**Enhanced COVID-19 Education Guidance for Cumbria**

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**14 October 2021**

**Background**

Colin Cox, Director of Public Health, issued new enhanced COVID-19 guidance to early years settings and schools in Cumbria on Friday 8 October 2021. The new guidance has been issued because although the case rates in children and young people had levelled off, they were still higher than the national average and were not yet reducing.

Feedback from the Cumbria Primary Headteachers Association (PHA), Cumbria Association for Secondary Headteachers (CASH) and the Cumbria Education Planning Group influenced the new local guidance.

On the same day, changes were also made to the national guidance for Directors of Public Health regarding COVID-19 outbreak management in schools. The Public Health team recognises that the local enhanced guidance from Colin Cox differs slightly from the national guidance, so we have produced responses to FAQs below to help avoid confusion.

1. **Why is the guidance issued to early years settings and schools in Cumbria different to the national guidance?**

The national guidance now says that Directors of Public Health (DsPH) can recommend the use of Lateral Flow Devices (LFDs) whilst household close contacts await their PCR result.

Locally, given that our rates of COVID-19 infection in school-aged children are significantly higher than the national average, we felt the national guidance did not go far enough. This is because you could have a PCR test on day ‘1’ of being identified as a close contact and LFD for one day only before getting your PCR result. Research indicates the average incubation period for Delta variant is 4 days, so infections are likely to be missed if testing is not implemented for a longer period.

Therefore, based on the feedback from primary and secondary school headteachers, we have developed enhanced guidance to ensure high risk household contacts are less likely to attend the setting whilst highly infectious to others, with the aim of trying to keep infection rates manageable and reduce the impact on staffing levels.

1. **Which guidance does Cumbria County Council recommend our school follow?**

Ultimately, it is up to the school to decide which guidance they follow. However, we anticipate that most schools will welcome the additional measures advised by the Public Health team in Cumbria in order to protect staffing levels and vulnerable individuals within their settings and school families.

1. **Does the guidance apply to colleges as well as schools?**

The updated guidance is specific to early years settings, primary schools, and secondary schools, and has therefore not been circulated to colleges.

If colleges wish to follow the advice provided in the guidance, they can do this. However, we are mindful that colleges mainly get their health and safety advice from their parent organisations, rather than the Local Authority.

1. **Who is exempt from this enhanced guidance?**
* Any child or young person who has had at least one dose of the vaccine more than 14 days ago.
* Any child or young person who has tested positive for COVID-19 themselves via a PCR test within the past 90 days.
* Where there are significant concerns about the impact of exclusion on the child or young person, but they are unable to carry out daily LFD tests.

Exempt means that these children and young people do not need to isolate or do daily LFD tests and can attend school as normal if they are identified as a household contact of a positive case.

1. **What if parents or carers do not want to follow this new guidance?**

Any parents or carers who still want their child to continue to attend school have the right to send their child into the setting. In these situations, we strongly advise the child or young person identified as a household close contact to get a PCR test before attending the setting.

1. **What is the definition of a household contact in this guidance?**

Anyone living at the same address as the child or young person during their infectious period (from two days before their symptoms started, or positive PCR result if no symptoms, and up to ten days afterwards), and who shares cooking facilities, bathrooms or toilets, or living areas.

Note that the guidance does not apply to pupils who are resident in boarding schools. Cases identified in these settings will be managed separately by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).

1. **The guidance states that household contacts can either isolate for 5 days and get a PCR test, or test to release using LFDs for 5 days instead. Why is there a choice?**

The options for the updated guidance were discussed with local primary and secondary school teachers, and it was agreed that no single approach would be suitable for all children and young people.

The most precautionary approach is for children and young people to isolate for 5 days and then get a PCR test. However, the option to perform daily LFD testing, instead of isolation, has been introduced to maximise school attendance for children and young people in whom daily testing is appropriate.

Research shows that LFD testing is effective at identifying people with the COVID-19 when they are at their most infectious. A recent trial looking at regular LFD testing in secondary schools demonstrated that the effectiveness of daily testing of pupils exposed to COVID-19 was comparable to self-isolation.

If a school is in an outbreak situation (i.e. multiple COVID-19 cases and evidence of in-setting transmission), as part of outbreak management arrangements, the school may choose to advise children and young people who are household contacts to isolate for 5 days and then get a PCR test (rather than give the option of LFD testing for 5 days instead). A risk assessment may identify this as an appropriate outbreak management approach, especially if there are concerns about the ability to maintain adequate staffing levels.

1. **Can a school request proof of daily LFD results if a pupil is choosing to carry out daily LFDs instead of isolating for 5 days?**

The enhanced guidance for educational settings in Cumbria is not mandatory. This means that there is no requirement for pupils to show proof of testing or test results before attending the setting.

1. **I have a member of staff who is a close contact of a household case – what should they do?**

The enhanced guidance in Cumbria only applies to pupils attending an early years, primary or secondary school setting. If staff members are identified as household contacts of a positive case, the following approach should be taken:

If the member of staff is:

* Fully vaccinated
* Below the age of 18 years 6 months
* Have taken part in or are currently part of an approved COVID-19 vaccine trial
* Are not able to get vaccinated for medical reasons

They should be asked to do a PCR test. They don’t need to stay off work while they are waiting for the results if they do not have symptoms of COVID-19. If the PCR test is negative, they can continue to attend work, but could be asked to conduct a daily LFD test for 10 days following the onset of symptoms / positive test in the household contact (unless they have already tested positive via PCR in past 90 days).

Staff who do not fall into any of these categories should isolate for 10 full days from the day the first person in their household’s symptoms started (or the day their test was taken if they did not have symptoms) as per national guidance.

Any staff members who develop symptoms of COVID-19 should isolate immediately and obtain a PCR test.

1. **I have a member of staff who is a close contact of a case at school (non-household contact) – what should they do?**

If the member of staff is:

* Fully vaccinated
* Below the age of 18 years 6 months
* Have taken part in or are currently part of an approved COVID-19 vaccine trial
* Are not able to get vaccinated for medical reasons

They should be asked to do a PCR test. They don’t need to stay off work while they are waiting for the results if they do not have symptoms of COVID-19. If the PCR test is negative, they can continue to attend work.

Staff who do not fall into any of these categories should isolate for 10 full days, starting from the date of their last contact with the person who has tested positive.

Any staff members who develop symptoms of COVID-19 should isolate immediately and obtain a PCR test.

1. **If a pupil or member of staff has a positive LFD, but their follow up PCR is negative, can they come back to the setting?**

If the PCR test comes back negative, an individual risk assessment should be conducted between the school and IPC Education team. The risk assessment will consider factors such as presence of symptoms, level of contact with positive cases and the amount of time that has passed between conducting the LFD test and the subsequent PCR test.

1. **A pupil who is a household contact of a positive case has been advised by NHS Test and Trace to get a PCR test straight away. Do they still need to do this if they are following the local enhanced guidance?**

Yes, if a pupil is identified as a household contact by NHS Test and Trace and advised to get a PCR test straight away, they should still do this. The local enhanced guidance is being implemented in addition to national guidance.

1. **A child who is a household contact of a positive case has been advised by NHS Test and Trace to get a PCR test. They have done this, and the result is negative. Do they still need to isolate or LFD test for 5 days?**

Yes, the child should still be advised to isolate or LFD test for 5 days. This is because they could still be incubating the virus despite having an initially negative PCR result.

1. **A pupil has isolated for 5 days. On day 5 the parent does a postal PCR and the result is not known the next day – can the child return to the setting?**

Ideally, the child should stay at home until the results of the PCR test are known. Getting a PCR test via a test site is likely to return a result quicker than a postal PCR test. Any families that cannot access a test site can order a postal PCR in advance of ‘day 5’ to ensure they receive the test kit in plenty of time.

1. **If a pupil is carrying out LFD testing but then doesn’t get a PCR test on day 5, can they continue to attend the setting?**

Yes, if daily LFD tests have been negative, and the pupil has not developed any symptoms of COVID-19, they can continue to attend the setting as normal. However, if the date of their last daily LFD test falls on a weekend, they should be encouraged to do a further LFD test on the morning of their next school day.

1. **What if a second household contact tests positive for COVID-19? Does the 5-day isolation period or LFD testing need to re-start?**

If a second household contact tests positive for COVID-19, and the date of onset of their symptoms (or positive test if they have no symptoms) is within 10 days of the date of onset of symptoms (or positive test if they have no symptoms) in the first household contact, there is no requirement for the child or young person to restart their 5-day isolation period or daily LFD testing.

1. **If a pupil has isolated and their PCR test on day 5 comes back positive, when does the isolation period start?**

If the PCR test result is positive, the pupil should stay at home and start a further full 10-day isolation period, regardless of where they are in their original 10-day isolation period. The isolation period should start from the date of the positive PCR test, or the date of symptoms onset (if they have developed symptoms of COVID-19). This means that the total isolation period may be longer than 10 days.

**Flowchart for managing a child or young person who is a household contact of a positive case**

**START**

Individual should follow [stay at home guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection)and arrange [**PCR** testing](https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test).

Follow guidance for managing confirmed and suspected cases of COVID-19

PCR test is negative: Child or young person can return to school as normal

**Option 2**

Instead of isolating for five days, the child or young person can take a Lateral Flow Test each morning and if negative, attend school the same day (rather than staying at home).

If they develop symptoms of COVID-19, or receive a positive Lateral Flow test result, they should immediately isolate and get a PCR test.

They should **also** conduct a PCR test on day five, starting from the onset of symptoms in the household contact who has tested positive (or test date if the positive case had no symptoms). They should continue to conduct LFD tests until the results of the day five PCR are known.

PCR test is positive: Child or young person isolates and follows [stay at home guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection)

Child can return to setting if they have not developed any symptoms of COVID-19

NO

NO

Child or young person also has any of:

* a new continuous cough,
* a high temperature,
* a loss of, or change in their normal sense of taste or smell.

YES

Child stays at home for 5 days, starting from the onset of symptoms in the household contact who has tested positive (or test date if the positive case had no symptoms). They should only have a PCR test if they develop symptoms of COVID-19.

There are two suggested options. Option 1 is the default option. However, option 2 is open to any child or young person (aged 5 years and over) if the parents and school agree.

Child is aged 4 years or under

Pupil is aged 5 years to 18 years + 6 months

Child or young person can continue to attend the setting as usual

Child or young person is identified as a household contact of a positive case

YES

Do any of the following apply:

* Child or young person has had at least one dose of the vaccine more than 14 days ago
* Child or young person has tested positive for COVID-19 themselves via a PCR test within the past 90 days.
* There are significant concerns about the impact of exclusion on the child or young person, but they are unable to carry out daily lateral flow testing.

**Option 1**

Child or young person stays at home and obtains PCR test on day five starting from the onset of symptoms in the household contact who has tested positive (or test date if the positive case had no symptoms). They should stay at home until the results of the PCR are known.