LETTER TO HEADTEACHERS

20/09/2021

Dear Headteachers

**Managing Covid-19 in educational settings**

After such a challenging 2020/21 academic year, I sincerely hope you and your staff had an opportunity for rest over the summer break.

The latest [DFE guidance](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gov.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fpublications%2Factions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak%2Fschools-covid-19-operational-guidance%23stepping&data=04%7C01%7Cstuart.lines%40bracknell-forest.gov.uk%7C27e9cbd2ca1740ea041508d972b28380%7Cf54c93b70883478fbf3d56e09b7ca0b7%7C0%7C0%7C637666933312742622%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=8KBOXwM%2FULaRecSGHusO8qziRSvRZ97Ts8y3z9zbEKQ%3D&reserved=0) outlines how schools are to operate during the Autumn Term and helps us understand how we will continue to manage and respond to Covid-19 now that it is becoming endemic within our communities.

Whilst some mitigations (enhanced cleaning of hands and surfaces, ventilation and testing) remain in place, other precautions that schools employed successfully last year to reduce the risk of transmission (including bubble arrangements and the use of face coverings in secondary schools) are no longer routinely advised by DfE.

Your local public health teams, council officers and PHE health protection teams will continue to have regular dialogue with you to help support and advise. It is important that you continue to share your views and experiences on implementing the new guidance.

**Contingency Plans**

It is important that schools have [contingency plans](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fassets.publishing.service.gov.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fuploads%2Fsystem%2Fuploads%2Fattachment_data%2Ffile%2F1011704%2F20210817_Contingency_Framework_FINAL.pdf&data=04%7C01%7Cstuart.lines%40bracknell-forest.gov.uk%7C27e9cbd2ca1740ea041508d972b28380%7Cf54c93b70883478fbf3d56e09b7ca0b7%7C0%7C0%7C637666933312752579%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=gVqgtu%2Fb8bQACJlc9Ozfh52X%2BxsfwlThsQ0Np0YhQ38%3D&reserved=0) (or *outbreak management plans*) in place which set out the steps you will take should you suspect in-school transmission is taking place. The guidance moves away from contact tracing for single cases to an outbreak management approach, where cases and their contacts will be followed up by NHS Test and Trace.

DfE guidance gives thresholds that trigger the setting to undertake an additional assessment and seek advice as necessary. Relevant thresholds are:

* 5 cases or 10% (whichever is reached first) test-confirmed cases of Covid-19 within 10 days, among students or staff clustered in a consistent group or cohort, or
* Severe illness (e.g. students or staff admitted to hospital due to Covid–19).

In this event your contingency plans should include actions which formally require Director of Public Health (DPH) approval, including:

* additional coronavirus testing
* the reintroduction of face coverings in certain circumstances
* moving certain activities online, such as open days and parents' evenings
* restricting the mixing of groups by re-introducing ‘school bubbles’

*However, should you be concerned that in-school transmission may be taking place you can introduce whichever of these mitigations you consider most appropriate immediately, without waiting for individual approval.*

Where you would like public health advice please call the DfE helpline (0800 046 8687, option 1) who will refer you to the local PHE health protection team where appropriate.  You can also get additional local public health advice by emailing your local authority on Heather.cook@slough.gov.uk

**Testing**

Pupils and staff should continue to test twice weekly at home until the end of September, when this will be reviewed.

**Vaccination of over 16 year olds**

Nationally, we are seeing the welcome benefits of vaccination in terms of reduced hospitalisations and deaths.

Those over 16 can get vaccinated at a number of walk-in vaccination clinics in the local area. The vaccines are safe and effective, and give the best protection against COVID-19. For a full list of local drop-in clinics visit [Walk-in vaccination clinics | Frimley Health and Care](https://www.frimleyhealthandcare.org.uk/living-here/covid-19-vaccination/walk-in-vaccination-clinics/). We would encourage you to share this information to encourage uptake of the vaccine.

**Vaccination of 12-15 year olds**

You will have seen the recent announcement from the CMO regarding vaccinating 12-15 year olds. NHS colleagues have been working hard to prepare for this and the roll out will be commencing very shortly. You will receive further information on this directly.

I also understand that you may well receive queries from parents concerned or confused about the apparent conflict with the JCVI view that there was insufficient evidence of benefit to warrant vaccination on health grounds alone. However, the CMO decision considers the range of benefits and harms and concludes that there is overall benefit in minimising further disruption to education.

Again, colleagues will be on hand to help you with these queries.

Overall, the risk of severe illness in children and young people fortunately continues to remain very low indeed. However, it is acknowledged that there have been significant harms associated with disrupted education and the direction of travel advocated by Government therefore is to keep children in education wherever it is possible to do so safely. I wish to assure you that local partners will continue to be on hand to provide you with the help and support to enable this.

Kind regards

Stuart Lines, DPH Alan Adams, DCS Slough Borough Council