



To all Headteachers

**Children, Young People and  
Education Directorate**

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Dear Colleague

As the end of the second full week of the new school year appears on the horizon it is clear that the protective measures involved in daily school life are placing a significant burden on all staff in schools, and leaders are being faced with unexpected operational challenges each day. I would again like to thank you on behalf of all Kent's children and young people for rising to these challenges, we continue to receive reports that children enjoy and value their time back in the classroom and parents feel supported by schools.

Where it is possible to reduce the burden on schools at this time we will, balancing any changes with our statutory responsibilities. Yesterday maintained schools were provided with a letter regarding the updated financial compliance programme, as part of reducing the burden on schools full compliance visits will not recommence until January 2021 and schools have been asked to provide scanned copies of documents for the current period in lieu of visits. It was the intention for this to reduce the burden on schools and not put pressure on school leaders at this time, however the deadline for these documents to be provided by 25<sup>th</sup> September did not strike the balance. Over the coming days I will liaise with Schools Financial Services to identify a revised programme for this period that continues to ensure we fulfil our statutory obligations but not place an unnecessary pressure on schools; the 25<sup>th</sup> September deadline will be revised. I am sorry for the anxiety this has caused some colleagues.

### **Managing Confirmed Cases in Schools**

The Government guidance on managing cases in schools was changed this morning. Previously schools were required to contact the Health Protection Team when they had been informed of a positive case of somebody in the school. This has now changed and schools are advised to call, in the first instance, the DfE helpline when they become aware of a positive case. The guidance for all schools now reads:

You must take swift action when you become aware that someone who has attended your setting has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19). **You should contact the DfE Helpline on 0800 046 8687** and select option 1 for advice on the action to take in response to a positive case. You will be put through to a team of advisors who will inform you what action is needed based on the latest public health advice. If, following triage, further expert advice is required the adviser will escalate your call to the local health protection team. The health protection team will also contact settings directly if they become aware that someone who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) attended the setting - as identified by NHS Test and Trace.

We would ask that schools continue to inform KCC of action through the online form, this does not include where an individual pupil or staff member displays symptoms but is awaiting a test. [Notification of a COVID-19 Case](#)

## Home Learning

The number of children and young people being required to self-isolate for 14 days in response to a confirmed case remains low; however it is clear that throughout this school year there will be times when it will be necessary for education to be delivered remotely to pupils at short notice. The DfE recently wrote to Local Authorities requesting that schools be reminded of the support offered and relevant guidance. I would therefore like to remind schools of the blended learning materials within the local guidance we produced before the summer <https://www.kelsi.org.uk/news-and-events/news/primary/coronavirus>

## Kent Test

Kent Test will take place on Thursday, October 15 for pupils who attend a Kent school and from Saturday, October 17 for all other students. Guidance will be sent to schools early next week to ensure you are prepared for testing and are aware what you will need to do if local issues arise, such as where individual children or school bubbles are self-isolating.

## 'The Rule of Six'

As of the 14<sup>th</sup> September the 'rule of 6' came into effect in England. This means that no person may participate in a gathering which consists of more than six people unless it is one of the explicit exceptions.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing>

The law includes an exception to the rule of six where gatherings *are reasonably necessary for the purposes of education or training*. The Government has not issued detailed guidance on what it considers necessary for the purposes of education or training. We know that in response many schools have decided to not continue with planned face to face open events in which education is not being delivered, instead these are being held virtually. This is an approach that we support.

Experience from the relatively small number of positive cases in schools so far this term has indicated that contact between staff is an area where PHE advisors have taken a conservative approach when identifying contacts. Staff that have met together at a distance of greater than 2m would not be classified as 'contacts' if one of them were to test positive according to the [national guidance](#), however we understand that where schools have had conversations with PHE to identify contacts, advisors have sought high levels of confidence from schools regarding distanced contact between staff. The view has been taken that staff who have been in the same room for more than 15 minutes, despite being more than 2m apart, have been in contact with each other, and therefore the number of staff advised to self-isolate is greater.

Schools should consider whether staff to staff contact is necessary in each case in order to minimise the potential that one positive test result leads to all staff who have met together being required to isolate at home for 14 days and not in school. This is particularly in the case of SLT and other school leaders. It is of course impractical for staff in a school to not come into contact at points, however the use of video conferencing for meetings is encouraged where appropriate.

## Symptoms

There is a national 'case definition' which identifies Covid symptoms as:

- **a high temperature** – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)
- **a new, continuous cough** – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)
- **a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste** – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal

Where an individual presents with one of the above symptoms they should self-isolate and receive a test. We understand that there is much discussion nationally regarding additional symptoms and their link to Covid 19, however the above three symptoms remain the only symptoms where an individual needs to isolate and seek a test unless they are requested to seek a test by a health professional.

We are also aware of cases where children or staff present with one of the above symptoms for a short period of time, such as 1 day, and then wish to return to school without testing or self-isolation when they no longer have these symptoms; often after having discussed their symptoms with a health professional such as a GP who concludes they are likely to have an illness other than Covid.

We have sought advice on this matter and it remains that anybody presenting with one of the three symptoms must isolate for 10 days and only return prior to that if they have received a negative test result and feel well. It is important that schools consistently follow the procedures set out in their policies and risk assessments and that those policies are

based on current guidance, which has not changed on this matter. A telephone consultation with a health professional that reports Covid is unlikely is not a reason for the school to deviate from the policy where an individual has had one of the three Covid symptoms.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection#ending-self-isolation-and-household-isolation>

## **The Use of Bleach in Schools**

The health and safety team would like to clarify the use of bleach in schools during the Coronavirus pandemic. There is currently confusion as to whether schools should be using bleach or other bleach-based products due to historical advice given to Kent schools.

The current advice from Public Health England relating to the cleaning of non-healthcare settings which schools have been advised to follow during the COVID pandemic, outlines the importance of disinfecting when cleaning. A disinfectant is a chemical liquid that destroys bacteria. The most well-known disinfectant is bleach, which is generally used to clean work surfaces and toilets. Whilst bleach is a chemical that is commonly used by us all, it is nevertheless a hazardous substance which can cause significant harm to health if it is not used appropriately or the manufacturers guidance is not followed. Bleach contains a solution of sodium hypochlorite and can be particularly dangerous if it is mixed with other cleaning agents as it can produce a dangerous toxic gas, chlorine, in certain circumstances. If this type of chemical reaction occurs, inhalation of the toxic chlorine fumes can quickly make a person feel overcome and breathing difficulties amongst other health issues can quickly occur and could be life threatening.

As part of the management process for the safe use of chemicals, all schools should have completed a COSHH risk assessment for each chemical being used at their site and put in the necessary controls to reduce any risks from the hazards identified within their risk assessments. COSHH risk assessments are required for many chemicals other than bleach and relevant school staff will already be used to undertaking COSHH risk assessments.

Any staff who undertake activities where chemicals are being used should have been given the appropriate instruction (which is a form of training) on the safe use of that chemical as outlined in the sites COSHH activity risk assessment and records of the training should be held on site. If your school is likely to use bleach or bleach-based products and staff have not received training in their safe use, please ensure that they are given the appropriate training. Appropriate training could simply be in the form of a 'toolbox talk' and must be given by a competent person who has undertaken COSHH training and is familiar with the safe use of chemicals. This includes online training.

As part of the prevention of possible transmission of COVID 19, all schools should follow the current government and Public Health England guidance given for the cleaning of their premises which may outline the use of bleach-based products during the COVID pandemic. It should be recognised that bleach is not and has never been a banned

substance by the Health and Safety Executive and is a permissible chemical that can be used within a working environment.

Support materials for the use of hazardous substances is available on KELSI <https://www.kelsi.org.uk/policies-and-guidance/health-and-safety-guidance>

*Please note that this supersedes any previous guidance issued by KCC in relation to the use of bleach within KCC schools*

Finally, I am conscious that today's letter has been one of the lengthier ones. I continue to receive reports that these regular letters are valued, however I appreciate that it can be difficult to refer to information in previous letters. I will continue to use these letters to inform of you of important local and national changes relevant to us all in this period but we will also be establishing an FAQ section on KELSI so that you are provided with one place where all up to date information is held. New FAQ's will be appended to a letter once a week.

Yours sincerely



Matt Dunkley CBE  
Corporate Director, Children, Young People and Education