

16 March 2021

Returning to School Safely

Letter to families, parents and carers from Dr Justin Varney, Director of Public Health

It has been good to see children and young people returning to the classroom and I would like to thank you for your support to your children and their schools over the past year.

I know this has not been easy for anyone, some families have been directly impacted through the loss of loved ones, or through the loss of employment or income, and for many families it has been especially hard juggling work and school on limited bandwidth or devices.

These factors and the impact of having to remain at home for such a long period away from school has undoubtedly had an impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people so I wanted to write to you to encourage you to support your children to return to school where their learning and development can be taught safely, reconnect with friends and classmates and they can start to work through some of these experiences with other children in a supported environment.

My team and I have been working closely with schools to make sure they are following the evidence and guidance on how to control coronavirus and keep everyone safe. Throughout the pandemic we have met regularly as guidelines and evidence has changed and we have worked to support teachers and students to remain safe in education settings and families and communities to keep them safe at home.

The main safety measures in education settings include social distancing, regular cleaning and handwashing, good ventilation, face coverings and where appropriate for close contact support access to personal protection equipment (PPE), suitable infection control procedures to ensure symptomatic children and/or staff are supported safely and quickly and now the additional measure of regular rapid testing using lateral flow devices for staff, students, families and their childcare bubbles.

Regular rapid testing is a key safety measure to support children's return to school by helping us to identify people with coronavirus infection and may not have symptoms. By everyone testing regularly we can identify cases more quickly and act faster to reduce the spread of the virus in education settings. We now know that about 1 in 3 people who have the infection do not have any symptoms, this isn't something we knew this time last year, and now we have access to lots more testing kits, testing regularly is our best way of stopping infections spreading in our schools and the wider community. It will also help to protect our most vulnerable family members, pupils and staff. The rapid testing for coronavirus is often called Lateral Flow Device (LFD) Testing and is now available for free to staff in primary schools and early year settings, students and staff in secondary schools, and households of children who are in any schools, including their childcare bubbles.

Your school will have been in touch about how these tests will take place, as there are some small but important differences between primary and secondary schools and higher education settings.

If you have children in secondary school, please provide consent for them to be tested and support your school by testing yourselves and encouraging children to continue testing regularly at home, as this is going to be a key part of the road map of relaxation of lockdown moving forward alongside vaccine uptake.

There are two ways for households to get LFD home testing kits:

1. Collect boxes of LFD home testing kits from several locations around the city.

- a. Collection locations can be found on the site finder tool here: <https://find-covid-19-rapid-test-sites.maps.test-and-trace.nhs.uk/>.
- b. Details of opening times for LFD kits collection at each location are on the site finder tool. **LFD home test kit collection times are in the afternoons.** Please note that the locations operate in the mornings as symptomatic PCR test sites.
- c. Parents and family members of pupils who attend Birmingham schools, and staff who provide support services to schools (catering staff, school transport drivers, etc) can visit any of these locations, without an appointment and collect up to a maximum of 4 boxes of test kits for their household members.
- d. Each box contains 7 LFD home tests that should last one person about a month based on them testing themselves twice a week.

2. Order test kits online here: <https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests>

If as a parent you are testing regularly through work twice a week then you don't need to do additional testing and as more workplaces re-open, we expect businesses to be ensuring that staff returning to the workplace are regularly testing as part of their Covid-19 safety measures.

The results of your test need to be registered on-line or by calling 119:
<https://www.gov.uk/report-covid19-result-or-by-calling-119>.

If anyone in your household tests positive or gets coronavirus symptoms, you should:

- Self-isolate immediately.
- Get a PCR test to confirm the result <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test> or call 119.
- Follow the stay at home guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection.
- Tell the school or college of the positive test result so they can get the right advice and support from our local public health team.
- Reporting every result to NHS Test and Trace on the same day you take the test.

Please remember: a negative result with the rapid testing kits means the test did not find signs of coronavirus on the day of the test and does not guarantee you do not have coronavirus, as the rapid tests are most effective at identifying when people are infectious and have lots of virus present so may miss early infection. So you should keep following all coronavirus advice including regular handwashing, social distancing and wearing a face covering where recommended.

Symptoms of coronavirus are a new and continuous cough or a high temperature, or has a loss of, or change in, their normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia). Although we know that some people have other symptoms, these remain the most common ones and people often have at least one of these three. You can find more information about symptoms of coronavirus in children at: www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/coronavirus-in-children/.

Our teams work with all schools to help to understand and follow the most current national guidance. The guidance may often change, and I appreciate that changes can cause confusion. Please continue to work with your school and our dedicated local teams for any enquiries or advice.

We have set up the [COVID-19 Champions](#) as a way of getting more information directly to citizens and there are now almost 800 champions across the city, we recently launched Covid Youth champions as well, so if you would like more on-going information about Covid, vaccination and changes in policy then do sign up and join the network.

We are also working with schools to support children and young people's wellbeing, as well as that of staff, as we recognise how hard this last year has been on them. A few resources which might be helpful are available on this video https://youtu.be/KI_xyNB598M and more links are below:

- Young Minds - <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/>
- MindEd - <https://mindedforfamilies.org.uk/young-people>
- Beat (specialist charity focused on eating disorders) - <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/>
- Birmingham Children's Partnership - <https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/bcp>
- Pause Birmingham <https://www.forwardthinkingbirmingham.org.uk/services/13-pause>
- Kooth <https://www.kooth.com/>
- Birmingham Education Partnership - <https://bep.education/>
- FRIENDS for Life programme - <https://friendsresilience.org/friendsforlife>
- Birmingham Education Support Services - <https://birminghameducationsupportservices.co.uk/>
- Birmingham Women's and Children's NHS Trust - <https://bwc.nhs.uk/youve-been-missed/>

Thank you again to you and your families for all you are doing to play your part in protecting your children, our city as we all work together to stop the spread of coronavirus and hopefully build a better future for all of our children and young people in Birmingham.

Yours sincerely



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