

26 May 2021

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Re: PCR testing of close contacts during their 10-day self-isolation period

As a precautionary measure, following discussions with Public Health England I am asking all pupils who are identified as a contact of a positive Covid-19 case to access PCR testing. I am also asking that pupils who feel unwell but who may not have any of the three main symptoms of COVID-19 get a PCR test. By using PCR testing, positive results can be sent for genomic sequencing at specialist laboratories, helping us to identify variant of concern cases and their spread. I understand you might be concerned but there has been a number of cases of the variant originally detected in India identified across the UK, including a rising number of cases in nearby Bolton and we are beginning to see that rise in Bury. So, it is very important for everyone who has been identified as a contact to take a PCR test and stop any onward spread.

There is no evidence to suggest this variant causes more severe illness than any other variant currently circulating in the UK. However, my priority is to keep all students and staff safe and well, and this measure is to help identify any additional cases, including when people have no symptoms. It will help us to identify and isolate cases, prevent onward transmission, and minimise our case rates in the city. The PCR test should ideally be taken early in the 10-day isolation period. My request also applies to anyone who lives with a pupil who has had a positive test result. Even if your PCR test result is negative, you must continue to self-isolate for the full 10 days in line with government guidance (this is because even though the PCR is the most sensitive test available to us, it can still miss some infections). You can go online at www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test to book a free test by clicking the box that says your local council has asked you to do this. For those without internet access, you can also order or book a test over the phone by calling 119. If someone has tested positive using a PCR swab test in the last 90 days, they do not need to take another test.

I recognise that for some children and young people, testing will not be appropriate. This includes younger children or pupils who have additional needs that would make carrying out the test distressing and/or challenging. Where this is the case, the household of the contacts can be signposted to asymptomatic testing instead.

Secondary age children and their families should also continue with twice-weekly lateral flow device tests. These are for people with no COVID symptoms. A positive lateral flow test result should be logged with NHS Test and Trace and a confirmatory PCR test should be taken. While waiting for the confirmatory PCR result, all contacts should isolate immediately for 10 days. Anyone who has symptoms should stay at home or return home as soon as possible to isolate and arrange a PCR test by calling 119 or visiting www.nhs.uk/coronavirus.

The more cases we find, the better chance we have at stopping it spreading. My thanks for your continued support.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lesley Jones".

Lesley Jones
Director of Public Health