

20 October 2021

Corporate Director: Beate Wagner

Children and Young People Services

County Hall

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Dear Head Teacher,

### Re: COVID-19 measures in schools

First of all, a big thank you to you and your teams for all you have done and continue to do to help us reduce the risk of COVID-19 in Wakefield. We appreciate just how hard you have worked and how difficult it has been through all the different stages and challenges of this pandemic.

We all want to see as many of our children and young people in school as possible, and having as 'normal' and positive a school experience as we can manage. Unfortunately, I know that for many of our schools this first half term has been disrupted by big outbreaks of COVID-19 and extremely high rates of student and staff absence.

Much as we would all like it to be, the pandemic isn't over. We are seeing significant increases in infections in Wakefield District. Infections in school age children have been the main contributory factor to our rate of COVID-19 in recent weeks, with rates of infection in 5-16 year olds currently standing at over 1,200/100,000. For our secondary schools, the rate is over 2000/100,000, which means that more than 1 in every 50 secondary school children in Wakefield District currently has COVID.

We are now seeing children pass infection to family members and local communities, some of whom will be more vulnerable to serious illness from COVID-19. The number of admissions to Mid-Yorkshire Hospitals is rising, just as they prepare for a very challenging winter where there is also a risk of high numbers of flu cases. Even when adults are not hospitalised, the high numbers who are infected or who need to care for sick children mean that our health and social care services are under pressure from high levels of absent staff. We know that school leaders have also struggled with the impact of staff absences.

We also want to give the schools-based vaccination programme for 12-15 year olds, and the booster programme for vulnerable adults, an opportunity to take full effect.

This means we now need to recommend further steps to reduce the amount of COVID-19 transmission in our schools, and the impact on the wider community.

Following a recommendation from our COVID-19 Health Protection Board last week, and consultation and feedback with our schools since the beginning of term, we are advising all schools in Wakefield District to consider implementing the following additional measures when they return following the half term break.

- 1. If someone in the household has tested positive for COVID-19 (on LFD or PCR),** advise pupils to stay at home. If they develop symptoms, they should get a PCR test straight away. If they don't have symptoms, they should get a PCR test 3-5 days after

their household member started with symptoms (or took their test if they had no symptoms). If this test is negative, the child can return to school but must stay at home and arrange another test if they go on to develop symptoms.

Some children are exempt from this advice:

12–16-year-olds who have had at least one dose of the vaccine more than 14 days ago

Any child aged between 5 – 16 who has tested positive for COVID-19 via a PCR test within the past 90 days.

Parents/carers who still want their child to continue to attend school have the right for them to do so. We hope that most parents will understand the reasons behind the request and will feel able to support the school, especially as they will have at least one household member self-isolating at home already.

If a parent is not able to support the school in this request, we would still strongly advise that their child obtains a PCR test before returning to school. Daily lateral flow tests could also be considered, but please be aware that these detect only 50% of positive cases.

2. **Recommend the use of face coverings** in classrooms and communal areas for secondary age and post-16 education settings, and the use of face coverings by adults in all schools in communal areas, including on dedicated school transport.
3. **Ensure windows are open in the classroom** to facilitate good ventilation, as much as is practicable and particularly in areas that have been shown to have poor air quality (if your school has access to CO2 monitors).
4. **Reduce mixing between year groups and classes** as much as possible to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.
5. **Wherever possible, suspend whole-school or year group events** e.g. assemblies. Revert staff and governors' meetings to virtual format.  
**Limit visitors to the school** and consider carefully whether events that bring parents into the school can be managed safely or should return to online.
6. **Carefully consider whether educational trips and residential visits should go ahead.** This is especially important because being on transport together for long periods, and/or sharing overnight accommodation, increases the chance of transmitting COVID-19.

As we have done throughout the pandemic, we will support schools with both Public Health and operational decision-making as required. We hope that the above advice will give a clear Public Health steer which will guide and help justify the decisions you make as school leaders.

We are recommending that schools implement this advice on return from the half term break.

We will review and refresh this advice in two weeks' time, and again at the end of November, when we expect the schools-based vaccination offer to be completed and the booster programme to be well advanced.

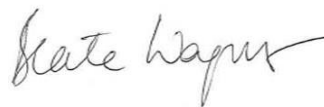
Further advice will be based on the rate of infection in schools and the pressure on health and social care services at that time.

Finally, we would like to thank you for your ongoing support. We're sure you're all looking forward to the half term break. Take care, both of yourselves and others.

Kind regards,

Handwritten signature of Anna Hartley in black ink.

Anna Hartley  
Director of Public Health

Handwritten signature of Beate Wagner in black ink.

Beate Wagner  
Director of Children and Young People's Services