

December 2021 - secondary

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to confirm changes to the arrangements for schools and colleges as a result of the new Omicron variant that were announced over the weekend. In addition, I would like to remind you of the current arrangements that are in place to prioritise and protect the education of children and young people up until the end of term, given that there are also rising numbers of the Delta variant in Essex.

Face coverings

The Prime Minister announced further measures regarding face coverings, including when and where these should be worn. Face coverings should be worn in communal areas in all secondary schools and colleges by staff, visitors, and students in year 7 and above, unless they are exempt. Students in year 7 or above should also continue to wear face coverings on public and dedicated school transport, unless they are exempt. Please ensure that your child is adhering to this advice.

Symptoms, testing and self-isolation

We are receiving reports of a wide variety of symptoms being associated with positive cases of Covid-19. While some children appear to be presenting with symptoms such as diarrhoea and vomiting, the Government advice is still focused on the main three symptoms which can be found here: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) symptoms in children - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms-in-children/). If your child is unwell with a symptom not on the NHS list, it would be advisable to test them with an LFD test.

If your child tests positive on the LFD Test, your child should isolate, and you should book a PCR test online: [PCR Test Booking](#)

The school will arrange remote education so that they can continue their learning, if they are well enough to do so.

It is important that anyone displaying the main three symptoms self-isolates immediately and organises a PCR test. It is not appropriate to use rapid lateral flow device (LFD) tests when individuals have symptoms likely to be COVID-19.

If your child is asked to get a PCR test because they were identified as a close contact of a positive case (excluding the new Omicron variant, see below) but is not showing any symptoms they should continue to attend school until you receive the results.

You will be aware that we are now dealing with the new Omicron variant of COVID-19. There are different rules in relation to self-isolation with this variant. If your child is identified as a close contact of a suspected or confirmed case of the Omicron variant, irrespective of vaccination status and age, you will be contacted directly by NHS Test and Trace and they will be required to self-isolate immediately and asked to take a PCR test. The 10-day isolation period will need to be observed regardless of the result of the PCR test and further testing will need to be carried out on days two and eight; NHS Test and Trace will arrange this for you.

Asymptomatic testing

We continue to strongly encourage all staff, students (primary, 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. Your school has been supporting your child to participate in twice weekly testing and we continue to encourage this approach and to support schools with their communication to you about this process.

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

School attendance

Children and young people must continue to attend school unless they develop symptoms likely to be COVID-19 or have tested positive.

Contact tracing

Close contacts in schools are now identified by [NHS Test and Trace](#) and education settings are not expected to undertake contact tracing. As with positive cases in any other setting, NHS Test and Trace will work with the positive case and/or their parent to identify close contacts. Contacts from a school setting will only be traced by NHS Test and Trace where the positive case and/or their parent specifically identifies the individual as being a close contact.

Vaccinations

People aged 16 and over are recommended to have a first and second dose of COVID-19 vaccine. Most children aged 12 to 15 are currently only being offered a first dose. Find out more about COVID-19 vaccines at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/>. You will have seen that the Government announced the roll out of second doses for 12-15 year olds and we will share more information on this when we receive it.

End of term gatherings and events

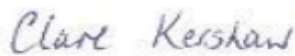
School performances can continue to take place if the schools' risk assessment deems it appropriate. However, if a school has a high infection rate, they will review the risk assessment and if necessary, make appropriate changes. This could include cancelling the gathering/event at short notice or moving the event online. When gathering indoors and/or attending an event, face coverings should be worn and we would encourage that an LFD test is taken before attendance. If your school does decide not to hold events with a parent audience, this decision has the full support of Essex County Council.

Preparation for the start of the new term in January

We would encourage your child to continue to undertake twice weekly LFD tests during the school holiday and prior to returning to their setting in January. With social mixing during the holiday period, it is vital that we support a successful start to the new term. Secondary schools have also been asked to offer an onsite test to children before they can start their education in January. Schools will let you know their approach to this but may stagger their start dates for the beginning of the new term.

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

With best wishes,



Clare Kershaw
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Essex County Council



Mike Gogarty
Director of Public Health and Wellbeing
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