

MESSAGE TO SCHOOLS FROM DR ARIF RAJPURA, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, BLACKPOOL COUNCIL

Blackpool Council is committed to helping schools to make the right decisions for themselves as well as for our families and children.

In addition to the current provision for the children of key workers, the Government has proposed a limited expansion of schools over the coming weeks from June 1 onwards.

Before expanding the numbers, schools will need to consider, amongst other things, changes in work practices including reducing social contact, enhancing hand and respiratory hygiene, as well as increasing cleaning regimes.

The opening of schools is important in supporting children's welfare and education, and also allowing those who are caring for children to resume their normal working lives.

There is clear evidence that the risk to children from COVID-19 infection is lower than in the general population. It also now appears that children under the age of 12 are no more infectious than adults and might actually be less infectious.

There is speculation around what is commonly known as the R number, but I would stress that in getting a clear picture of the local position it is important that we don't solely focus on the R value and fully understand where transmission is occurring.

Taking all this into consideration and balancing the risks of COVID-19 with the potential detrimental impact on child welfare and educational outcomes, we are now in a position to support schools to start to invite children back to school in the specified year groups.

This, of course, can only be done when individual schools feel that it is safe to do so.

Any lifting of restrictions is likely to introduce some element of risk, but the risks with this particular proposal are low, particularly if the working practices within the school are changed and positive cases are promptly identified and contacts self-isolated in the appropriate way.

Along with all the changes in working practices outlined in the guidance to schools, Blackpool Council will be offering support through its Outbreak Management Hub in collaboration with Public Health England to respond to cases that might occur within a school. The contact details are set out below:

Working closely with the Diane Booth, the Council's Director of Children's Services, I will be closely monitoring how the pandemic is developing and will, of course, keep schools informed of any changes or developments in guidance.