

Dear parents and guardians,

Update to parents on Covid-19 in Lancashire schools and colleges

Firstly, I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for all your support in keeping our children and young people in our schools and communities safe and adhering to national and local Covid guidance.

As you may be aware, in recent weeks, there has been an increase in the number of Covid-19 cases and outbreaks reported in education settings. There has been media attention recently on variants of concern, and the Lancashire County Council area is no exception. Therefore, it is important to do as much as possible to continue to keep our children and families safe and minimise the disruption to education.

This includes various areas of prevention and early intervention, such as:

a) Vaccinations

It is vital that everybody who is eligible for a vaccine books an appointment without delay. A recent study from Public Health England has shown that two doses of either the Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccine offer high levels of protection against symptomatic disease and remains the most effective weapon in our fight against Covid.

b) Whole school testing

In the event of an outbreak we may advise that every pupil and member of staff undertake PCR testing. The delivery of this will differ from school to school. The purpose of whole school testing is to control the spread of the virus to prevent further disruption to education. If the PCR test result is positive, close contacts, including pupils and their household, must self-isolate from the day their symptoms started and the next 10 full days. Close contacts should also take a PCR test and continue to self-isolate even if the result is negative.

c) Symptomatic testing

If you or your child or young person has one or more of the three classic Covid-19 symptoms – a high temperature; a new continuous cough or a loss or change to your sense of smell – you or they must isolate immediately and book a PCR test via the NHS. If you or your child or young person do not have any of the three classic symptoms, proceed through the questions and then tick the box that says: "My local council or health protection team has asked me to get a test, even though I do not have symptoms."

If the PCR test result is positive, close contacts, including pupils and their household, must self-isolate from the day their symptoms started and the next 10 full days. Close contacts should also take a PCR test and continue to self-isolate even if the result is negative.

You can get a PCR test here: <https://self-referral.test-for-coronavirus.service.gov.uk/antigen/essential-worker>

d) Close contacts testing

Around 1 in 5 people who have been in close contact with a person with Covid-19 will go on to have Covid-19 themselves, and around 1 in 3 of those will have no symptoms but can still spread the virus. Getting a test when you are a contact helps to find if you are one of those people and, if so, ensures they self-isolate. This is how we break the chains of transmission.

People who have been identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive with Covid-19 can now get a PCR test during their 10-day self-isolation period, whether or not they have symptoms. It is important to isolate for 10 days even if the PCR test is negative.

e) Wider symptomatic testing

If you or your child or young person has other new or unusual symptoms or if in doubt, you can still get a PCR test. However, you do not need to self-isolate for 10 days, unless you get a positive test result. If the PCR result is positive, everyone who lives in your household must self-isolate from the day your symptoms started and the next 10 full days. This is important as this will help prevent further spread into the community.

If you require support during your isolation, contact your Local District Council who can provide advice on welfare and support available.

f) Routine asymptomatic testing

To continue to avoid disruption to education, it is important to undertake routine testing, which plays a pivotal role in allowing for normal life to resume and to detect asymptomatic cases. LFT kits are available for household testing. If you or your child or young person's LFT test result is positive, you and your close contacts will need to self-isolate immediately and book a confirmatory PCR test via the NHS as soon as possible.

g) Face coverings

Earlier this month, we advised all secondary school and college students and staff that they should continue to wear face coverings until 21 June, despite restrictions relaxing nationally. This recommendation came amid concerns about the spread across the region of the B.1.617.2 variant of concern first identified in India.

The advice will be reviewed ahead of 21 June, the next milestone in the Government's roadmap. Continuing to use face coverings in schools along with maintaining hand washing, social distancing, fresh air and regular testing will help to control the spread of Covid-19.

I am extremely grateful for your support and patience during this difficult time. Thank you.

Dr Sakthi Karunanithi
Director of Public Health
Lancashire County Council