

**Thursday 9 September 2021**

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to confirm the arrangements for schools and settings following the summer holidays. There have been several changes to guidance around protective measures, testing, self-isolation, and vaccinations.

### **Protective Measures**

Bubbles are no longer required in schools, and children, young people and staff are no longer required to be kept in specific groups. Some schools may continue with some of the measures from last year such as staggered start and finish times and lunch breaks, as this may help with the smooth and safe operation of the school. Face coverings are no longer required, although if there is an outbreak in your child's setting, this requirement may change in order to mitigate the spread of infection in communal areas.

The government expects and recommends face coverings are worn on public transport and recommends that children and young people aged 11 and over continue to wear a face covering when travelling to secondary school or college on dedicated home to school transport.

### **Testing**

It is important that anyone displaying symptoms of Covid-19 self-isolates immediately and organises a PCR test. It is not appropriate to use rapid lateral flow tests when individuals have symptoms of Covid-19. The symptoms of Covid-19 remain the same and can be found here: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) symptoms in children - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus/coronavirus-symptoms-in-children/).

### **Self-Isolation**

The guidance around self-isolation has now changed and only those who are over 18 and 6 months and unvaccinated need to self-isolate if they come into close contact with a positive case. NHS Test and Trace will undertake contact tracing, this will no longer be undertaken by your child's school, so if you are contacted by the Test and Trace team and told that your child is identified as a close contact of a positive case, you will be advised to seek a PCR test for them. There is no need for other household members to seek a PCR test (including siblings) unless they are also identified as a close contact. There is no need to self-isolate whilst waiting for the PCR test results to come back, it is vital that children and young people continue to attend school. However, if whilst waiting for the PCR test results your child develops symptoms or tests positive then they must self-isolate immediately and follow the guidance. There is no need for fully vaccinated household members/close contacts to isolate anymore unless they themselves go onto develop symptoms or test positive.

Attendance is now mandatory, and any other reason for absence except for COVID-19 or wider medical absence, or absence for religious reasons may not be authorised by your child's school. If your child is likely to be absent for any other reason, please discuss this with your child's school. It is the decision of the Headteacher as to whether they authorise the absence in line with the DfE Attendance Guidelines.

If your child has to stay at home because they have a positive Covid test and are required to self-isolate, the school will provide remote learning for them, if they are well enough to take part. Schools will not provide remote education for absent children for any other reason.

### Asymptomatic Testing

We also continue to strongly encourage staff, secondary and further education students and all households to take part in regular testing if they are not showing symptoms. This will help to reduce the risk of the virus unknowingly entering the school community.

You can access a free LFT in a number of ways, including at the local LFT site in your district, by collecting a home LFT kit from a test site, or by ordering a home test kit online. More information about these options can be found here: [Regular Rapid Lateral Flow Coronavirus \(Covid-19\) Tests](#).

### Vaccinations

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) have updated their [guidance](#) to advise that all those aged 16-17 years old receive a first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. 16-17 year olds can get their vaccination at one of the local walk-in centres which can be found at - [Find a walk-in coronavirus \(COVID-19\) vaccination site - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#). The JCVI have also advised that young people aged 12-15 who have been identified as vulnerable due to certain underlying medical conditions should be contacted to receive a first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Young people in this group will be contacted directly to book their vaccination. It has been determined that young people in this age bracket who do not qualify through underlying health conditions do not need to be vaccinated although this is still being explored and further announcements will be made when more research has been done.

We appreciate that the changes in guidance can cause anxiety for some, but it is important that the education of our children and young people is prioritised this academic year. The likelihood of serious illness in children is extremely low and after 18 months of serious disruption, the DfE and the Local Authority are committed to ensuring that all children and young people in Essex have every opportunity to catch up and exceed their potential.

We have included a flow chart to assist you further in understanding the changes if your child tests positive, develops symptoms or is identified as a close contact.

With best wishes,



Clare Kershaw  
Director of Education  
Essex County Council



Mike Gogarty  
Director of Public Health and Wellbeing  
Essex County Council