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Guidance

Coronavirus (COVID-19) asymptomatic testing in schools and colleges

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To safeguard the health of the teaching workforce and keep as many staff and pupils in school and college as possible, we will be making rapid-result coronavirus (COVID-19) tests available to schools and colleges in the new year. This will help identify asymptomatic cases - which make up a third of all cases - limiting the spread of the virus.

Testing, along with other infection prevention and control measures such as social distancing, can ensure pupils are given the best chance of face to face education.

With a phased approach beginning in January, testing will be made available to all members of staff and all pupils and students in schools and colleges.

Approach

From January, rapid-result tests will be provided to schools and colleges, starting with secondary schools and FE colleges, including special schools and alternative provision:

- for the school and college workforce to conduct weekly testing - this will help identify those who are carrying the virus without displaying symptoms, reducing the risk of transmission
- for students and pupils as well as the school and college workforce to conduct daily testing for those identified as close contacts of workforce colleagues, students or pupils that have tested positive - this ensures that they do not need to isolate and are able to continue to benefit from high quality, face to face education

For every group, testing is voluntary, but those who are eligible for tests are strongly encouraged to participate to reduce the risk of transmission within schools and colleges.

In line with routine infection control practice, close contacts who decide not to be tested daily will need to self-isolate in line with [guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection](#).

Conducting testing in schools and colleges

Recent pilots have shown how rapid testing can be used effectively and have positive impacts in schools and colleges. The lateral flow tests that will be provided to schools and colleges produce a result in 30 minutes and do not require a laboratory to process.

From the beginning of January, schools and colleges will be provided with testing kits including personal protective equipment (PPE). They will be provided with comprehensive guidance and training materials and support to introduce a testing programme that works for staff, students and pupils.

Schools and colleges should make clear to staff and pupils that a negative test result does not remove the risk of transmission. In some cases, someone who has tested negative may still have the undetected disease and be infectious. It is therefore essential that everyone continues to follow good hygiene and observe social distancing measures whether or not they have been tested.

Anyone who is showing symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) who has a negative result from a rapid test will be required to self-isolate until the result from a lab-based polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test is known.

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