

South West Regional Consensus Schools Statement

21/10/21

All South West local authority areas are in areas of rapidly rising infection and therefore triggering thresholds for additional action. To ensure consistency, South West Directors of Public Health and regional colleagues have jointly agreed the additional advice and action set out below in order that their schools can implement additional Covid response measures as proportionate or necessary. This statement works within the parameters set out within the educational [Contingency Framework](#).

Aims:

1. To protect population health and prevent widespread transmission of Covid 19
2. To support schools and early years settings to stay open and to maximise children's access to education, learning and mental and emotional health
3. To strengthen awareness of the identification of symptoms and key messages relating to testing
4. To continue to promote and publicise the effectiveness of vaccination as the best protection for everyone
5. To provide advice and consistency of approach across the region that helps schools take decisions when thresholds have been met on a case by case basis

Situation Summary

- The South West is experiencing the impact of national rising case rates and the impact of increased transmission arising from false negative PCR results
- SW Case rates have increased sharply against the national average and are expected to continue to rise
- The majority of cases are in school age groups. There is evidence of this translating into adults of parent age.
- Over 60 rates are rising steadily. Hospital Admissions for Covid have increased

Risk Assessment

- The greater prevalence is being seen in school age children and their families
- All local authority areas are in areas of rapidly rising infection and therefore triggering thresholds that warrant additional action
- Enhanced mitigation measures are required to prevent transmission, prevent school closures and to maintain appropriate levels of education

Mitigations

Given the evidence of spread of infection in pupils and the impact on staffing across South West educational settings since term began, we are advising all settings to review their contingency plans within the national contingency framework to implement, where possible and appropriate, those protective measures listed where threshold levels have been reached. This will help to minimise the spread of infection and maintain good quality face to face education.

Where local rates are high, and schools are experiencing challenges from widespread transmission, or where there is a clear risk of widespread transmission South West Directors of Public Health **recommend** schools invoke a precautionary and sensible set of measures; maintaining these for 14 days post half term (whilst we review) to limit the impact of social mixing at half term.

Particular measures for consideration on a case by case basis include:

1. Continued good infection prevention control (ventilation, touchpoint cleaning), including in areas where staff gather
2. Promote and publicise the effectiveness of vaccination as the best protection for all eligible cohorts including staff and students
3. Continued efforts on testing. Examples are included in the DfE participation toolkit, including:
 - a. Household siblings (secondary school age) of confirmed cases are advised to take daily LFD while awaiting their PCR test results and to continue to attend school (unless test is positive). This is also advised for primary school aged children but is at the discretion of the parent/guardian
 - b. Given high prevalence it is appropriate to recommend daily LFD testing for all close contacts identified by NHS Test and Trace whilst individuals await their PCR results
 - c. Promotion of twice weekly asymptomatic testing
 - d. During an outbreak and following a risk assessment with the Local Authority Public Health team or the UK Health Security Agency Health Protection Team, to extend daily LFD testing for close or household contacts (identified by NHS Test and Trace) while awaiting PCR results to a minimum of 5 days, increasing to 7 days as necessary to ensure the final test is taken on a school day
 - e. If unwell stay at home. If negative for COVID individuals should still wait until 24 hours post fever to go back into a setting. Colds and other non-Covid symptoms are circulating but in the first instance cardinal symptoms should be treated as possible COVID and trigger isolation and testing. This is the case even if others in the setting /group have tested negative for similar symptoms
4. The introduction of face coverings in communal areas such as corridors when movement occurs between lessons (for secondary school and college settings)
5. Reduced mixing between groups of students as much as possible including consideration of pausing 'whole school' assemblies for the time being and any other 'large gatherings'.

Next steps for schools

After reviewing your risk assessments please do consult with your Director of Public Health if you need further support