

13th October 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

Re: COVID-19 measures in schools

In the last few weeks, we've seen a huge increase in the number of children and young people testing positive for COVID-19. More than 1 in 40 secondary age children in Calderdale are confirmed as having COVID-19 at the moment, and about 1 in 100 primary age children. This is just the children who we know about – up to 50% of children with COVID-19 won't have any symptoms and are unlikely to be tested. We've never seen so many cases in children locally, and this is leading to considerable disruption to learning.

Unfortunately, we are also seeing rising rates in adults, who are more vulnerable to the effects of the virus. The increase in COVID-19 cases in adults in Calderdale is almost certainly driven by infection rates in children, who are catching it in schools and passing it on to their families and friends. The rate in people 60 and over in Calderdale is one of the highest in England, and as a result more people are needing hospital care.

Because of our very high COVID-19 rate, the risk of more people in our communities becoming seriously ill and dying is also higher. This puts severe pressure on local NHS and social care services and affects their ability to care for people with COVID-19 and those with other illnesses.

This means we now need to consider what we can do to lower our rate of COVID-19.

We have advised all schools in Calderdale to consider taking the following precautions:

- 1. If someone in the household has tested positive for COVID-19 (on LFD or PCR),** advise children and young people who attend school to stay at home. If they develop symptoms, they should get a PCR test straight away. If they don't have symptoms, they should get a PCR test 3-5 days after their household member started with symptoms (or took their test if they had no symptoms). 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.

Some children are exempt from this advice:

- 12–16-year-olds who have had at least one dose of the vaccine more than 14 days ago
- Any child who has tested positive for COVID-19 via a PCR test within the past 90 days.

Parents/carers who still want their child to continue to attend school have the right for them to do so. We would, however, still strongly advise getting a PCR for your child before they return. Reducing the risk of transmission is important for the health reasons explained above but also is important to reduce the overall disruption to education.

- 2. Recommend the use of face coverings** in classrooms for secondary age education settings, and the use of face coverings by adults in all schools in communal areas, including on dedicated school transport.

3. **Ensure windows are open in the classroom** to facilitate good ventilation, as much as is practicable and particularly in areas that have been shown to have poor air quality following testing.
4. **Reduce mixing between groups** as much as possible to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.
5. **Limit visitors to the school** and consider carefully whether events such as face to face parent evenings that bring parents into the school can be managed safely or should return to online.
6. **Consider the safety of residential educational visits**, given sharing a room overnight increases the chance of catching COVID-19.

Schools may choose not to follow all of the above advice. Their decision will be based on infection rates in school and in the local area, and the measures they feel are likely to be most effective in their setting.

We understand the above will be frustrating to some of you, and welcome to others. This advice is for temporary measures and will be reviewed over the half term break. Further advice will be based on the rate of infection in schools along with the pressure on NHS services at that time. If the decision is taken to advise continued use of the above measures after half term, we will review every two weeks.

This advice applies to those children who attend primary and secondary school. The current data suggests the risk of infection is lower in the preschool age group and evidence suggests if they do catch it, they are less likely to pass it on to others. Those who attend post-16 education will have already been offered vaccination so, as a group, are likely to have additional protection already.

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

1. Continue to support your child to undertake lateral flow testing twice a week if they attend a secondary school
2. Encourage your child to wear a face covering if they attend secondary school, both in school and in public
3. Consider carefully the benefits of the vaccination programme that will shortly be rolled out to all children between the age of 12-15, which you should receive further information about, if you have not already, from your school
4. If you or your child develop symptoms of COVID-19 you should book a free NHS test as soon as possible (www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test). You can also phone 119. Stay at home until it is time to take your test.

Finally, we would like to thank you for everything you've done to keep your family and community safe, and for your patience in supporting schools at this difficult time. We're sure you're all looking forward to the half term break. Take care, both of yourselves and others. Hopefully we'll be in a much stronger position after half term.

If you or your child have any concerns about COVID-19, contact the Healthy Futures Calderdale school nursing team by phone on **0303 330 9974** or by text on **07480 635297 (young people)** or **07507 332157 (parents/carers)**.

Kind regards,



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