

Contact: Amanda Healy
Direct Tel: 03000 264323
email: amanda.healy@durham.gov.uk



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Dear Parents and Carers

Information regarding additional measures in school in response to the new Omicron variant of COVID-19

We appreciate that you will already be aware that some national measures have been reintroduced in response to the emergence of a new COVID-19 variant, which is called Omicron.

All individuals who have been identified as a close contact of a suspected or confirmed case of the Omicron variant of COVID-19, irrespective of vaccination status and age, will be contacted directly and required to self-isolate immediately and asked to book a PCR test.

There are some extra measures which schools have been asked to introduce and these include:

- The use of face coverings in communal areas for secondary age pupils
- The use of face coverings in communal areas for all adults in all primary, special and secondary schools
- The use of face coverings on home to school transport for secondary aged pupils
- Schools will carefully consider whether educational visits and residential trips should go ahead

Also face coverings are now compulsory in some settings on public transport and in shops for all people aged 11yrs and over unless they are exempt.

All travellers arriving into the UK will need to isolate and get a PCR test by 'day two' after arrival. They may end their isolation once they receive a negative result.

In addition, there are a large number of children and young people in County Durham testing positive for COVID-19 and the highest case rates are in school age children. This is leading to spread of COVID-19 within families and into older age groups.

We know that the vaccine is helping to prevent serious illness and deaths. However, the vaccine does not always stop people from becoming infected or spreading COVID-19 and we know that those with underlying conditions are more vulnerable.

Adult and Health Services

Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham DH1 5UG
Main Telephone 03000 26 0000

COVID-19 cases in children is disrupting their education, affecting schools and has an impact on the wider community. Our priority remains, to maximise the number of children and young people in face-to-face education and minimise any disruption.

In addition to the new extra measures outlined above recommended by national government we have made additional recommendations for schools to consider. As a result, your school may contact you to advise on some changes in your school. These changes may include:

- The use of face coverings in classrooms for secondary age pupils
- Staggering start and finish times
- Reducing mixing of pupils in school by grouping pupils by class or year group
- To cancel or postpone educational visits and residential trips
- Open days or events to move to a virtual format
- To cancel or postpone whole school events e.g., assemblies

These recommendations build on the ongoing work by schools to ensure good ventilation, cleaning, and respiratory and hand hygiene. They will be reviewed as infection levels change.

In addition, we are also asking you to support your school with increased testing when there is a positive COVID-19 case in your household:

- PCR testing for all adults and pupils if they are a close contact of a positive case in your household*.
- Daily LFT testing at home for 7 days for any adult, secondary age pupil or primary key stage 2 pupil who is a household contact of a positive case and is exempt from isolation and continues to attend school. The testing of primary age pupils is at parental discretion. Testing should start from the day the household member has symptoms or if they don't have symptoms from when they tested positive*.

**Note: People who have tested positive with a PCR test within the last 90 days should not be encouraged to test unless they develop new symptoms*

Please also carefully consider the benefits of the COVID-19 vaccination programme for you and your family including all adults and children aged 12-15 years.

Ordering or collecting LFD home testing kits

We would recommend you have a supply of LFD testing kits at home in the event you need to use them. You can order home testing kits to be delivered to your home here www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests

Or you can collect LFD testing kits at Community Collect sites across the County. To find your nearest collection point please enter your post code here maps.test-and-trace.nhs.uk

If you pick up tests from a pharmacy, you may be asked for a 'collect code' this helps the NHS match your details to the tests. To get a 'collect code' please visit test-for-coronavirus.service.gov.uk/collect-lateral-flow-kits

Please register the result of your home test at www.gov.uk/report-covid19-result

What to do if you develop symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) or test positive for COVID-19

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are recent onset of:

- new continuous cough and/or
- high temperature and/or
- a loss of, or change in, normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)

If you or a member of your household develops symptoms, you should get a PCR test and remain at home at least until the result is known. Book a free PCR test at www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test If positive, you should isolate until at least 10 days after their symptoms appeared.

If you are concerned about your symptoms, you can seek advice from NHS 111 at <https://111.nhs.uk/> or by phoning 111.

If you have a positive test result but do not have symptoms you should stay at home and self-isolate for 10 days from the date the positive test was taken. This isolation period will be extended if you go on to develop symptoms by counting 10 full days from the day following their symptom onset.

Help, support, and further information.

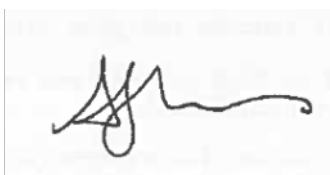
To help you comply with the requirement to self-isolate, the County Durham Together Community Hub can provide access to essential supplies, financial support, and emotional support as well as other services. Please visit www.durham.gov.uk/covid19help or call the Community Hub on 03000 260260 for further details.

There is also support available the coronavirus section via durhamlocate.org.uk

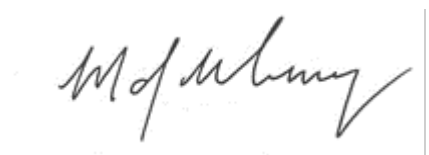
Please be reassured that for most people, coronavirus (COVID-19) will be a mild illness.

Thank you again for everything you are doing to support you child and your school and in helping to keep your family and community safe.

Yours sincerely



Amanda Healy
Director of Public Health



Jim Murray
Head of Education & Skills