

Director of Public Health for North Yorkshire

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Dear parents and carers,

Over the last few weeks we have seen a significant increase in the number of children and young people who have tested positive for COVID-19. Parts of North Yorkshire have recently had some of the highest rates of COVID-19 in the country. Transmission rates are particularly high among school-aged children and young people, their households and contacts.

The number of cases seen in both health and social care is also increasing. The number of people in local hospitals with COVID-19 has risen steadily throughout October, with an increasing number of cases also seen in care homes. This comes at a time when health and social care settings are already facing challenges with workforce shortages, increasing workloads, and preparations for a difficult winter.

We need to do what we can to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 in schools and our communities. Keeping COVID-19 rates as low as possible over the next few months is crucial to keeping children in classrooms, allowing time for vaccinations for young people to be rolled out and take effect, and minimizing the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on young people.

We continue to work with education settings to make sure that appropriate measures are in place to minimise the risk of transmission. We have written to all schools reinforcing public health guidance on managing and preventing cases. This includes:

- 1. Encourage regular twice-weekly lateral flow testing for all staff and pupils aged 11+**
- 2. Considering reintroduction of face coverings in settings experiencing cases to minimise onward spread.**
These should initially be for a period of 2 weeks, then reviewed in line with the number of cases currently in the setting.
- 3. Wearing face coverings on shared transport**
- 4. Continuing to reinforce messages on good hand and respiratory hygiene**
- 5. Maximising ventilation in classrooms and other shared spaces.**
- 6. Reducing mixing between year groups and classes and limiting visitors to the school**
- 7. Assessing whether educational trips and residential visits should go ahead**

These measures are recommended based on the current picture of COVID-19 locally and nationally, and will continue to be reviewed on a regular basis. Some schools may choose not to follow all of the above advice based on their existing COVID-19 measures and infection rates. We continue to provide bespoke advice for any schools identifying concerns.

On top of the measures that schools are taking, there are measures that you can continue to support to keep young people safe. This includes:

Face coverings: Face coverings should be worn by everyone travelling to school via shared transport, in line with national guidance. This includes buses or trains or any transport where they come into contact with people they do not normally mix with. Schools experiencing increased numbers of cases can bring back face coverings on site. Regardless of outbreak status individuals across all settings who wish to wear a face covering are able to do so.

Testing: If you have a child aged 11 or over, please continue with regular lateral flow testing at home twice a week for the rest of this term. If anyone in your family has symptoms of COVID-19 they must isolate and book a PCR test. Schools may give additional advice on testing if your child is identified as a possible close contact of a case.

The 3 main symptoms of COVID-19 remain a fever (temperature 37.8°C or higher), a new continuous cough, or a change to/loss of taste or smell. However, other commonly reported symptoms of the Delta variant include headache, sore throat, tiredness, and cold-like symptoms, so please be aware of these as well and stay at home and seek further testing if you are in any doubt.

Hand and respiratory hygiene: Continue to encourage children to wash their hands regularly with soap and water, or use hand sanitiser if handwashing facilities are not available. Encourage children to use a tissue to catch coughs and sneezes as part of 'Catch it, Bin it, Kill it' messages.

Vaccination: We would also encourage families to take up offers of vaccination when made available. There is clear evidence that vaccination has had a positive impact on reducing COVID-19 transmission and severity of disease across those age groups already taking part in the programme.

In addition to the school COVID-19 vaccination programme for 12-15 year olds, some appointments are now being made available through the NHS National Booking Service (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/> or calling 119). The availability of appointments will vary week to week and NHS colleagues are looking to further develop this offer with additional sites as the programme continues to progress.

We continue to encourage all residents of North Yorkshire to follow general COVID-19 guidance on an everyday basis as part of 'living with COVID'. Regular handwashing, wearing face coverings in indoor and crowded areas, maintaining a respectful social distance from others where possible, maintaining good ventilation. and regular testing (including before travelling, attending events etc.) are all measures that will help keep North Yorkshire a safe place to live.

Finally, we would like to thank you for everything you have done to keep your family and community safe, and for your patience in supporting schools at this difficult time.

Kind regards,



Louise Wallace
Director of Public Health for North Yorkshire



Stuart Carlton
Director of Children and Young People's Service