

NHS Test and Trace: COVID-19 testing for staff and secondary aged students

Dear School Community,

We are working to keep our school open and as safe as possible. I'm guessing that families will be scanning news updates and hearing the pressures placed on schools. As it stands today, we will be open as planned on Tuesday 5th January 2021. All schools are being given direction and guidance at very short notice and I assure families that we will continue to keep channels of communication open, and that information will be shared as quickly and as sensitively as is possible.

I met with Calderdale Local Authority this morning. Families may be aware that current rates in the district are today considerably lower than other parts of the country, hence our Tier 3 position. The LA have offered reassurance that schools in Calderdale are safe to return to on this basis, and considering that the new variant is not the dominant strain in our locality. This said, the new variant will inevitably start to move further north and Calderdale will review the situation on a daily basis.

Families may have heard that testing for those without coronavirus symptoms is beginning across the country using new, quicker COVID-19 tests known as 'lateral flow tests'.

Along with all the other protective measures we already have in place, these tests will help staff and students to remain in school. (Up to one third of people who have coronavirus experience no symptoms). Lateral testing is another tool in our system of controls to help combat the virus and protect the wider community, for obvious reasons; many of our students are of a primary age, not all students and staff will be tested, and these tests are purely voluntary. School remains a very safe place and the many measures we had in place before Christmas, including bubbles will remain.

We will be testing those staff who requested tests before our return and then from the following week offering this twice weekly from a dedicated site that will be set up within school next week. In addition, secondary school age students-Yr 7 and above (who want to participate and are able to) will be offered a test, from week commencing 5 January 2021 and then again from the 11 January 2021 twice weekly at our on-school site.

I very much appreciate that for many of our secondary aged students, accessing these tests and self-administering, along with associated anxieties they bring, will simply not be possible.

For those families that feel their child can access this test, we would encourage a discussion with school by midday on Monday the 4th. I appreciate that this is a very difficult decision for families and we are here to help answer any questions.

Where we agree it is feasible, and once consent has been granted, we will give students access to tests from Tuesday the 5th. I also appreciate that for many students and families this will not be a simple decision and therefore testing will likely commence, if at all, from the following week. I enclose an instructional leaflet with some more information to help guide your decisions. We have been advised that families may wish to apply for one week's leave of absence to allow schools to prepare for testing. Where this is deemed necessary, families should contact the school to discuss further.

If after serious consideration, families are happy for their child to be tested and feel they would be able to access the test, and cope with any increase in anxiety, I ask that the form below is filled in and the enclosed consent statement returned to the school via email or with your child on Tuesday morning.

Those taking the test will be supervised by trained staff (please note we have one clinician, in the form of our School Nurse, Sara). The 'lateral flow' tests are quick and easy using a swab of your nose and throat. For under 18s, staff can oversee the swab process. Results (which take around half an hour from testing) will be shared directly with staff and students participating. Where participants are under 16, parents or legal guardians will also be informed.

In validation studies conducted by Oxford University and Public Health England, these tests were shown to be as accurate in identifying a case as a PCR test (99.68% specificity). The tests have lower sensitivity but they are better at picking up cases when a person has higher viral load, hence the need to test frequently.

What if a member of staff / student tests positive?

Participating staff and students who test positive will be informed about their results individually. Where participants are under 16, parents or legal guardians will also be notified. Guidance on safe travel and additional precautions will be provided along with test results.

Individuals will need to take a further 'PCR test' (similar to those done in local and regional testing sites) on the same day (or as soon as possible). School will be able to provide these PCR test kits to perform at home or individuals/families can go to www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test or call 119 to book a follow-up test. If ordering a PCR test independently, individuals/families should choose to visit a drive-through test site if possible, as it is faster than requesting a home test.

During this time while individuals wait for the PCR result (via text / email) they will need to self-isolate.

If the PCR test returns a positive result, individuals will have to self-isolate and follow the guidance from NHS Test and Trace.

What happens if the test is negative?

Individuals will be able to stay in school as normal. Individuals will only be told if they test positive on a 'lateral flow' test, so no news should be assumed as a negative result. A small number of students may need to repeat the test if the first test was invalid or void for some reason.

What if a close contact at school tests positive?

A close contact of someone in school/college who has tested positive for COVID-19 will be able to return to school if they agree to be tested once a day for 7 days and the test is negative. If they do not want to take the test, they will need to self-isolate as per the national guidelines. This does not apply to household members or close contacts outside of school who will still need to self-isolate. Further details will be provided at the time, but if you would prefer to self-isolate instead of doing daily testing, you can. As a school we are carefully considering how and if we can facilitate serial testing as this would depend on students' ability to access testing and staffing levels within a bubble.

What if my child develops symptoms?

This testing programme at school is for people with no symptoms. If your child develops symptoms at any time (such as a high temperature; a new, continuous cough; or a loss or change to their sense of smell or taste) they must immediately self-isolate, and book a test by calling 119 (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) or 0300 303 2713 (Scotland) or visiting <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>.

We know that the situation locally and nationally is rapidly changing. We understand too that the changes to guidance are at times confusing for us all and therefore it is very important to the school that any questions or concerns are shared. We are here to help and appreciate your support.

I wish you a healthy and happy new year.

Yours sincerely,

Sue Ackroyd

Principal