



COVID-19 CASES CONTINUE TO RISE – STAY VIGILANT

At this time, we ask for all parents, carers and families to keep a high level of vigilance for symptoms of Covid-19. With case numbers continuing to rise locally and news of a new variant of COVID-19 causing concern nationally, it is an important time to make sure we are all working together as a community to follow essential public health advice.

- Get vaccinated or seek your booster (if eligible)
- Wear a face covering wherever it's required
- Wash hands frequently
- Cover nose and mouth if coughing/sneezing
- Open windows when meeting people indoors
- Avoid large gatherings or crowded spaces
- If you have symptoms, act quickly. Isolate and seek a test.

If you or anyone else in your household are displaying potential symptoms, isolate immediately and contact the NHS Western Isles Covid helpline on 01851 601151 or by e-mail wi.covid19queries@nhs.scot to seek advice.

Schools continue to take every step they can to reduce the risk of pupils and staff becoming exposed to the virus in school and higher levels of restrictions will be in place for the remainder of this term.

If you are concerned about having been in contact with the virus or have very mild symptoms, we would advise taking a Lateral Flow Device (LFD) test in the first instance before contacting the NHS helpline.

STOP THE SPREAD!

Cover & Clean

Wear face coverings – Wash hands often

Open Windows

Open windows when meeting indoors

Vaccinate

Get vaccinated or seek your booster

Isolate & Test

If symptomatic, isolate and seek a test

Distance

Avoid large gatherings – Keep apart

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

After the issue of the last COVID-19 Briefing, we received a number of questions from parents and worked with the local representative of the National Parent Forum of Scotland and Parent Councils to gather more questions from parents and carers.

They have been collated together with answers in a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document that is being sent out alongside this briefing.

Thank you to everyone who submitted questions.

FACE COVERINGS ON SCHOOL GROUNDS

It continues to be a requirement that parents wear a face covering when on any part of school grounds. This includes when dropping off or picking up pupils. Please make sure that you wear a face covering at all times that it is required unless you are exempt.

We also ask that any adults accessing school grounds keep distanced from any adults from other households.



SICKNESS & SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

We continue to seek the support of parents and carers to keep children at home when they are unwell and displaying recent onset of COVID-19 symptoms. Recent onset would be within the last five days.

It is important at this time that we continue to reduce the risk of both COVID-19 and any other infectious illnesses with similar symptoms.

If you believe that you or anyone in your household has recent onset of any symptoms of COVID-19, please act quickly to isolate and seek a PCR test.

Regular use of Lateral Flow Device (LFD) tests is strongly encouraged. Secondary-age pupils can access test kits from their school office. If parents/carers wish to administer LFD tests to primary or nursery children, kits are available from local chemists or by online order for home delivery here: <https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests>.

If you or anyone in your household receives a positive LFD test result, isolate and seek a PCR test immediately.

We are aware that some illnesses can cause long-lasting symptoms such as coughs or runny noses that last well beyond any infectious period. A child or young person may return to school where parents are confident that their symptoms:

- do not include fever, loss of taste/smell or a new cough;
- have been present for 7 days or more;
- are stable or improving (not getting worse);
- are not believed to be infectious;
- do not affect their ability to engage in lessons and learning.

All of the above points must be true before returning to school or nursery.

Common symptoms of COVID-19 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;
- runny nose/cold;
- unexplained headache;
- diarrhoea.

**Act quickly: Isolate and seek a test. Call NHS
COVID-19 Helpline**

01851 601151

RISK ASSESSMENTS

All Comhairle schools and nurseries continue to have increased protection measures and risk assessments in place and will continue to do so for the remainder of this term.

Increased measures will vary in different locations depending on their individual risk assessments and number of cases in the area, but they may include:

- Use of pupil bubbles;
- maintenance of at least 2m physical distancing between adults;
- provision of maximum available ventilation in all classrooms and learning spaces
- avoidance of any gatherings such as assemblies or meetings;
- restriction on all but essential visitors to the school;
- short-term cancellation of any trips or off-site activity;



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Pupils, Parents & Carers

- restrictions on some higher risk curricular activities such as indoor singing.
- timetable changes to reduce movement and contact between different pupil groups.

CONTACT TRACING & COMPLIANCE

Comhairle education staff continue to work on a daily basis with NHS Western Isles Health Protection Team to respond to the latest reports of positive cases affecting schools.

We then work with schools to identify potential close contacts and they are classed as high or low risk. The vast majority of school-based 'business as usual' contacts will be considered low-risk, including seating contacts of a positive case.

High-Risk: Very significant levels of contact with a positive case. They will be informed by NHS Test & Protect staff and will be advised to isolate and seek a PCR test.

Low-Risk: Routine business-as-usual contact with a positive case in a school or nursery setting. Will be informed by letter issued from the school advising increased vigilance. No requirement to isolate or seek a PCR test. Use of LFD tests are encouraged.

When a person is notified by NHS Test & Protect staff that they either have a positive PCR result or have been identified as a high-risk close contact, they must fully comply with self-isolation instructions and any other requirements advised by NHS.

VENTILATION & TEMPERATURE

Maintaining very good ventilation and air quality in classrooms and playrooms is a very important step in reducing risks of transmitting COVID-19 in schools.

Schools and nurseries are required to maintain high levels of ventilation, mainly through keeping windows and classroom doors open. Schools also have access to CO² monitors that monitor air quality in rooms and they can be used to check that there

is enough access to fresh air in a room, reducing the risk of COVID-19 being passed on.

Due to the need to have windows open, rooms will be colder at this time of year, just as they were when we had the same measures in place last winter.

School staff will be able to open and close windows and use CO² monitors to balance maintenance of both fresh air and room temperature.

Although rooms should not fall below 16°C, they will feel colder than usual and we strongly advise that pupils wear warmer clothes or additional layers to school during the winter months.

Financial Support: Families that have had a clothing grant for pupils this academic year will automatically receive an additional winter clothing payment this month. If any parents/carers are concerned about costs of providing winter clothing, please check for your eligibility for school clothing grants. Application forms are available here: <https://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/schools/application-forms/>

SAFELY CELEBRATING THE SEASON

Due to the restrictions currently in place in schools, it will not be possible for them to hold traditional Christmas events such as concerts, parties, dances or shows as they normally would.

Our schools came up with lots of interesting and innovative ways last year to mark the Christmas season and will continue to do so again this year. Your school will share directly with you what their plans are.

There are also many community events and activities at this time of year and, whilst we welcome the opportunity to come together as a community, we strongly encourage people to follow the latest public health advice to keep everyone safe and reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.