

Cheshire West & Chester Council

Office of the Director of Public Health

Cheshire West and Chester Council
4 Civic Way, Ellesmere Port, CH65 0BE

Tel: 0300 1238 123

Email:

enquiries@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Web: www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

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Dear Parents and Carers,

As half term approaches, I am writing to update you on the current position concerning COVID-19 cases in the borough as well as transmission rates in our schools. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank you for supporting our schools and helping to ensure that the majority of children have been able to remain in face-to-face education.

Our schools have also worked closely with our public health and education teams to introduce, where necessary, a range of additional measures to break chains of COVID-19 transmission, including reducing mixing between classes, in assemblies and in shared facilities and by restricting or temporarily stopping some activities.

In addition, the in-school vaccination programme for children aged 12-15 years has started and is progressing well across the borough. To date, 21% of all 12-15 year old students have received their first dose, as have 65% of 16-17 year olds. Vaccination is the best defence against COVID-19 and, as well as protecting the individual, reduces the risk of transmission within families, schools and the wider community. Information on the programme be found here: <https://www.cheshireccg.nhs.uk/news/news-stories/covid-19-vaccination-programme-what-you-need-to-know/>

You will probably be aware from reports in the media, however, that as we go into the autumn, cases are increasing nationally. Case rates in Cheshire West and our neighbouring areas are higher than the national average and still increasing. For the seven-day period from 7th to 13th October, the rate in Cheshire West was 528 per 100,000 people compared to the England average of 424 per 100,000. The highest rates are currently seen in the youngest age groups from 0-19 years: for example, in the 5-9 years age group there are 797 cases/100,000 (England average 658/100,000).



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New Guidance – Testing

You may be aware that following concerns raised about potential in-school transmission linked to pupils who are household contacts of cases (and other contacts/household contacts), the Government has updated the schools' guidance.

The new guidance explains that local public health teams can now implement daily Lateral Flow Device (LFD) testing for secondary aged students in households where there is a confirmed case or for other close contacts (identified by NHS Test and Trace) while they wait for the results of their PCR test; and that they can advise primary schools to suggest this course of action to parents and carers, although in this case the decision is left to parental/carer discretion.

As long as the pupil's daily LFD test result is negative, they can continue to attend school as usual. If they test positive, however, they must self-isolate for 10 full days from the date of the positive test and they should obtain a confirmatory PCR test.

New Guidance – Director of Public Health Recommendation

The new guidance can be applied in response to outbreaks/potential outbreaks or in areas of high prevalence. So far, we have recommended additional measures (e.g. face coverings in communal areas, restricted activities etc.) on a case-by-case basis, but in view of the high and rising case rates in the borough and in our neighbouring local authority areas, we are now advising our primary schools to suggest to parents and carers that if one individual in a household tests positive, any children in that household who attend school should:

- Take a PCR test (ideally on Day 3-5 after first exposure), **and**
- Take a daily LFD test for 10 consecutive days from the date of first exposure
- Continue to attend school provided that their test results (PCR and LFD) are negative

- Self-isolate for 10 full days from the date of the test if any of their test results are positive
- In the event of a positive LFD test result, obtain a confirmatory PCR test
- If the confirmatory PCR test is taken within the two days following the positive LFD result and PCR result is negative, the young person can return to school.

In the case of other contacts (identified by NHS Test and Trace), we will continue to advise on any additional testing measures on a case-by-case basis.

LFD Test Kits are available:

- Online [Order coronavirus \(COVID-19\) rapid lateral flow tests - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)
- From community pharmacies [Regular rapid lateral flow coronavirus \(COVID-19\) tests - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)
- From certain Cheshire West and Chester Council test sites
 - Stanney Oaks Leisure Centre, Ellesmere Port
 - The Dingle Centre, Winsford

- Pop up mobile testing unit
- Libraries: Northwich, Neston, Frodsham and Ellesmere Port and the mobile library service

Venues for the mobile testing units and opening times for all Cheshire West and Chester Services are available at [Testing without symptoms \(cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk\)](https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

We are recommending the above measures to ensure the safety of children and staff in our schools, to minimise the disruption to young people's education and to ensure our schools remain open. Thank you once again for your continued support and co-operation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Ashworth', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ian Ashworth
Director of Public Health