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Ref: JMCovidGuidance
Date: 25 April 2022

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am writing to you to update you on the new COVID-19 guidance for children and to give you information about the current COVID-19 situation in Waltham Forest.

While we have moved to a new phase of the pandemic, levels of COVID-19 remain very high in both London and England – almost as high as they’ve ever been. The Omicron variant is not ‘mild’ – for anyone not vaccinated, it remains as serious as the original COVID-19 strain. COVID-19 continues to cause deaths and put pressure on the health system – just last week, there were over 80 people in Whipps Cross hospital beds with COVID-19.

In addition, illness due to COVID-19 continues to cause large disruption to many sectors, including schools and nurseries, and to affect the wellbeing of pupils. We are also seeing more and more people infected with COVID-19 for a second or even third time – there is no ‘getting COVID over with’. The future of COVID-19 is unclear, but it is likely to continue to circulate at high levels for some time to come with reinfections, and new variants present an ongoing threat. Any steps that can be taken to reduce the spread of disease remain important, even as activities return to normal.

At the start of April 2022, new national guidance was published for COVID-19. This includes general guidance for [people with symptoms of a respiratory infection including COVID-19](#) (which includes children) and also [guidance for schools](#) on respiratory infections, which includes coronavirus.

The most significant change is that, with the reduction in testing for COVID, **children are expected to remain home from school while they are unwell or have a high temperature**, rather than just based on test results.

The guidance is summarised in more detail below:

Testing

There is no longer free access to testing for most people, both LFD (rapid home tests without symptoms) and PCR (lab testing with symptoms). LFD tests can be bought in pharmacies and supermarkets; however, it is not recommended that children and young people are tested for COVID-19 unless directed to by a health professional.

Symptoms

The list of symptoms of COVID-19 (and other respiratory infections) has been expanded and now includes shortness of breath, unexplained tiredness, lack of energy, muscle aches or pains that are not due to exercise, not wanting to eat, headache, sore throat, stuffy or runny nose, diarrhoea, feeling or being sick, a continuous cough, high temperature, fever or chills, and loss or change in your sense of taste or smell.

Children under 18 with symptoms.

Children and young people with mild symptoms such as a runny nose, sore throat, or slight cough, who are otherwise well, can continue to attend their education or childcare setting. Children and young people who are unwell or have a high temperature should stay at home and avoid contact

with other people. **It is really important that anyone who feels unwell does not come to school – this will help to reduce the risk of transmission.**

They can go back to school and resume normal activities when they no longer have a high temperature and they are well enough to attend i.e. their temperature does not need to be controlled by medication. If you are worried about a child, then you should seek medical help. If a child who is unwell is brought into school, they will be sent home immediately. It is particularly important for children with symptoms to avoid contact with vulnerable people at risk of becoming seriously unwell due to COVID-19 or respiratory infections.

Positive test results

All children and young people aged 18 and under who have a positive test result should stay at home for a minimum of 3 days (adults should stay at home for a minimum of 5 days). This advice is regardless of symptoms. After this period, children should not return to the school until they feel well and do not have a high temperature.

Contacts

Children and young people who live with someone who has a positive COVID-19 test result should continue to attend school as normal, as long as they are well. Please be vigilant for any symptoms and if your child develops these, they should be kept at home as per the above bullet points.

Vaccination

Vaccination is still the best way to protect pupils and staff from becoming seriously ill with COVID-19, or developing long COVID, and now children can have them from the age of 5 and over. This is especially important as early evidence indicates that the reinfection rate of the current coronavirus strain is very high. Please visit <https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/covid-19/covid-19-vaccinations> to book a first, second or booster dose of the vaccine for anyone aged 5 years or older.

Reducing the spread of infection

There are many ways to reduce the spread of infection e.g. washing hands regularly, good ventilation and supporting children with respiratory symptoms to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Please see the infographic below for how to reduce the spread of infection if someone in the household has COVID-19.

UK Health Security Agency

How to reduce the spread of infection with the people you live with if you have COVID-19.

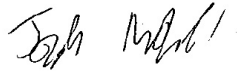
If you have COVID-19, there is a high risk that others in your household will catch it from you. There are several things you can do to reduce the spread of infection in your household.

- 1** Limit close contact with others. Spend as little time as possible in communal areas.
- 2** Regularly clean frequently touched surfaces and shared rooms like kitchens and bathrooms.
- 3** Wash your hands regularly using soap and water, particularly after coughing and sneezing.
- 4** Get help where possible from those you live with. Ask for help with cleaning and being brought food safely to avoid unnecessary contact.
- 5** Use a face covering if you need to spend time in shared spaces.
- 6** Keep rooms well ventilated.
- 7** Catch coughs and sneezes in disposable tissues and put them straight in the bin.

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For further information on COVID-19 please visit:
<https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/covid-19>
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe McDonnell', written in a cursive style.

Joe McDonnell
Director of Public Health, Waltham Forest