



5th January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

NHS Test and Trace: COVID-19 testing for staff and students

I will write to you again later today regarding the announcement yesterday. This letter is about consent for testing only.

While the extension to the period of school closure will slow down our timescale for student testing we will continue to prepare for this as we are working to keep our school as safe as possible in the future. This will be using quicker COVID-19 tests known as 'lateral flow tests'. Along with the other protective measures we are taking, these tests will help staff and students to remain in school safely. It is still important that we maintain the 'hands, face, space' measures to protect ourselves – the addition of testing is just that, an addition. **Testing does not replace the need for us to conduct ourselves safely.**

Up to one third of people who have COVID-19 experience no symptoms. By testing we will help to stop the virus spread and help to keep our school open as safely as possible. The test is voluntary, but I think that it shows great social responsibility to be involved in the testing programme and I am expecting everyone to take the test. Last term we had put in place all of the preventive measures suggested to schools but this could not prevent the new strain of the virus having an impact on some of our year groups and high numbers of students. This is an additional step now available to us so I trust you will be supportive of it.

We will still try and test our staff this week to help us establish the practice and ensure staff on site working with any children are well and not asymptomatic. We also intend to go ahead and use the testing with students who do join us on site during this period where the closure of school is extended where consent has been given for this to happen.

An instructional leaflet with some more information about how testing works can be found on the website here <https://www.thamesmead.surrey.sch.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/How-to-do-your-test-COVID-19-instruction-leaflet-for-schools.pdf>.

I would like to confirm that students will be administering these tests themselves. This involves self-swabbing of the tonsil area and the nostril.

We still expect that testing will be a part of any plan to reopen schools at the right time and would appreciate you completing the consent form at this time so we can get all the necessary records and registration in place.

If you are happy for your child to be tested, please fill in the registration and consent statement (one per child) by following this link.

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/DesignPage.aspx?fragment=FormId%3DRF27HurRRkOcwa-UXm33Dyd2I84x8cJGiufkwXsJJ7BUMUxRQkM1REtBWUJYVVpZVFRJSFFENVgwVi4u>

It can also be completed via this link on the school website

<https://www.thamesmead.surrey.sch.uk/latest-guidance-to-parents-about-corona-virus-covid-19/>



Those taking the test will be supervised by trained staff. The lateral flow tests are quick and easy, using a swab of your nose and throat. Results (which take around half an hour from testing) will be shared directly with staff and students if they are positive or void. Where participants are under 16, parents or carers will also be informed.

We know these tests work when conducted properly – in validation studies conducted by Oxford University and Public Health England, they were shown to be as accurate in identifying a case as a PCR test (99.68% specificity). The tests have lower sensitivity but they are better at picking up cases when a person has higher viral load, hence the need to test frequently. Testing will of course be offered with no charge.

What if a child tests positive?

Participating staff and children who test positive will be informed about their results individually and confidentially. Where participants are under 16, parents or carers will also be notified.

Children will need to take a further 'PCR test' (similar to those done in local and regional testing sites) on the same day (or as soon as possible). You can go to www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test or call 119 to book a follow-up test and should choose to visit a drive-through test site if possible, as it is faster than requesting a home test. **The school are not able to book these tests for you.**

During this time while you wait for the PCR result (*via*. text / email) your household will need to self-isolate. If the PCR test returns a positive result then you will have to self-isolate and follow the guidance from NHS Test and Trace.

What happens if the test is negative?

Your child will be able to stay in school and resume their activities as normal. **A child will only be told if they test positive on a lateral flow test, so if they or you do not hear you can assume that it was negative.** A small number of children may need to repeat the test if the first test was invalid or void for some reason. We will speak to these individuals in a timely fashion.

What if a close contact at school tests positive?

The longer term plan for testing is that a close contact of someone in school who has tested positive for COVID-19 will be able to return to school if they agree to be tested once each day for 7 days and the test remains negative. If they do not want to take the test, they will need to self-isolate as per the national guidelines. This does not apply to household members or close contacts outside of school who will still need to self-isolate. The schools' system is operating under a different set of guidelines. Please understand that we are continuing to risk assess if these tests provide the safest way to manage known infections in the school and will provide further details when we are certain this is a safe strategy, but if you would prefer to self-isolate instead of doing daily testing, then in this situation you could.

What if my child develops symptoms?

This testing programme at school is for people with no symptoms. If your child develops symptoms at any time (a high temperature; a new and continuous cough; or a loss of or change to their sense of smell or taste) **then they**

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must immediately self-isolate and book a test by calling 119 or visiting <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>.

How can I help with the testing programme?

Please can I extend a very sincere and personal thanks to all of those who have so far come forward to help us with the testing process. We will be in touch shortly. If any other members of our wider community feel able to support us by providing help with these plans for testing then please contact us on info@thamesmead.surrey.sch.uk and let us know the days and times when you can help, and if you have any specific experience that is relevant (although this is not necessary).

I will be in touch again tomorrow to confirm arrangements for the weeks ahead.

Yours faithfully,

Phil Reeves

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