this first half term has been disrupted by outbreaks of COVID-19 and high rates of student and staff absence.

Much as we would all like it to be, the pandemic isn't over. While it is clear that the vaccination programme is effective in preventing serious disease and deaths, the vaccine is never going to stop all transmission, and resultant harm, on its own. Indeed, hospitals across the country are beginning to see a rise in the number of COVID-19 cases being admitted.

Even though adults who test positive may not become ill, many are absent from work because of household transmission from their children, or because they need to care for children who have tested positive. This is impacting on children's education and critical services such as the NHS and social care.

We are also seeing increases in infections across the borough and infections in school age children have been the main contributory factor to our rate of COVID-19 in recent weeks.

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.

On that basis and as practically possible we are now recommending to schools that the temporary measures below are put in place.

1. **The use of face coverings** in classrooms and communal areas for secondary age pupils and in communal areas for all adults. We encourage all parents/carers to also wear a face covering when dropping off or collecting children, and when using public or shared transport.

2. **PCR testing** is recommended for all adults and pupils if they are a close contact of a positive case\*. 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.
3. **Daily LFT testing for 5 days** for any adult or secondary age pupil who is a **household** contact of a positive case and is exempt from isolation and continues to attend school. Testing should start from the day the **household member** has symptoms or if they don't have symptoms from when they tested positive\*.

Any child aged between 5 – 16 who has tested positive for COVID-19 via a PCR test within the past 90 days should not be tested unless showing new symptoms

Parents/carers who still want their child to continue to attend school have the right for them to do so. We hope that most parents will understand the reasons behind the request and will feel able to support the school, especially as they will have at least one household member self-isolating at home already.

If a parent is not able to support the school in this request, we would still strongly advise that their child obtains a PCR test before returning to school if they are a close contact.

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** eg 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. Schools carefully consider whether **educational visits and residential trips 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.
7. Schools carefully consider whether **open days or events** could move to a virtual format
8. Additional attention be given to **ventilation, cleaning and respiratory and hand hygiene**

*\*Note: People who have tested positive with a PCR test within the last 90 should not be encouraged to test unless they develop new symptoms*

As we have done throughout the pandemic, we will support schools with both Public Health and operational decision-making as required. We hope that the above advice will give a clear Public Health steer which will guide and help justify the decisions you make as school leaders.

We are recommending that schools implement this advice as soon as practically possible on return from the half term break, however we will review and refresh this advice in two weeks' time, and again at the end of November.

The vaccination offer for 12-15 year olds is also an important measure and following the Health Secretary's announcement on Wednesday there will be increased access for young people, vaccinations for 12-15-year olds can be booked online [Book your vaccine](#) or via 119. This will complement the offer in schools.

Finally, we would like to thank you for your ongoing support. We're hope you have enjoyed the half term break and we ask that you continue to support secondary school age pupils to undertake lateral flow testing twice a week, and especially on the morning or night before of their first day back of the new term.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Hall' with a stylized flourish.

Tom Hall  
Director of Public Health

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Beverley Scanlon' in a cursive style.

Beverley Scanlon  
Head of Learning and Early Help