

Dear Parent/ Carer

20<sup>th</sup> January 2021

### **Approach to COVID19 testing in Essex Secondary Schools and Colleges**

I am writing to share information regarding the approach to COVID19 testing in Essex secondary schools and colleges.

You will be aware that secondary schools and colleges were asked by Central Government to roll out an extensive programme of on-site testing for staff and students. This ask is threefold:

1. Mass testing of all students, who have no symptoms of COVID19, before they return to school
2. Regular testing for staff, who have no symptoms of COVID19
3. Serial (daily) testing for close contacts of someone who has tested positive for COVID19

In response to the first ask of schools, at the start of term we asked those parents and carers of children who would be using onsite provision at school or college to access a COVID test before returning to school. We are aware that many families did this and we appreciate their support. If your child is attending onsite provision and they haven't had a test for COVID19, we would encourage you/them to book a test, which can be done by visiting <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>.

Since the beginning of term, we have been working closely with schools and colleges to support them to implement regular testing of their staff. This means that secondary school and college staff who have no symptoms, are being tested for COVID19 on a weekly basis, using lateral flow tests. Any staff member who tests positive is required to self-isolate at home and this reduces the risk of them unknowingly passing the virus on to other staff or students at school.

Essex County Council is strongly advising schools and colleges in Essex against implementing serial testing for close contacts of someone with COVID19, as an alternative to self-isolation. The reason that we are not supportive of this approach in schools and colleges, is because it does not provide greater protection than self-isolation. COVID19 infection rates remain high across the county at the moment, and the safest way to reduce transmission of the virus is for contacts of a positive case to self-isolate. We acknowledge that this will disrupt your child's onsite education, however schools are providing remote education to all pupils who are at home at this present time and all pupils self-isolating will be able to access the remote education offer. The period of self-isolation is ten days. We will keep our advice under review and update parents accordingly.

This means that any staff member or student who has come into close contact with someone who has COVID19 must self-isolate at home, as they are at a greater risk of having contracted the virus and could pass this on to others. This is in-line with the guidance for all other sectors of the community and NHS Test and Trace guidelines. It remains a legal obligation to self-isolate if identified as a close contact and your school or college is not using the serial testing approach.

We want to provide reassurance that the rollout of regular testing for asymptomatic individuals who have *not* been identified as a close contact, is a positive addition to the protective measure that schools and colleges have implemented. We have confidence that this regular testing will help to identify those who have the virus unknowingly and reduce the risk of the virus spreading within the school community.

Any individual taking part in regular testing who tests negative must continue to adhere to the national guidance and strict protective measures which have been implemented in schools and colleges. This includes social distancing, face coverings where appropriate and regular hand washing. Lateral flow tests are an additional protective measure, not a replacement.

Together the increase in testing, along with the protective measures already implemented by schools and colleges will ensure that they remain a safe place to learn and work.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

With Best Wishes,



Mike Gogarty  
Director of Public Health and Wellbeing  
Essex County Council



Clare Kershaw  
Director of Education  
Essex County Council