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CABINET STATEMENT

# Written Statement: Testing offer for schools, colleges and childcare settings

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**Kirsty Williams, Minister for Education**  
**Julie Morgan, Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services**

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We recognise the impact that Coronavirus has had on face to face care and learning, what this has meant for families across Wales, and on all of the staff working in settings that provide care and education for our children and young people in Wales.

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We are grateful to everyone in the education and childcare and playwork sectors who have worked so hard to make sure infection prevention measures are in place. We are grateful to the parents and carers who have been asked to find different ways of working, caring for and educating their children throughout the pandemic. And we are grateful to our children and young people here in Wales for the way in which they have adapted to overcome the challenges that COVID has presented.

On 14 December 2020 we announced our plans for testing in schools and colleges from January 2021 along with our future plans to provide testing support in other education and childcare settings including Flying Start settings.

Since the announcement in December, the context has changed. In particular, we have learned of the introduction of new variants and the rise in community infections has resulted in a number of changes around childcare and education provision.

We are led by the latest scientific advice and so it was right that we consider again what testing offer should be made available alongside other infection prevention controls to support childcare, schools and colleges to safely provide face to face learning and care.

Following discussions with Public Health Wales and the Children and Schools Technical Advisory Cell sub group, we are pausing daily contact testing in schools and colleges whilst we learn more about the new variants and how this might impact on transmission. Daily contact testing may provide an opportunity to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on in person learning, however this will only be introduced if it is safe to do so. We will continue to work with the UK Department for Health and Social Services, Public Health England, Public Health Wales and our Technical Advisory Group to understand what the latest data is telling us so that we can consider when daily contact testing would be an appropriate method of testing in schools and settings in Wales.

In the meantime, we are offering regular, twice weekly, Lateral Flow Tests (LFTs) to all staff in all registered childcare settings including Flying Start settings, schools and further education settings when we return after the February half term.

Listening to feedback we have adapted our approach and all settings will be offered LFTs that will be collected by staff and used at home in order to regularly and quickly identify positive asymptomatic cases and ask them to self-isolate before coming into the school or setting. Along with social distancing and other measures put in place by schools and settings this will reduce the likelihood of adults unwittingly spreading the virus to others in the setting. As our schools and settings fully re-open for face to face learning this is another way of reducing the chances of transmission in settings and the disruption to education and childcare services this causes.

The added benefit of offering testing in this way means that we will have a much clearer picture of what is really happening in our schools and settings and a marker for asymptomatic transmission and the effectiveness of the measures that have been put in place by each setting.

Each setting will be offered free test kits, support, a small supply of PPE and we are engaging with the sectors representatives on the specific logistical requirements.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency have approved the use of LFTs in this way, and whilst it is recognised that that LFTs are not as sensitive as the lab based Rt-PCR test, the available evidence shows we can still be very confident that positive LFT results are 'true' positives. In addition we will be asking all those who test positive with an LFT to book a follow up Rt-PCR test. It is essential that everyone understands that a negative test result does not mean that individuals can relax the control measures they have in place and the precautions they take. We must continue to maintain social distancing and comply with the measures put in place regardless of the result of the test.

Testing alone cannot eradicate the risks associated with contracting and transmitting Covid-19. Testing helps to mitigate the risk but it needs to be taken alongside other more effective infection prevention control measures, including reducing bubble sizes where possible, appropriate social distancing and good hand hygiene measures. We are grateful to everyone in the sector who has worked hard to make sure these measures are in place.

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