

11 December 2020

Dear Colleague,

### **NHS Test and Trace: Covid-19 Testing for schools and colleges**

Yesterday, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care announced that Mobile Testing Units will be used in areas across north east London, parts of Essex and parts of Kent to test secondary school and college aged children and young people. We are writing to explain what this means in practice and to reassure you that tests will be delivered independently of schools and colleges and that we remain committed to supporting children and young people to be in schools and colleges until the end of the term.

We remain very appreciative of the work you and your teams have done to provide the very best education for children and to keep them safe in schools and colleges over the whole of the pandemic period. Because we are now experiencing sudden increases in covid-19 incidents in these areas, we have set up this testing programme to stop the spread amongst school age children and to gather information about the transmission of the coronavirus amongst 11-18 year olds.

The testing programme is not directly linked to transmission in schools or colleges – but we are asking for your help in reaching as many 11-18 year olds as possible.

From today, deployment will begin of Mobile Testing Units across your area. These are walk in testing units and are designed to make sure as many people as possible may have a test. We are asking you to encourage all staff, students and their families to take a test at a Mobile Testing Unit or any other local site, regardless of whether they are currently showing symptoms.

There will be a range of testing options available in your area, including the Mobile Testing Units with walk-in as well as an enhanced capacity which you can book online via gov.uk. Do look out for more local communications shortly.

The tests are not obligatory but the more people who take them, the better able we will be to contain the virus. Along with the other measures you are taking to keep children and young people safe, these tests will help reduce the risk of people without symptoms transmitting the virus. As school and college leaders, we are asking you to support the message to encourage testing but want to reassure you

that we are not expecting you to be part of the test process itself or to seek parental agreement for tests. The test results will be shared directly with staff and pupils/students, and their parents/ or legal guardians if they are under 16 years old, in accordance with the usual way the national test and trace system operates. Some further information is attached at the end of this letter.

We know that the testing programme will identify some asymptomatic children and young people carrying the virus, which means they can isolate and stop the spread of the coronavirus to the wider community. It follows that the programme will therefore result in children and staff needing to isolate if they have tested positive or if they have been in close contact with people testing positive. We acknowledge that this could pose further challenges to the school and college's operations, and are grateful for the important role that schools play in contact tracing, to help in the national effort to limit the spread of the virus. It remains our explicit aim that children should be in school or at college for the whole of the term to have the full benefits of face-to-face education. We would however assure you that we will do all we can to support you in this last week of term.

We appreciate this is an extremely challenging time for everyone, but wherever possible to do so, face to face learning should continue as planned. We thank you all in advance for your continued support, and we will continue to work closely with you throughout the testing programme.

The links below give access to information from DHSC and PHE which you may find useful. If you have any questions about the testing programme that aren't answered by the DHSC/PHE information, please contact us:

**DfE coronavirus helpline**

**0800 046 8687**

**OR**

[rsc.sesl@education.gov.uk](mailto:rsc.sesl@education.gov.uk)

Your local authority has a copy of this letter.

Yours sincerely,



Claire Burton

**Regional Schools Commissioner, South East and South London**

## Further Information

### What happens to those who test positive?

- If the result of the PCR test is positive, the pupil/student/staff member will need to self-isolate for at least 10 days, they should follow the guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection and must continue to self-isolate for at least 10 and then return to school only if they have not had a high temperature for 48 hours and are well. They can return after 10 days even if they have a cough or loss of taste/smell as these symptoms can last for several weeks.
- Close contacts of positive cases including household members will need to isolate for 14 days. They will need to follow the [guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection](#)
- Schools or colleges should contact parents/legal guardians to arrange for their child to be collected. Detailed guidance is being provided on how to manage pupils and students while awaiting collection.
- You can book a test by following this link <https://www.gov.uk/getting-tested-for-coronavirus>
- Please look out for further communication which will be released locally.

### What happens to those who test negative?

- **If the test result is negative**, pupils/students will be able to remain in school/college.
- Regular handwashing, social distancing, and face coverings where appropriate will remain necessary.