

Derrychrin Primary School

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Wednesday 16th September 2021

Dear Parents/Guardians,

COVID-19 New Guidelines Key Questions and Answers

What do the changes mean for schools?

School leaders will no longer be required to respond to every COVID-19 case and identify contacts. Instead, the Public Health Agency Contact Tracing Service will undertake a more targeted approach and will only contact the school Principal for assistance in certain circumstances, such as to obtain parent or staff contact information. This will reduce the potential for large numbers of pupils being required to self-isolate and also reduce the amount of time spent by schools contact tracing.

What do the changes mean for parents?

If your child tests positive for COVID-19 expect to be contacted by the Public Health Agency Contact Tracing Service, recognise the number (028 9536 8888) and please answer when we they call. Close contacts of the positive case (or their parent/guardian if under the age of 16) will be contacted by the Public Health Agency Contact Tracing Service by phone or text, advised they have been identified as a close contact and directed to advice on self-isolation and testing.

Parents of children who test positive for COVID-19 must contact their school as they would for any absence.

WE WOULD ASK ALL OUR FAMILIES TO BE VERY VIGILANT, ERR ON THE SIDE OF CAUTION AND TO KEEP IN MIND; OTHER CHILDREN; FAMILIES AND VULNERABLE MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL AND WIDER LOCAL COMMUNITY.

PLEASE DON'T TAKE CHANCES

If your child is sick or has any COVID-19 symptoms you should keep them and other siblings at home and book a PCR test to check if they have COVID-19 as soon as possible.

Your child should stay at home and not have visitors (self-isolate) until you get the test result – they can only leave home to have the test.

The school must see the result of the PCR test before the child can return to school.

Let the school know if your child is absent due to any COVID-19 related symptoms.

Follow the PHA guidance if you have been contacted through track and trace.

The purpose of these Questions and Answers is to address any concerns parents may have around the new changes.

What should I do if my child has symptoms of COVID-19?

The symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- a high temperature –this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature); OR
- 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); OR
- a loss of or change in sense of smell or taste.

If your child has any of these symptoms it is very important that they DO NOT attend school and should also self-isolate at home. You should arrange for them to get tested as soon as possible.

They should continue to isolate until the result of the test is available

What do I do if my child tests positive for COVID-19?

If your child tests positive for COVID-19, they should self-isolate for 10 days and not attend school during this time.

The Public Health Agency Contact Tracing Service (PHA CTS) will be in touch to determine who your child's close contacts are, and will ask for contact details for them so they can be advised appropriately.

Cases will initially receive a text to inform them of the PCR result – it takes a number of hours for these positive results to be transferred to the CTS. The text will be followed by a telephone call by the CTS, this can happen in the 48 hours after you have received the text to inform you of your positive PCR result. Parents can help by familiarising themselves with the process; if their child tests positive for COVID-19 – expect to be contacted by the CTC, recognise our number (028 9536 8888) by adding it to your phone's contacts, and please answer when we do call.

Parents and guardians are responsible for informing the school Principal of their child's positive result.

What if my child tests negative for COVID-19?

If your child tests negative for COVID-19 they can return to school as normal, provided they feel well enough to do so and you have shared the result screen with the school.

What do I do if my child's friend tests positive?

If you do not hear from the PHA CTS, then there is no requirement for you or your child to self-isolate. The PHA CTS will identify all close contacts, and follow them up directly. If your child has been identified as a close contact, then the PHA CTS will make contact with you or your child and provide advice.

However, if your child develops symptoms, then they must self-isolate and not attend school, until they have had a negative test.

What is a 'close contact'?

Within a school setting, your child would only be identified as a contact if they have had prolonged close contact with the case (someone who tests positive for COVID-19). This could mean a child in the same household or someone who has stayed overnight. It will also include intimate contact for example, kissing and where a child has received help with personal care in a school.

It does not include all children in the same class or all those who sit next to each other, because the risk of COVID spreading in the school setting is much lower than in a household.

What will now happen if there is a case of COVID-19 in a school?

Whole classes ('bubbles') will no longer be asked to self-isolate if someone in a school tests positive for COVID-19.

There will be no requirement for you or your child to self-isolate unless your child develops symptoms or you are contacted by the PHA CTS.

All close contacts of the case who need to take specific actions will be identified, contacted and advised by the PHA CTS to follow the latest guidance on self-isolation and testing. Usually the following will not need to isolate:

- adults who are fully vaccinated, where 14 days has passed since the second vaccination, who do not have symptoms and who do not develop symptoms and who have not tested positive; and
- children and young people aged under 18 who do not have symptoms and who do not develop symptoms and who have not tested positive.

Why has the approach to schools changed?

Children have missed a large amount of school in the past year. There is a growing body of evidence documenting the damaging impact this has had on the health and wellbeing of children and young people. School is incredibly important for the health and wellbeing of children as well as for their educational attainment.

We now have evidence which shows that the vast majority of those identified as school close contacts and sent home to isolate during the 2020/21 school year did not go on to develop COVID19.

Additionally, the vaccination programme has now reached 90% of adults and approaching 88% are fully vaccinated. The vaccine is highly effective at preventing serious illness and hospitalisation.

At this stage in the pandemic the best place for children is in school. Our schools are safe. Closures and isolation of children have primarily been to help control community transmission to protect the adult population.

Do you have evidence that this new approach is safe, even with the Delta variant now dominant?

Yes. A study published in England during the summer found that, across all the post primary schools taking part, only 1.6% of those identified as close contacts went on to become confirmed cases within 14 days. This study was carried out in schools during the summer term in 2021 when the Delta variant was becoming dominant.

A report covering the whole 2020/21 school year published by Public Health Scotland on 1st September 2021 reported that only 7.9% of close contacts in primary school and 2.3% of close contacts in post-primary schools went on to become cases.

The proportion of close contacts that went on to become cases was highest in the third term when the Delta variant had emerged and there was routine testing of close contacts. However, the vast majority of school close contacts (89.5% in primary school and 96.5% in post primary schools) did not become cases.

How will you get close contact information from parents and children?

Parents can help by familiarising themselves with the process - if your child tests positive for COVID-19 you should expect to be contacted by the PHA CTS, recognise our number (028 9536 8888) by adding it to your phone's contacts, and please answer when we do call. We are confident we will be able to get sufficient information from cases in the vast majority of cases.

There may be occasions when the PHA will need to contact school Principals for further information such as names and contact details. However, these will be kept to a minimum and will be much less than the requirements placed on schools at present. PHA CTS has a protocol for when to contact schools based on the risk assessment of each case. PHA CTS will also ask questions about close contact with staff – for example if a child receives support from a special needs or classroom assistant – similarly contact will have to be made in those circumstances.

As with of any new measure, implementation of these new arrangements will be kept under review and will be refined and enhanced if necessary.

Will the PHA inform schools of a positive case?

No. the PHA CTS will advise that parents should inform the school if their child tests positive for COVID-19.

Under the new arrangements, identification of close contacts is now the responsibility of PHA CTS and, even upon receipt of such information from parents, schools/Principals do not need to take any action.

Where parents do inform schools, PHA have made available to schools a 'warn and inform' letter that schools may wish to use to inform parents of cases in the school and to remind everyone of the steps we should all be taking to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in school and beyond.

PHA will continue to keep positive cases number at all schools under review and will provide public health advice and assistance where necessary.

Will the close contact definition apply for all school-aged children now even outside of school settings?

No. Outside of school children will use the same close contact definition as the general population.

These definitions are solely for use within the school setting.

What about those who have previously been identified as close contacts who wouldn't now fit the definition?

Those who were previously identified as close contacts should follow the advice they were given at the time. There is no capacity in the system at this time to revisit these close contacts, due to the large number of cases notified each day.