



Office of the Director of Public Health
Public Health
West Offices
Station Rise
York YO1 6GA

Date: October 2021

Email: enquiries.publichealth@york.gov.uk

Dear Parents and Carers,

RE: COVID-19 measures in schools

Thank you for everything you have done to keep your family and your community safe so far during the coronavirus pandemic and for your patience in supporting schools at this difficult time. Unfortunately the pandemic is not yet over and cases of COVID are continuing to rise in York.

In the last few weeks we have seen a significant increase in the number of children and young people testing positive for COVID-19 and an increase in household transmission of the virus. We are now in a position where we are beginning to see pressures starting to build on the NHS again. We can see from our local data that children are passing infection to family members and into local communities and this is leading to rising infection rates in adults, particularly older adults, who tend to be more vulnerable to the effects of both COVID-19 and flu.

This means we need to consider taking further steps to try and stop the spread of winter viruses and lower our rate of COVID-19. We have advised all schools in York to consider taking the following precautions:

1. Recommend that children who are unwell with symptoms that may be COVID should stay home from school and book a PCR test. They should stay home until they get their PCR test result.
2. Recommend that children who receive a positive result using a lateral flow test should stay home from school and book a PCR test to confirm their result, even if they do not have symptoms.
3. Children who are identified as a close or household contact by NHS Test and Trace of someone who has tested positive for COVID should take a PCR test and stay home from school until they get their PCR result. Alternatively a parent/carer can do a daily lateral flow test on their child while waiting for the PCR test result. Provided the lateral flow test is negative, and the child does not have any symptoms that might be COVID, they can return to school while waiting for the PCR result.
4. Reinforce the importance of regular hand washing with soap and water or using hand sanitiser when soap and water are not readily available.

5. Promote good respiratory hygiene and “Catch it, Bin it, Kill it” messages to encourage children to catch coughs and sneezes in a tissue and dispose of it in the nearest waste bin.
6. Recommend the use of face coverings in communal areas in secondary school and post-16 education settings, including on dedicated school transport.
7. Ensure windows are open in the classroom, if only for short periods during the day as we head into colder weather, to aid good ventilation and particularly in areas that have been shown to have poor air quality following testing.
8. Reduce mixing between groups as much as possible to reduce the risk of transmission of respiratory infections including COVID-19.
9. Consider the safety of residential educational visits given the risk of sharing a room overnight increases the chance of catching COVID-19.

Schools may choose not to follow all of the above advice based on your individual circumstances. As we have done throughout the pandemic, we will continue to support schools with both Public Health and operational-decision making as required and are happy to discuss with you the options for your school, accepting that these may change dependent on what the school infection rates are at any point of time.

This advice applies to primary and secondary schools. Those who attend post-16 education will already have been offered vaccination for COVID-19 and so are likely to have additional protection already.

This is a temporary measure and will be reviewed every 2 weeks taking into account the rate of infection in schools and the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

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

- Continue to support your child to carry out lateral flow testing twice a week if they attend secondary school
- Encourage your child to wear a face covering if they attend secondary school both in communal areas of the school and when travelling by bus to and from school
- Consider carefully the benefits of the COVID and flu vaccination programmes that will shortly be rolled out to all schools in York. You will be receiving further information about this from your school.
- If you or your child develop symptoms of COVID you should book a free NHS test as soon as possible either by going online [Get a free PCR test to check if you have coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/get-a-free-pcr-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus) or by calling 119.

To help you decide if your child's symptoms might be COVID please see the attached information which has been shared with schools.

Yours sincerely

Sharon Stoltz

Sharon Stoltz
Director of Public Health

Anne Coyle
Interim Director of Children's Services

DRAFT