

COVID-19 Briefing

Briefing for Pupils, Parents & Carers

24th September 2021



COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR
Education, Skills & Children's Services

DMD38188

Safe Operation of Schools

Whilst there has continued to be daily reports of new COVID-19 cases across our island communities, all our schools have continued to operate and have been able to do so safely and with minimal disruption to learning.

Whilst it is the case that now fourteen of our twenty-two schools have had links to positive cases, we are able to confirm that evidence currently indicates very low probability of in-school transmission taking place, meaning that the risk assessments and control measures in schools are working in protecting both pupils and staff and significantly reducing risk of contact with the virus.

We continue to work very closely with colleagues in the NHS Western Isles Health Protection Team to respond quickly to reported cases and act based on both NHS and Scottish Government advice. More information about updated Test & Protect contact-tracing arrangements are included later in this briefing.

Taking all that into account, we do wish to reassure all parents and pupils that it is safe to attend school and our staff are taking every step to make sure that continues to be the case.

Extension of Restrictions in Schools

In recognition of the continued numbers of daily cases seen nationally since schools returned in August, the Scottish Government has decided to extend the initial six-week period of heightened restrictions through to the October holidays. As a result, there are currently no changes or updates to the guidance for the safe operation of schools. All existing restrictions remain in place, including the following.

- Strict hand hygiene
- Wearing of face coverings by pupils and staff where that is required
- Maintenance of physical distancing
- Maximum use of ventilation in all rooms
- Implementation of CO2 monitoring
- Restrictions on visitors and movements between schools
- Restrictions on large gatherings of pupils
- Enhanced daily cleaning
- Application of Test & Protect contact-tracing procedures
- Implementation of school risk assessments

Stay Vigilant for Symptoms and Act Promptly!

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 seen in the Western Isles are recent onset of:

- a new cough;
- a fever (including high temperature or chills/shivers);
- loss of sense of taste and smell;
- sore throat;
- unexplained headache;
- diarrhoea.

If you or anyone in your household has symptoms of concern, act quickly:

- self-isolate the household
- book a PCR test
- follow Test & Protect advice

Call to book a test:

01851 601151

or e-mail: wi.covid19queries@nhs.scot

or visit: www.coronavirus.wi.nhs.scot

Updated Contact Tracing Procedures

Throughout the pandemic, we have been working closely with the NHS Western Isles Health Protection Team and have continued to do so during this time when we are aware of cases linked to schools.

The guidance for Test & Protect contact tracing has been agreed locally and takes account of the latest NHS and Scottish Government guidance. Letters were issued to all parents on Friday 17th September explaining these processes.

From Monday 20th September, updated Test & Protect procedures came into use for schools that involve the identification of high and low risk contacts and specific different actions are taken depending on what level of contact pupils and staff have had with a positive case.

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High Risk Contact: Prolonged high level out-of-school contact, such as in familial and household settings or involving overnight stays. It can also include very high levels of contact within a school setting in certain circumstances.

Action: High risk contacts are instructed to immediately self-isolate and will be offered a PCR test, typically 4-5 days after last contact with the positive case. The self-isolation period will be 10 days but can end early upon receipt of a negative PCR result.

Low Risk Contact: Routine 'business as usual' contact, such as sitting next to someone in class or working with them in a routine way, where other safety measures are in place, for example, good ventilation or use of face coverings.

Action: Issued with a Low-Risk Contact Notification Letter that informs of this status and what action to take. Self-isolation and PCR testing is NOT required but a high level of vigilance for symptoms should be maintained. The taking of LFD home tests is strongly encouraged. If symptoms do develop or a positive LFD test result is received, isolate immediately and contact 01851 601151 to book a PCR test.

A diagram is provided at the end of this briefing to explain the high/low risk contact tracing process.

NHS Test & Protect staff inform and advise about who are considered high or low risk contacts following close consultation with the positive case and with the relevant education staff. Each case is assessed on its own specific circumstances and a number of variable factors are considered when deciding if a contact is high or low risk.

Beyond the immediately identified high/low contacts, the school will arrange for general information to be shared with the wider school population and will keep parents informed with any information it is permitted to share.

Ventilation & CO2 Monitoring

A critical measure in reducing the risk of the spread of COVID-19 in schools is the maximum use of ventilation and maintenance of good air quality.

All schools and early learning settings are required to keep the highest possible levels of ventilation in learning spaces. This can be challenging as we approach the

winter months, and the weather deteriorates but it is a very important measure to maintain.

To assist schools with monitoring the air quality in spaces used by pupils, we have been implementing a programme of measuring and recording CO2 levels in classrooms and learning spaces. This allows schools to be confident about ventilation levels and take action to improve them, where that is required.

LFD Home Testing for Pupils

We continue to strongly encourage the use of Lateral Flow Device (LFD) home testing. It has proven to be a successful measure in the early identification of positive cases, preventing unwittingly infectious pupils and staff from attending at school.

LFD testing kits are available for all secondary-age pupils from your school office, and we advise at least twice-weekly testing for those in the programme. The use of LFD testing remains voluntary, but we do strongly encourage it.

For younger children, the tests can be used at the discretion of parents and carers and kits are available from local pharmacies or by ordering for home delivery via the [UK Government portal](#). Delivery is usually within two working days.

LFD tests are intended for identifying and tracking asymptomatic cases. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, isolate immediately and contact the NHS Western Isles COVID-19 helpline to request a PCR test.

Please be aware that there are now different types of LFD test kits in circulation that have different administration instructions. Ensure that you accurately follow the correct instructions provided with the kit you have. We also strongly encourage the reporting of all test results via the [LFD Result Reporting](#) website. This helps government and NHS to track the prevalence and spread of the virus.

Vaccination for 12-15 Year Olds

Following the very successful roll out of vaccination of 16–17 year-olds, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) confirmed that the vaccination programme is to be extended to the 12-15 year-old age group.

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The Comhairle strongly supports the vaccination programme and encourages all children and young people aged 12 and over to seek vaccination.

The first NHS Western Isles drop-in clinics for the 12-15 year-old age group will take place in the coming days, with clinics operating at locations across the Western Isles. Details of dates, times and venues is provided below.

Friday 24th September

Western Isles Hospital: 2pm – 7.30pm
Uist and Barra Hospital: 4.30pm – 7.30pm

Saturday 25th September

Western Isles Hospital: 10.30am – 5.30pm
Uist and Barra Hospital: 8.30am – 3pm
St Brendan's Hospital: 9am – 4.30pm

Sunday 26th September

Western Isles Hospital: 10.30am – 5.30pm

Tuesday 28th September

Harris Hub: 3.30pm – 8pm

Continued Restrictions on Visiting Schools

With confirmation that the Scottish Government is keeping school restrictions unchanged until at least the October holidays, it will continue to the case that school

buildings will be closed to all parents and non-essential visitors.

We appreciate that this can be challenging for parents and this restriction has now been in place for a long time, but it has been an important protective factor for our schools and will continue to be in place for as long as it is required.

Any events or activities for parents or the wider community, such as teacher consultations, meetings, Parent Council events or community clubs, will continue to take place virtually or be postponed until further notice.

Seeking More Information?

As well as the information provided in relation to current key issues, we have provided a section below that lists a number of frequently asked questions from parents that schools have noted in recent weeks.

If you have any further questions about COVID-19 procedures, especially relating to the circumstances of individual schools, we advise that you contact your school office in the first instance.

Attached:

- Frequently Asked Questions
- COVID-19 Contact Tracing process Map

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Frequently Asked Questions

We were aware of a case with a positive LFD test already. Why didn't the school act sooner?

Whilst LFD tests do provide critical notice of potential positive cases, the school is required to await formal confirmation from NHS Test & Protect staff before taking steps to trace close contacts or notify parents. In addition, the school or education service has to consult with the NHS Test & Protect staff to evaluate the high/low risk contacts and agree what actions are to be taken. Schools act as soon as they can and only when in possession of correct and validated information.

Can you tell me who was the positive case and where it came from?

If a person with links to the school receives a PCR positive Covid-19 result, we must respect their right to privacy and confidentiality and will not share any specific case details with parents or the school community. General notification will be issued to parents that there has been a positive case at the school and updates will be provided about any subsequent cases or other relevant or developing information. Any identified high/low risk close contacts of a positive case will receive separate direct communication.

Does my child need to self-isolate?

Please reference the contact tracing section of this briefing and the diagram provided below. Where a child has been identified as a high-risk close contact of a positive case, they will be required to self-isolate until the result of a PCR test is known. Typically, it is only the child who has to isolate but depending on their age and capacity for self-care, a consistent adult may have to isolate with them. Please follow all current public health advice and any instructions issued by NHS Test & Protect staff.

Will my child need to receive a PCR test?

If your child has been identified as high-risk close contact, you will be contacted by NHS Test & Protect staff and will be offered a PCR test. For the test to be most reliable, it is usually administered on day four or five after your last contact with a positive case. You will be given information on the phone and as a parent/carer you can decide whether you wish your child to receive the test. If the test is not taken, your child will be required to complete the full 10-day isolation period. If symptoms develop before a scheduled PCR test date, contact the NHS Covid helpline on 01851 601151 and request a test to be undertaken sooner.

What happens if my child receives a positive or negative PCR result?

If your child has a positive result you will be advised by NHS Test & Protect staff to continue self-isolation and they will discuss other potential close contacts with you. If a child is negative and has had no symptoms for 48hrs, they may return to school.

When will my child receive PCR results?

Where possible, results are returned to you on the same day but, at times of high demand on the Test & Protect service, it can take up to 48 hours for a result to be returned. This is not common, and they are most often returned much sooner.

Another class in the school has links to a positive case, what happens to my child's class?

If your child has been identified as a high-risk close contact, you will be notified by NHS Test & Protect staff and they will also be able to advise about what actions to take in relation to siblings. It is usually the case that only the high-risk close contact is required to isolate, which means that children in other classes or groups across the school will be unaffected.

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COVID-19 Test & Protect Contact Tracing Process Map

