

## Children & Young People's Services

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Dear All

### Covid-19 Position Update for Rotherham

We wanted to take this opportunity to update schools and parents on the current position in Rotherham in terms of Covid-19, which does differ from the position across much of the rest of the country. **The headline message is that locally case rates have been below half the national average since Christmas and that lockdown impacts are starting to show with rates declining since 4<sup>th</sup> January.**

This positive picture is in part due to Rotherham and South Yorkshire as a whole seeing a 2<sup>nd</sup> peak in cases during October and November that the rest of the country did not see. The local Tier 3 restrictions which came in in response to this coupled with the national lockdown in November and the efforts of local people to observe the restrictions put us in a better position than most areas going into the Christmas period. Like many places we did see a rise in cases over Christmas and into the New Year, but this was from a lower level and we have stayed well below the national average in terms of our case rate. Our local 7 day case rate peaked on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January at 326 cases per 100,000 below the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave peak of 537.7 cases per 100,000 on the 30<sup>th</sup> October 2020. Current official data shows a case rate of 270.1 cases per 100,000 for the week to the 15<sup>th</sup> January. Case rates can be viewed on the government dashboard at [Cases | Coronavirus in the UK \(data.gov.uk\)](https://data.gov.uk/cases/coronavirus).

Of particular interest to schools and parents is the case rate amongst children and young people, which remains significantly lower than our overall case rate in Rotherham and has done throughout the pandemic to date. The age data displayed on the government dashboard at [Cases | Coronavirus in the UK \(data.gov.uk\)](https://data.gov.uk/cases/coronavirus) clearly demonstrates this, and shows that throughout the October peak when children were in school this was the case. There has been much concern in the press about schools being reservoirs for the disease and key locations for transmission, but local evidence does not support this for Rotherham. While we will continue to see cases in schools and to need to isolate those who are close contacts over the coming months we are confident that with the lower case rate seen in Rotherham and the excellent work that all of our schools have done to make their environments Covid-safe that the benefits of the return to school will outweigh any additional risks. The DfE guidance remains clear parents and carers of children who are eligible for a school place, that they should keep children at home if at all possible.

## Covid Testing in Schools

Following recent media reports we also wanted to offer an update on the use of lateral flow testing (LFT) in schools. A national programme is being rolled out by the Department for Education working with all schools to add LFT to the range of preventative actions available to schools. It is important to note that this is an additional measure and does not replace the core measures that schools are already taking in terms of cleaning regimes, social distancing, classroom ventilation and the isolation of cases and their contacts.

There are two proposed uses of LFT in schools. These are:

- **Return to school testing of secondary school pupils and regular testing of all school and college staff**

This involves testing as many students as possible on their return to school with 2 LFTs 3 – 5 days apart and the weekly testing of school and college staff. We are fully supportive of this and would recommend schools adopt this approach. LFTs will identify some, but not all, cases of Covid-19 who don't have symptoms, and support the isolation of those individuals to reduce infection risk in school alongside the core prevention measures noted above.

- **Daily testing of staff and students who are contacts of positive cases for 7 days.**

This use of LFTs is proposed to allow pupils and staff who are close contacts of a positive case to come back into school who would otherwise be self-isolating. Whilst we recognise the value of being in school as much as possible once schools return, there remain concerns that LFTs are not sensitive enough to pick up all asymptomatic cases and that this would leave a risk of further infection in school. The Department of Health and Social Care are currently reviewing the effect of daily contact testing on breaking chains of transmission and there is an existing pilot. There are a range of issues to be addressed by this pilot which make it prudent to await this review before commencing daily testing. Our current recommendation is therefore that pupils and staff who are close contacts of a positive case continue to self-isolate at home for 10 days. To maximise the numbers of pupils in school it is important to ensure good social distancing in school to limit the numbers who will be assessed as close contacts of any cases identified.

Yours sincerely,



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