

Date: August 2021

## Returning to schools and colleges safely in September 2021

Dear parents and carers,

As you prepare for the start of the new term, you may have questions or concerns about how the risks of Covid-19 will be minimised in educational settings and the measures we can all continue to take to help keep yourself, your child and everyone safer while Covid-19 continues to circulate.

This letter sets out the national guidance on what has changed since July 2021 and testing arrangements for all secondary aged pupils as the new term starts. It also describes how South Gloucestershire Council's Education and Public Health teams are working with all educational settings to support you and your child, as well as the local support available to families.

### What has changed since last term?

On 19 July, England moved to Step 4 of the government's roadmap out of the pandemic. Most remaining restrictions were lifted, such as social distancing and the legal requirement to wear face coverings. Schools and colleges therefore no longer have to organise children into smaller bubbles during the school day, although some may continue to do this.

The government has been very clear that Covid-19 has not gone away. Your child's school or college will still have a Covid-19 risk assessment in place that covers:

- supporting regular testing of those without symptoms
- operating safely on a day-to-day basis through cleaning regimes, hand and respiratory hygiene and keeping spaces and classrooms well ventilated
- processes for outbreak management

From 16 August 2021, the government guidance states that anyone under the age of 18 and 6 months, or anyone who has had both doses of the vaccine, does not have to isolate if they are identified as a close contact of someone who tests positive for Covid-19.

### What will happen if my child tests positive for Covid-19, develops symptoms or is unwell?

A child or adult of any age who has symptoms of Covid-19 or a positive rapid lateral flow test will still have to isolate. If they haven't already, they will also need to take a PCR test to confirm they have Covid-19. The rules for positive cases have not changed and you will be asked to come and collect your child if they show signs of Covid-19 symptoms whilst in school and arrange a PCR test for them. If the test is positive, they will have to isolate for 10 days.

It is important to keep your child at home if they start to develop Covid-19 symptoms - a new, continuous cough, high temperature or loss or change to sense of taste or smell. Please \_\_\_\_\_

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continue to let your school or college know if your child has Covid-19 symptoms and also tests positive for Covid-19.

As usual, as we enter the winter months, there will be other infectious diseases circulating. Even if your child has a negative Covid-19 test result, please ensure they are fever free for at least 24 hours and have recovered from acute symptoms before they return to school or college.

If you are concerned about other childhood illnesses, you may find this [HANDi app](https://bnssgccg.nhs.uk/get-involved/campaigns/download-handi-app/) useful:  
(<https://bnssgccg.nhs.uk/get-involved/campaigns/download-handi-app/>)

The HANDi app aims to provide advice and support to parents and carers when your child is unwell. It offers simple and straightforward advice for conditions in children and babies such as diarrhoea and vomiting, high temperature, 'chesty' symptoms, abdominal pain and common new-born problems.

The app takes you through a series of questions about the symptoms your child is experiencing and then advises on the best course of action, whether that's to treat at home (with a plan provided for each condition), to make a GP appointment, or to take them to A&E.

Download the [HANDi App](#) for Android phones at Google Play, and for iPhone or iPad using the app store or iTunes. Use the search term 'HANDi App'.

### **What will happen if there is a positive case of Covid-19 in my child's school or college?**

Anyone who has symptoms will be asked to stay at home. If they also test positive for Covid-19 they will have to isolate for 10 days. This rule has not changed. Anyone who has Covid-19 symptoms will need to be collected from school or college and isolate until they have taken a PCR test and know the result.

### **Will my child be asked to isolate if they have been near a positive case?**

No but they will be encouraged to book a PCR test and they will not need to isolate while they wait for the result of this PCR test. This is the main change for schools and colleges and in most circumstances they no longer have to contact trace or ask close contacts to isolate when there is a positive case in their setting. This will mean fewer class and setting closures if there is a single positive case in the school or college which will help minimise disruption to face-to-face education. Children under 4 years of age who are a contact will not be asked to take a PCR test unless the positive case is a member of their household.

### **What if there are several cases of Covid-19 at my child's school or college?**

All settings will have an outbreak management plan, this may be referred to as a contingency plan, for when cases rise in their setting or in the local area. The plan is based on the latest government guidance. Your child's school or college will work with health protection and public health teams and use the plan to guide decisions or actions they need to take to reduce the spread. If it is decided it is best to do so, certain measures may be reintroduced by local Directors of Public Health such as staggered start and end times of the school day, contact tracing, the wearing of face coverings and partial school closures where children will access

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their learning online. Please be assured these measures will only be introduced if the risk to individuals' health outweighs the risk to disrupting our children and young people's education.

### **Will my child be tested at the start of the new term?**

At the start of the new term in September, all students at secondary schools and colleges should receive two rapid lateral flow tests, 3 to 5 days apart, at their school setting. Your child's school or college will let you know the details of when your child needs to go to their school or college to get tested.

For parents of children starting secondary school, you can watch our video with your child to understand what taking a rapid lateral Covid-19 test at your secondary school or college is like. Visit: [Covid-19: Brimsham Green School tour - YouTube](#)

Secondary school and college students, as well as early years, primary, secondary and college staff, will continue to take regular rapid lateral flow tests at home twice a week. Individuals should not take a rapid lateral flow test if they have tested positive for Covid-19 in the last 90 days, unless they have developed new symptoms.

The rapid home test kit now comes in two forms: the throat and nasal swab test and the new nasal-only swab test. It is unclear which test kit the Department for Education will send to schools to use, but both will have instructions for use if you are concerned.

Please be assured that your child's school or college has been updated with all the latest government guidance. Our education and public health teams will continue to provide support and guidance to all educational settings, and we will keep you informed of any national changes.

### **Who can have the Covid-19 vaccination?**

Vaccination is now available to everyone over 16 and to those aged 12 to 15 who are clinically vulnerable or who live with someone who is immunosuppressed. As the vaccination programme progresses and is also opened up to the wider 12 to 15-year-old age group, we will keep you informed.

All the information about vaccinations for all eligible age groups is available on our health partner website [www.bnssghealthiertogether.org.uk](http://www.bnssghealthiertogether.org.uk) Walk-in clinics are also being held across South Gloucestershire, visit [www.grabajab.net](http://www.grabajab.net) for the latest details. This Public Health England leaflet explains the Covid-19 vaccination programme for eligible children and young people <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-resources-for-children-and-young-people/covid-19-vaccination-a-guide-for-eligible-children-and-young-people>

### **Flu vaccine**

For the 2021 to 2022 flu season, the flu vaccination programme that already includes all children in primary school will be expanded to additional children in secondary school so that those in years 7 to 11 will now be offered the flu vaccination. This is part of the government's

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wider winter planning to reduce flu levels in the population, and therefore the potential impact on the NHS, when we are likely to see both flu and coronavirus (COVID-19) in circulation. Your school will be providing more details of when this is likely to happen.

### Support available to you and your family

Buying new shoes, uniform, lunch boxes, and a long list of kit for your child's return to school is costly. If your income or outgoings have been impacted by Covid-19 and you need some extra financial support to help, you can apply for our resilience fund. You may also be eligible for a £500 payment if you are not exempt and have been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace. Find out more here [www.southglos.gov.uk/community-resilience-fund](http://www.southglos.gov.uk/community-resilience-fund)

Finally, we would like to say thank you for your continued support and all your efforts to keep your child and family, your child's school and your wider community safer.

We are continuing to encourage everyone in South Gloucestershire to be considerate and respectful of those around us. Thinking about risks to ourselves and others, particularly people with clinical vulnerabilities, will help keep us all safer.

### How we can all continue to take precautions to keep ourselves and each other safer:

- Meet outdoors or in well ventilated areas
- Wear a face covering when you come into contact with people you don't normally meet in enclosed and crowded spaces
- Wash your hands regularly
- Cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze
- Stay at home if you feel unwell
- Have both doses of the vaccine if you can. If you are concerned about the vaccine or cannot have it, you can seek advice here: [COVID-19 vaccination questions and answers - Healthier Together \(bnssghealthiertogether.org.uk\)](http://COVID-19.vaccination.questions.and.answers-Healthier.Together.bnssghealthiertogether.org.uk)

Yours sincerely,



Sara Blackmore,  
Director of Public Health



Chris Sivers,  
Director for Children, Adults and Health