

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)



Education Restart – Update to Coronavirus (COVID-19) : Guidance for Schools and Educational Settings in Northern Ireland

From: Education Restart Programme

To: All Schools, Education Sector Partners

Date: 29 September 2020

Dear Colleague

COVID-19 TESTING

PHA have asked us to emphasise to schools that pupils and staff must only be advised to seek a COVID-19 test when they are symptomatic of the virus – that is a new continuous cough, a fever or a new loss of taste and/or smell. Early evidence from the Contact Tracing Service is that available testing capacity is being utilised to test many children and school staff who are showing no symptoms and in doing so make it more challenging for genuinely symptomatic individuals to access a test.

Tests must only be recommended for a staff member or pupil where they are clearly symptomatic or where PHA specifically recommend a test for any reason.

Update to Coronavirus (COVID-19) : Guidance for Schools and Educational Settings in Northern Ireland

On Thursday 24 September, schools were provided with updated guidance on managing the impact of COVID-19 within schools.

Subsequently as you have been advised, an issue was brought to our attention by school leaders in relation to the practical implications of several paragraphs in Section 8 of the

revised guidance. These paragraphs had advised that schools operating classes in bubbles would need to protectively self-isolate whenever a class member became symptomatic. In practical terms this would have meant that anytime a child got COVID-19 symptoms, for most primary schools and many post primary schools, the entire bubble would have been sent home.

We have worked closely with the Public Health Agency who lead on public health advice to rectify the issue. PHA has advised the correct position is that only when a positive case has been identified in a symptomatic child, young person or member of staff do schools need to consider self-isolating close contacts of that individual. Close contacts must stay in isolation for the full 14 day period. They should not return to school before the 14 day isolation period as they may still be incubating the virus – regardless of a lack of symptoms.

An updated version of the guidance is attached [here](#) and has been published on the Department's website.

Regards

Education Restart Programme