



WARRINGTON

Borough Council

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Dear Parents/carers

Schools and colleges across Warrington are looking forward to welcoming pupils and students back for the new school year.

Since last term, we've seen a new phase in the government's response to the pandemic. We have moved away from stringent restrictions, towards offering advice and guidance to people on how to protect themselves and others, aided by the national vaccination programme being rolled out in earnest.

As schools and colleges open in September, it is imperative that we continue to do all we can, like we did in the previous academic year, to reduce disruption to the education of our young people. The risk of transmission of coronavirus in education settings and the risk of severe illness in children and young people is low. We also know that there are significant harms associated with missed education. This is why it's so important we work together to keep educational settings as safe as possible, acknowledging we are all learning to live with the virus.

It is a local and national priority that we deliver face-to-face, high-quality education to all pupils, something we steadfastly support here in Warrington. The evidence is clear that being out of education causes significant harm to educational attainment, life chances, and mental and physical health.

Ensuring Warrington Schools and Nurseries are as safe as they can be

The vaccine rollout has been a success in Warrington and the region, with huge numbers of colleagues and education staff taking up the vaccine. Alongside this in September and following Government guidance, Warrington schools will also ensure the following safety measures are in place:

- Continuing the good hygiene practices we have all been following these past months
- Maintaining appropriate building cleaning regimes

- Keeping occupied spaces well ventilated
- Following public health advice on testing, self-isolation and management of confirmed cases of COVID-19

It is no longer a requirement for 'bubbles' or the need for schools and colleges to contact trace, but they remain a measure which could be reintroduced in some situations. And, whilst the government has removed the requirement to wear face coverings in law - meaning that face coverings are no longer advised for pupils, staff and visitors either in classrooms or in communal areas - they are still recommended in enclosed and crowded spaces where there may be contact with people you don't normally meet. This includes public transport and dedicated transport to school or college.

Contingency planning

Schools and colleges in Warrington will have contingency plans (sometimes called outbreak management plans) outlining what they would do if children, pupils, students or staff test positive for COVID-19, and how they would operate if they were advised to take extra measures to help break chains of transmission. You will be familiar with much of what these plans entail - for example, self-isolating if you test positive for the virus, but now without the need for all classmates to isolate.

Importantly, if you are displaying any COVID-19 symptoms, however mild, you should remain at home and seek a PCR test. It's important to use lateral flow tests routinely – twice a week – in case you have the virus but do not display any symptoms. About 1 in 3 people with COVID-19 do not have symptoms, so the continued use of LFTs are strongly recommended for staff in all settings and students in high schools and colleges.

Warrington's educational settings will continue to work closely with our local public health and education teams to ensure they are fully briefed on local and national policy and advice.

Given the clear difficulties that restrictions on education can have on children and young people, any additional measures in schools would only be considered as a last resort, kept to the minimum number of schools or groups possible, and for the shortest amount of time possible. However, we acknowledge that the safety of our staff and students is a priority, so if any measures are required, they will be proportionate and will ensure that people are kept as protected as possible from the virus.

Changes to national self-isolation guidance

From 16th August, the Government has said that people aged under 18 years and 6 months or who are fully vaccinated will no longer be legally required to isolate if they are a close contact of someone with COVID-19. Instead, close contacts will be advised to get a PCR test unless they have had a positive PCR test in the previous 90 days.

Regardless of age or vaccination status, anyone who develops any of the three main COVID-19 symptoms (see below) must get a PCR test as soon as possible and isolate until the result is available. People who get a positive PCR test must continue to isolate as usual.

What you can do to help ensure the safe, smooth return of pupils and students to schools

1. Administering Lateral Flow Tests

We strongly recommend that all high school and college students should take two lateral flow tests, spaced three to five days apart, before they return to school and college. This will help schools to ensure that the return is as safe and smooth as possible.

There will be an opportunity for high school and college pupils to take two further tests as schools reopen from the beginning of September. Schools and colleges will send out details about their testing programme, with general information on symptom-free testing routes also available at warrington.gov.uk/symptom-free-testing

2. Vaccination

The government is clear that one of the targeted interventions to reduce risk is to offer every person 16 years or older a first vaccine and the opportunity for two doses by mid-September. Everyone who is eligible for the vaccination and is offered it should take up the offer. Details of open vaccination sites in Warrington are available at warrington.gov.uk/coronavirus-vaccinations

Below are some frequently asked questions which we hope you will find useful.

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

The main symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- new continuous cough and/or
- fever (temperature of 37.8°C or higher)
- loss of or change in, normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)

If your child develops any of these symptoms, you must arrange for them to have a PCR test as soon as possible. A PCR test can be arranged via the NHS UK (www.nhs.uk) website or by contacting NHS 119 via telephone if you do not have internet access.

Your child should self-isolate immediately and they should not attend school.

Please contact the school by phone to inform them that your child has COVID-19 symptoms and you are awaiting a COVID-19 test.

What should I do if my child has COVID-19 confirmed by PCR test?

Anyone with COVID-19 confirmed by PCR test should self-isolate until the latest of:

- 10 days after the onset of their symptoms, or
- 10 days after their test day if they are asymptomatic

Self-isolation means your child should not go to school, attend any out of school activities or visit a friend's house. They should not visit any public places, use public transport or go out to exercise. You should not have visitors into the home except for those providing essential care.

Please contact the school by phone and inform them your child has COVID-19 confirmed by PCR test. It is really important you let the school know if your child has confirmed COVID-19 so they can monitor the number of children with COVID-19 across the school.

What should I do if my child is a contact of someone with COVID-19 confirmed by PCR test?

If your child is aged under 18 years and 6 months and does not have any symptoms of COVID-19 (high temperature, new continuous cough, loss of or change in, normal sense of taste or smell) they do not have to self-isolate as a contact of COVID-19.

They are advised to have a PCR test unless they have had a positive PCR test in the last 90 days.

Children aged 5 and under are not advised to take a PCR test unless the confirmed case is someone in their own household.

What should I do if my child has a positive result on a lateral flow device test?

If your child has a positive result on a lateral flow device test, they should self-isolate immediately and you should arrange a PCR test as soon as possible.

Other members of the household do not need to self-isolate whilst you await the PCR test result if they do not have symptoms and are aged under 18 years and 6 months or are fully vaccinated.

What should I do if my child is unwell with signs of an infection but does not have symptoms of COVID-19

Your child should be excluded from school if they are unwell. If concerned you should seek advice from your GP or Pharmacist, they will be able to advise you how long your child should stay off school. Otherwise we would recommend exclusion for 48 hours or until the child is symptom free, whichever is longer. We are not currently advising that preschool children get a PCR test if they do not have the three main symptoms of COVID-19.

Wishing you the very best for the new term.

Yours sincerely



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