

Cheshire West & Chester Council

Office of the Director of Public Health

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Dear Parents and Carers,

As half term approaches, I am writing to update you on the current position concerning COVID-19 cases in the borough as well as transmission rates in our schools and colleges. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank you for supporting our schools and helping to ensure that the majority of pupils and students have been able to remain in face-to-face education by taking action, including regular testing and vaccination, to break chains of transmission.

Our schools have also worked closely with our public health and education teams to introduce, where necessary, a range of additional measures to help reduce COVID-19 transmission, including face coverings in communal areas, reducing mixing in assemblies and shared facilities, restricting or temporarily stopping some activities, and increasing testing capacity.

In addition, the in-school vaccination programme for children aged 12-15 years has started and is progressing well across the borough. To date, 21% of all 12-15 year old students have received their first dose, as have 65% of 16-17 year olds. Vaccination is the best defence against COVID-19 and important in this age group to protect them, minimise disruption to their face-to-face education and reduce the risk of transmission within schools, families and the wider community. I have attached the COVID-19 information leaflet on vaccination that also includes links to other sources of information. Information can also be found here: <https://www.cheshireccg.nhs.uk/news/news-stories/covid-19-vaccination-programme-what-you-need-to-know/>



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You may have heard in the media that it will soon be possible to book vaccination for 12-15 year olds using the National Booking Service (online or via 119). This will complement the in-school vaccination programme and mean that vaccination will be able to continue throughout school holidays.

You will probably be aware from reports in the media, however, that as we go into the autumn, cases are increasing nationally. Case rates in Cheshire West and our neighbouring areas are higher than the national average and are still increasing. For the seven-day period from 7th to 13th October, the rate in Cheshire West was 528 per 100,000 people compared to the England average of 424 per 100,000. The highest age group rate is currently seen in the 10-19s where there are 1,680 cases/100,000 (England average 1,256/100,000), and this is set to increase to at least 1,835/100,000 by 16th October (complete data date).

New Guidance – Testing

You will also know that following concerns raised about potential in-school transmission linked to pupils/students who are household contacts of cases (and other contacts/household contacts), the Government has updated the schools' guidance. You should have received a letter about the changes (dated 11th October) from the Secretaries of State for Education and Health and Social Care.

The new guidance explains that local public health teams can now implement daily Lateral Flow Device (LFD) testing for secondary aged students in households where there is a confirmed case or for other close contacts (identified by NHS Test and Trace) while they wait for the results of their PCR test.

As long as the pupil's/student's daily LFD test result is negative, they can continue to attend school as usual. If they test positive, however, they must self-isolate for 10 full days from the date of the positive test and they should obtain a confirmatory PCR test.

New Guidance – Director of Public Health Recommendation

The new guidance can be applied in response to outbreaks/potential outbreaks or in areas of high prevalence. So far, we have recommended additional measures (e.g. face coverings in communal areas, restricted activities etc.) on a case-by-case basis, but in view of the high and rising case rates in the borough and in our neighbouring local authority areas, we are now making the general recommendation that if one individual in a household tests positive, any children and young people in that household who attend school or college should:

- Take a PCR test (ideally on Day 3-5 after first exposure), and
- Take a daily LFD test for 10 consecutive days from the date of first exposure
- Continue to attend school provided that their test results (PCR and LFD) are negative

- Self-isolate for 10 full days from the date of the test if any of their test results are positive
- In the event of a positive LFD test result, obtain a confirmatory PCR test

- If the confirmatory PCR test is taken within the two days following the positive LFD result and PCR result is negative, the young person can return to school/college.

In the case of other contacts (identified by NHS Test and Trace), we will continue to advise on any additional testing measures on a case-by-case basis.

LFD Test Kits are available:

- From school or college
- Online [Order coronavirus \(COVID-19\) rapid lateral flow tests - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests)
- From community pharmacies [Regular rapid lateral flow coronavirus \(COVID-19\) tests - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/regular-rapid-lateral-flow-coronavirus-tests)
- From certain Cheshire West and Chester Council test sites
 - Stanney Oaks Leisure Centre, Ellesmere Port
 - The Dingle Centre, Winsford
 - Pop up mobile testing unit
 - Libraries: Northwich, Neston, Frodsham and Ellesmere Port and the mobile library service

Venues for the mobile testing units and opening times for all Cheshire West and Chester Services are available at [Testing without symptoms \(cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk\)](https://cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/testing-without-symptoms)

We are recommending the above measures to ensure the safety of children and staff in our schools, to minimise the disruption to young people's education and to ensure our schools remain open. Thank you once again for your continued support and co-operation.

Yours sincerely



Ian Ashworth
Director of Public Health