

Asymptomatic Testing in Schools

Frequently Asked Questions



The information contained in these FAQs was correct as of 18 January 2021. Much of the information was provided by the government and we have adapted this to suit our context. We will continue to update these as & when new information becomes available.

Definitions

Asymptomatic Someone who has Covid-19 (in this case) but does not display any symptoms

LFD Lateral Flow Device – this is the test which will be used in schools

PCR Polymerase Chain Reaction – this is the test commonly used by the large testing facilities

Mass testing This is where the whole school population will be tested

Serial testing This is where those in close contact with a positive test will be tested

Why is the government implementing this programme of testing?

What are the objectives of the Government's asymptomatic testing strategy in education settings?

- By testing we will help to break the chains of transmission of coronavirus.
- The rapid testing programme in secondary schools will help to identify people who have the virus without symptoms (they are asymptomatic).
- Those who test positive will then self-isolate, helping to keep other pupils and students in face-to-face education.

Why is asymptomatic rapid testing being introduced now?

- One in three people have the virus and are asymptomatic so could be spreading the disease unknowingly.
- New technology that allows for rapid testing means that we can now introduce initial testing of staff and students who may be asymptomatic, then daily testing for staff or students who are identified as contacts.
- Testing for people who are identified as contacts of positive cases will also mean that they possibly do not need to isolate and can stay in face-to-face education (see below.)

This will help to identify positive cases more quickly, break the chains of transmission and reduce the disruption that has been experienced in recent months. Schools will continue to put in place a range of protective measures to minimise the risk of infection spread and weekly testing for staff will also increase their confidence in the workplace.

Children and young people that fall into the clinically extremely vulnerable group should continue to follow the Guidance on shielding and protecting extremely vulnerable persons.

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What is serial (daily) testing of close contacts in secondary schools?

As of week commencing 18 January, there is some confusion as to how appropriate the use of serial testing is in schools. There are two scenarios:

1. Current government guidance instructs schools to begin **serial testing** of those students who come into close contact with a positive case. According to this guidance, students will continue to receive a daily test in the morning for 7 school days. If at any point, they test positive on the lateral flow test they will need to leave school, self-isolate and take a further PCR test. If the PCR test is positive, they will need to self-isolate for ten days from the point of the positive PCR test.
 2. However, this last piece of advice is contradicted by the Medicine & Healthcare products Regulation Agency (MHRA), the government's own regulatory body which advises self-isolation of close contacts, as does the Confederation of School Trusts, of which the Horncastle Education Trust is a member.
- We are currently awaiting confirmation from the government regarding the exact protocols for self-isolation. Once we have that, we will advise parents on the appropriate measures based on that advice and the safety of staff, students and their families.

Mass Testing

What is the Government's asymptomatic testing strategy in education settings?

- One in three people have the virus without symptoms (they are asymptomatic) so could be transmitting the virus unknowingly.
- That is why the testing of asymptomatic people can support education settings. Identifying positive cases will help break the chains of transmission.
- Testing programme will involve secondary school students initially receiving two LFD tests.
- ***Individuals testing positive will need to self-isolate in line with the stay-at-home guidance for households for those with a possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID19) infection. The student or staff member should then take a confirmatory PCR test to validate the positive result. Schools will issue any individual that receives a positive test with a PCR test, to support swift access to a confirmatory test.***

Testing is not mandatory and any student who does not wish to take the two LFD tests will not need to produce a negative test result, or provide proof of having taken a test, to return to face-to-face education. ***However, testing is strongly encouraged.***

How accurate is a lateral flow device test?

- Lateral flow tests are very accurate, which means that only a very small proportion of people who do not have coronavirus will receive a positive result (false positive).
- If you test positive on a lateral flow test, it is likely that you are infectious at that moment.
- By using the lateral flow test, we can identify people with a high viral load who are the most likely to spread the virus further.

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Those who receive a negative test result from an LFD test must still follow social distancing guidance, wear face coverings when appropriate and wash their hands regularly.

Who will be doing the testing in schools?

- In most cases, students will self-swab in order to provide a test sample and will be supported by both school staff and volunteers.

Getting tested

Will the existing testing service remain open?

- The Government's normal testing service for symptomatic individuals will continue.
- This is the foundation of our testing strategy. It is the most effective way to know if you are positive and need to self-isolate.
- If you have symptoms, you should continue to book a test via the NHS Coronavirus (COVID-19) service or by calling 119.

How will you avoid a stigma on those who choose not to take part or who test positive in school in front of their peers?

- Test results will be communicated to students and staff in private.

Can my family get tested too?

- No, this testing is aimed at staff and students in schools with the goal of keeping schools open and students in face-face education.
- Family members of staff and students taking part are not eligible. If family members experience COVID-19 symptoms, they must follow standard government guidance, including self-isolating immediately and booking a test through the NHS Coronavirus (COVID-19) service or by calling 119 (England and Wales).

Why should I (the student/staff member) get tested if I (the student/staff member) have no symptoms?

- Lateral flow tests are designed to detect the level of virus in individuals who do not experience and show any symptoms, but who could still be infectious and pass the virus to others. By taking a test, you will help to stop the spread of the virus, protect other people, and save lives.

Why would a student/staff member take the test?

- If positive, you will have to self-isolate, but lateral flow tests are designed to detect the level of virus in individuals who do not experience and show any symptoms, but who could still be infectious and pass the virus to others.
- By taking a test, you will help to stop the spread of the virus, protect other people, and save lives.
- This will also mean that staff can continue going to work, schools can avoid unnecessary staff shortages, and students can continue in face-to-face education with their peers.

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Consent

What happens if a school cannot get the consent and the child turns up to school?

- Participation in the programme requires active consent from the person being tested, or, if they are under 16, their parent or legal guardian.
- Any staff member or student who does not take part in testing will still be able to attend school unless they develop symptoms or have been in close contact with a positive result.
- People who decline to participate in daily/serial contact testing will follow the usual national guidelines and must self-isolate for ten days.

Do you need consent to process the personal data required for testing?

- Secondary schools will need to satisfy themselves that they have a lawful basis for processing personal data.
- The duties prescribed in education legislation for secondary schools require them to plan for safeguarding needs and promote students' welfare may provide sufficient legal basis without having to rely on consent.
- Schools will provide staff, students and parents with a privacy notice explaining what personal data is required to participate in the programme.

Testing Workforce

Will volunteers require a DBS check?

Schools must comply with their legal duties regarding pre-appointment checks when utilising staff and volunteers to support testing. Usually, if you are involved in the testing procedure, or if you are at any time with children unsupervised, then you will require a DBS check. If you are volunteering but not assisting with swabbing and you will not be unsupervised with children at any time, then you will not need a DBS check.

It is essential that volunteers are appropriately supported and given appropriate roles. The school should minimise the mixing of volunteers, agency staff and contractors across groups, and they should remain 2 metres from students and staff where possible.

Test process

After LFD testing - the results take up to half an hour to develop. Can students go back to class?

- When the testing is part of the mass testing, individuals can return to regular school activities.
- Anyone tested as part of the daily/serial testing of contacts programme will need to wait somewhere before being allowed to begin normal school activities until they receive a negative test result. These holding spaces must be separated for each group of close contacts and cleaned after all individuals leave.

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What happens if a student or staff member's lateral flow test result is positive?

- Individuals who return a positive lateral flow test result must self-isolate immediately and take a confirmatory PCR test.
- If the PCR test returns a positive result, the individual must continue to self-isolate and follow NHS Test and Trace guidance. They should also inform their school of the positive result.
- A confirmatory PCR test is crucial as it activates contact tracing, which reduces the spread of the disease.
- If an individual does not take a PCR confirmatory test, they must self-isolate for ten days and inform their contacts to self-isolate in line with public health advice.

Transport

What if staff or students need to travel to school on public transport – should they still attend school if they are in the daily/serial testing window?

This will very much depend on the guidance issued in light of the discussions between the Government and the MHRA (see the section above: **What is serial (daily) testing of close contacts in secondary schools?**)

- Depending on the outcome of the discussions between the two agencies, an individual identified as a close contact of a positive case within an education setting, **may** have to self-isolate **OR may** receive daily/serial testing and **may** not need to self-isolate, follow social restrictions, or travel arrangements beyond the rules and guidance issued for the tier they are living in.
- If the individual cannot take a test during this time, i.e., weekends or holidays, they must self-isolate. If the seven-day period ends over the weekend, the individual would need to take a further LFD test on the following Monday.

What happens if, in exceptional circumstances, the parent is unable to collect a child who has tested positive?

- Parents or carers should arrange for their child to be collected as quickly as possible following a positive test.
- The pupil or student should wear a face covering and keep a safe distance from others in a designated waiting area within the school.
- If possible, the child should walk or cycle home.
- Pupils and students who have tested positive must not travel home using public transport. Exceptionally the local authority may be able to help source a suitable vehicle which would provide appropriate protection.