

Coastal Together

					
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28 February 2022

Dear Parents and Carers,

On February 21st, the Prime Minister announced that England would move into a new phase of managing COVID-19. He said that we as a country would now be dealing with the virus by "moving from government restrictions to personal responsibility, so we protect ourselves without losing our liberties."

Essentially, this places responsibility on the public to manage the spread of the disease in their communities by making sensible decisions. There are no significant changes to the government's advice, just changes to the law enforcing that advice.

The global pandemic is not over yet, and the government is clear in their response that there is considerable uncertainty about the path that the virus will now take in the UK. The very nature of viruses means that new variants of COVID-19 will continue to emerge. This could include variants that make vaccines less effective, are resistant to antivirals, or cause more severe disease.

As a school, where hundreds of people gather each day, we must be careful and take sensible precautions - reducing the risk while impacting as little as possible on school life. Outbreaks of illness affect how well classes and groups run, but most importantly, we have members of our wider community and staff with vulnerable family members (and vulnerabilities themselves), so a cautious approach is needed to help keep them safe. In essence, we're trying to achieve a balance.

Throughout the last two years, as a group of schools, we have tried to take a measured approach to the guidance given from the Government and make it work for our schools and their communities. At the end of this letter is the guidance given to schools this week to help them formulate a way forward. Below that is a chart which states how we are going to work with this guidance in our schools;

Extract from DfE communication to schools regarding new COVID rules care services

From today, Monday 21 February, the Government is removing the guidance for

Changes to testing in education and childcare settings and children's social staff and students in most education and childcare settings to undertake twice-weekly asymptomatic testing.

Given we now know that the risks of severe illness from COVID-19 in most children and most fully vaccinated adults are very low, and our successful vaccination programme has achieved a high rate of take-up, we can remove this advice, bringing education into line with wider society.

Changes to self-isolation and daily testing of close contacts

From Thursday 24 February, the Government will remove the legal requirement to self-isolate following a positive test. Adults and children who test positive will continue to be advised to stay at home and avoid contact with other people for at least 5 full days, and then continue to follow the guidance until they have received 2 negative test results on consecutive days. In addition, the Government will:

- No longer ask fully vaccinated close contacts and those aged under 18 to test daily for 7 days, and remove the legal requirement for close contacts who are not fully vaccinated to self-isolate
- End routine contact tracing. Contacts will no longer be required to self-isolate or advised to take daily tests. Staff, children and young people should attend their education settings as usual. This includes staff who have been in close contact within their household, unless they are able to work from home.

Working guidance for schools:

How often should I test my child?	We are recommending that children take a test if they begin to show symptoms of COVID-19, and that they then test on day 5 and 6 of the infection, following the advice to stay at home until they get two negative test results taken 24 hours apart. If a member of your household tests positive, we would ask you to please give your child a test before sending them into school.
What if my child contracts COVID?	If you believe your child has COVID symptoms we are recommending that they take a LFD. If they test positive they will need to self-isolate for 5 days from when the symptoms started, informing the child's school immediately. LFD testing to start on day 5 of isolation and after 2 negative test results on consecutive days children can return to school.
Do parents have to wear masks on site?	This will be a matter of parental choice. Parents may be asked to wear a mask if a meeting happens in the school building.
Can parents use the school office?	Parents can return to using the school office but just need to be mindful that the entrances are very small spaces and the wearing of a mask may support the office staff.
What things will not change in our schools?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleaning regimes will remain the same; end of day deep cleans and regular cleaning of high touch-points throughout the day. • Children may also be asked to continue using hand-gel upon entry to the school. • Children and staff may continue to wear masks should they wish to do so. • Notification of children with suspected COVID symptoms will be internally isolated and parents will be required to pick up
What things will change in school for my children?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools will go back to holding whole school assemblies • Where currently not happening already, children may eat lunch together • Children can mix more readily on the playground and field • We will slowly reintroduce more events in school where parents are welcome to attend

We will continue to monitor COVID rates in our schools very carefully and if we need to switch-back to greater control measures then we will inform you immediately.