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To Parents, Carers and Young People

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As you may have heard, although case rates are currently high in Scotland we believe that the epidemic is increasingly moving into a calmer phase. This has been made possible by remarkable progress on vaccination and people's willingness to take it up, and by new treatments, which have both helped reduce the severity of the impact of the virus. COVID-19 remains a threat, but we are hopeful that this threat will continue to reduce as we head into the spring and summer.

We believe the time is therefore right to make further changes to the measures taken across society, including within education and childcare settings. We hope these changes will allow children and young people to enjoy a more normal experience of early learning and childcare (ELC) and school after two years of disruption.

However, I recognise that some families might still have concerns about safety, so I'm writing to you to explain the reasons for the decision, to help clarify how this impacts on children and young people, and to emphasise the importance we are placing on retaining a sensible set of routine protective measures.

As always, this decision has been informed by a range of scientific advice and clinical evidence. Although infection rates are currently high the evidence shows that, compared to adults, children and young people still have a very low risk of severe COVID-19 related health outcomes. Those without symptoms (who are asymptomatic) are also at a relatively lower risk of transmitting the virus compared to those who do have symptoms. Although the Omicron variant has higher transmissibility than previous variants, there is no evidence suggesting that it impacts children and young people disproportionately.

Severe health outcomes for all age groups are far less likely to arise while vaccination rates are high. Our [Advisory Subgroup on Education and Children's Issues](#) – which includes scientific and public health experts, clinicians and academics, as well as experts in education, early learning and children's services – routinely publishes its advice and supporting evidence should you wish to explore this further.

The Sub Group has made clear that protective measures in schools and childcare settings should therefore be in step with those that apply in wider society.



However, the pandemic is not over and I wanted to take the opportunity to explain the routine protective measures that will remain in place in childcare settings and schools as we enter this new phase:

- children, young people and adults should stay at home and self-isolate if they:
  - have symptoms of COVID-19, whether they feel unwell or not
  - have tested positive, even if they have no symptoms
  - are required to self-isolate for any other reason e.g. travel-related reasons
  - are identified as a close contact and are over 18 years and 4 months and are not fully vaccinated
- good hand hygiene and cleaning in ELC and school environments and on dedicated school transport will continue to be encouraged and supported
- an ongoing focus on the importance of good ventilation and the potential for CO2 monitors to be utilised to ensure good air quality in enclosed spaces, with the goal that all school buildings, including all learning and teaching spaces, and ELC settings should be assessed regularly for ventilation issues, taking remedial action where required.
- the requirements for face coverings for staff and young people in secondary schools, and for staff in primary schools and ELC should be in line with the general guidance for safety in the workplace (but there remains no need for staff to wear masks when they are working with children).
- physical distancing will not be required among children and young people, but staff should continue to take reasonable steps to keep a safe distance from other adults (and between adults and school-aged children and young people wherever possible) in line with the requirements for other workplaces.
- arrangements for dedicated school transport should follow the general guidance for public transport on the use of face coverings, cleaning, hygiene and ventilation
- ongoing need for outbreak management capability, including active surveillance
- assessments on the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) should continue to be undertaken for those who work in close contact with children and young people

I know that many of you, and/or your children, have been testing regularly using LFDs during the course of the pandemic. The asymptomatic testing programme has played an important part in the suite of measures to reduce risks in schools and ELC settings over the course of the pandemic. However, in view of the latest position in the pandemic, from 18<sup>th</sup> April, we will no longer ask school and ELC staff and secondary pupils in mainstream and special schools and ELC settings to test regularly. The regular asymptomatic testing programme will therefore end in schools from the end of this term (for ELC settings which do not operate to school term dates, the final date for testing will be 17<sup>th</sup> April).

Our wider [Test and Protect Transition Plan](#) will also see regular testing in low-risk workplaces, and the universal testing programme, end operation on the same timescales (ending from 18<sup>th</sup> April). Further details on the planned changes to other aspects of testing (including close contact testing) can be found in the Transition Plan. I fully appreciate that some people who have built regular testing into their daily lives may feel anxious about these changes in our overarching approach to dealing with COVID-19. However, please be assured that this decision has been informed by expert advice, including from Public Health Scotland and the Advisory Sub-group on Education and Children's Issues.

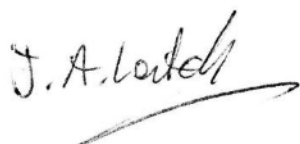
As highlighted above, at the current time, the population has much stronger protection against COVID-19 than at any other point in the pandemic, due to the success of the vaccination programme and the development of natural immunity to the infection. Severe health outcomes are therefore now far less likely to arise, and the availability of and

access to antiviral treatments, coupled with increased scientific and public understanding about how to manage risk.

We will continue to monitor where the virus is through surveillance programmes. It will still be possible for local health protection teams to opt to make use of asymptomatic testing in outbreak management situations in schools/settings, if their expert judgement is that it is appropriate to do so. Schools can continue to distribute test kits to staff and secondary pupils as usual until the end of this term, and ELC settings can distribute test kits to staff until 17th April.

The remaining routine protective measures will also play an important role in helping minimise risks in schools/settings. We continue to encourage people to get vaccinated if they are eligible to do so and further information on vaccines can be found at [NHS Inform Scotland](#).

I hope that this provides some reassurance and clarification of the plans to continue living with COVID-19. In closing, I'd particularly like to add my sincere thanks and recognition of the immense efforts by you and your families to protect yourselves and your communities during these challenging times.



Jason Leitch  
National Clinical Director