



Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership

4th January 2022

Dear Parents and Carers

I hope that you had a lovely Christmas and I wish you all a happy New Year. I should however say that for a number of families, the Christmas period has been very sad, as they have lost loved ones either in tragic accidents, or due to illnesses including of course, Coronavirus. My thoughts and those of everyone in the Trust are with them at this difficult time.

As promised in my last letter to you, I am writing following updated guidance from the DfE regarding Coronavirus and particularly, the Omicron variant that has caused a significant rise in infection rates.

Firstly, the Government is determined that schools should remain open and that children should attend school. Rightly, they believe that education of children is a priority, despite the continued challenges of Coronavirus. The Government issued school leaders with new guidance on the 2nd January 2022 and I have outlined the main changes to previous guidance received below:

1. Schools will continue to ensure good ventilation, by ensuring windows and doors are open to allow air movement. Pupils should continue to wear normal school uniform and consider wearing additional layers beneath their uniform to ensure they are warm. However, these additional layers should not be visible. Coats should not be worn inside of the school buildings, unless Headteachers have given permission for this.
2. All secondary-aged children will be tested once on site in the first week back where parents have given permission. The reason for this is that we know Christmas time brings different groups of people together and therefore mixing of different groups where the, coronavirus may be passed between households. Schools are required to report to Government the results of tests, so that officials can measure the extent of infection across schools and adjust guidance where necessary.
3. Secondary-aged children should now wear face coverings **in lessons** as well as in communal areas. This is also the case for staff and visitors. **Please ensure you provide your child with a face covering, as supplies in some schools are still limited.**
4. The rules surrounding quarantine have changed. Pupils and staff who have contracted Coronavirus should now isolate for 7 days and can return to school on the 8th day. However, they must have had negative lateral flow tests on day 6 and 7 of their quarantine period and have no Coronavirus symptoms. They should also continue to test on days 8, 9 and 10. This change will help children and staff to return to school more quickly and therefore reduce disruption.
5. If your child is identified as a close contact, they no longer have to isolate provided they have no symptoms. However, they must complete a daily lateral flow test if 5 years of age or over. Provided tests are negative, children can be in school as normal.
6. Visitors to school buildings should take a lateral flow test before arriving at a school where possible. This is designed to keep the spread of Coronavirus through schools as low as possible. Parents and carers should also wear masks when on school sites, again to reduce the spread of Coronavirus.
7. Schools have been told they should receive air cleaning devices as well as additional supplies of face coverings and lateral flow test kits. Some schools have received some of these items, but as you may know, there are some national supply issues with certain products.
8. Previous measures from late 2021 remain in place, including the need for children to wear face coverings on school and public transport, as well as the requirement for good hand hygiene.





Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership

There is currently no requirement to teach children in bubbles and classes can be combined if there are staffing issues in school. There are one or two other issues that I would also like all parents and carers to be aware of.

1. School meal provision is likely to be difficult if staffing levels fall. We will notify parents and carers about this if it occurs and it may be necessary to provide cold meals only if too many catering staff are absent.
2. Trips will currently still run and be subject to additional risk assessment. The Government guidance on trips will be used if we need to postpone or cancel any visits. Foreign trips are still due to run as well at this stage, but may well be postponed following travel updates. For example, you can now no longer travel through France to reach a third country for a holiday or a trip.
3. Please do try and avoid visiting school sites unless absolutely necessary, as this will help reduce the spread of the virus.
4. Please do continue to send children into school if they have minor ailments. Provided they do not have the common Coronavirus symptoms, children should do their best to be in school, even if they feel a little under the weather. Studies show that those children that miss a lot of school struggle to catch up and in some cases can suffer with mental health problems. **It is also worth mentioning that we are experiencing an increased number of the usual sickness bugs and common cold infections in schools across the Trust. This was expected, as children have not been mixing as much and therefore have lower immune systems.**
5. I am already aware of some schools that have teachers and support staff with Coronavirus who will miss the first week of term. Therefore, please do be understanding with school settings as they try to manage staff absence.
6. Children aged between 5 and 12 who are classed as vulnerable, will be eligible for a Coronavirus vaccine. Contact regarding this will come directly to you from the NHS.
7. I anticipate another round of school-based vaccinations for eligible secondary-aged children, but have yet to receive details of this. Given the previous shortages of staff and vaccines when schools were part of the programme, I would advise parents to book vaccines at local centres to ensure children can be fully protected as soon as possible.

Individual schools will contact you with local arrangements for testing, etc in due course if they have not done so already.

Thank you again for your continued support and understanding.

Best regards

Alun Williams
CEO

