

Children's Services

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Dear Parent/Carer

We are writing to update families in East Sussex on our position regarding the programme of Covid testing in schools for staff and pupils. Representatives from East Sussex County Council's Public Health and Children's Services had a further meeting this week with school leaders in light of the Government's latest announcements regarding the return to school for all pupils from 8th March, as part of the overall roadmap to lifting COVID restrictions.

Schools are looking forward to welcoming students back and want to ensure that they start back in a calm and safe environment. It is important that your children are able to return to the classroom and enjoy all the benefits of being back in the school environment with their teachers and friends. We are working closely with schools to ensure that they can operate effectively whilst also ensuring that we keep our communities safe.

As you will be aware, the Government is now proposing a revised asymptomatic testing programme for mainstream secondary schools using lateral flow devices (LFDs) which can be summarised as follows:

Pupils

- 3 LFD tests on return to school for all pupils at 'Asymptomatic Testing Sites' (ATS) on the school site. Once tested, results are available in 30 mins
- Twice weekly testing at home thereafter
- Small provision of testing sites at school for those unable to test at home

Staff

- Twice weekly home testing

Asymptomatic testing is one of 12 control measures which are available to schools as part of supporting the safe return of staff and pupils from 8th March. Others include, the use of face coverings where recommended, social distancing, good ventilation and enhanced cleaning. New operational guidance¹ is now available to schools and more will follow.

Schools want to do their best to implement the new testing programme but we recognise that they face a number of challenges in implementing testing for their students in such large numbers. As well as real logistical issues, senior school leaders are concerned about unintended consequences and, in particular, wish to minimise disruption to learning as all pupils return. Schools will face different challenges according to their specific circumstances and this means that there will be differences in the way that schools roll out testing for their students.

Asymptomatic testing remains voluntary, and it is not mandatory for your child to be tested in order to return to school. It does, however, represent a key part of the Government's overall approach to ensuring the success of the staged approach to removing restrictions, by identifying cases early and reducing COVID transmission. LFD testing is also being made available more generally to those who are unable to work from home and/or work with vulnerable people.

¹ [Schools coronavirus \(COVID-19\) operational guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874122/schools-coronavirus-covid-19-operational-guidance.pdf)

Parents and carers play a key role in supporting children with their return to school and with the implementation of asymptomatic testing. Following discussion with school leaders, we have suggested to schools that they consider providing the following options for families:

- 1) Provide asymptomatic testing at school for those children where they and their parents/carers wish their child to try the test for the first time under supervision. Three tests may be provided by a school, up to 3 to 5 days apart. Parents/carers would then be provided with the means for children to commence with twice weekly home testing.
- 2) When sufficient home testing kits are available to schools, provide these to families with the required information on how to complete the tests. This would enable students to test at home where parents/carers would prefer their children not to access testing via the school. Students would commence twice weekly testing as soon as they receive the kits, under the supervision of their parents/carers.
- 3) Parents/carers choose to opt out of testing completely for their children.

For logistical reasons some schools may wish to commence testing before the 8th March, although this may not suit all families and should not be a condition of school return. All schools should aim to commence testing before the 12th March.

Pupils with a positive LFD test result will need to self-isolate in line with the guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection². Those with a negative LFD test result can continue to attend school unless they have individually been advised otherwise by NHS Test and Trace or Public Health professionals (for example as a close contact).

We wish you and your families all the best in the coming weeks as children return to school and we take these first steps towards lifting the current COVID restrictions. Thank you for your ongoing support for your children and their learning.

Yours sincerely



Stuart Gallimore
Director of Children's Services



Darrell Gale FFPH
Director of Public Health

² [Stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection)