

## COMMUNITY AND HOUSING DEPARTMENT

Dagmar Zeuner – Director of Public Health



London Borough of Merton  
Merton Civic Centre  
London Road  
Morden SM4 5DX

*Direct Line:* 020 8545 4834

*Date:* 14 March 2022

Dear Parents and Carers

### COVID-19 update – national changes

Since writing to you at the end of January, we wanted to share the latest guidance on testing and self-isolation, which affects everyone including children and young people.

Under the government's new 'Living safely with COVID' approach, the advice is to treat COVID symptoms like other respiratory illness, such as flu.

Consequently, there are various changes to testing and self-isolation that are summarised in the table below. There is an expectation that the experience of the pandemic will foster a new civic norm for anybody with respiratory symptoms to avoid spreading infection. More clarity is expected about what that would mean, including possible implications for schools.

**Please see table below which shows the current guidance that we need to follow until 31<sup>st</sup> March and what the expectations are from 1<sup>st</sup> April.**

Rule	What is the current guidance to be followed until 31 <sup>st</sup> March?	What is the guidance from 1 <sup>st</sup> April?
Testing: Lateral Flow Device (LFD) Testing for those without symptoms	The Government has removed the guidance for staff and pupils in year 7 and above to test twice weekly from 22 <sup>nd</sup> February. However, testing currently continues for staff and pupils in special educational needs settings up until 31 <sup>st</sup> March.	No change for mainstream educational settings. We are waiting for more information on regular testing in SEND settings from this date.
Testing: PCR test for those with symptoms	Anyone with any of the recognised symptoms (lack/change in smell/taste, high temperature, new continuous cough), <b>should</b>	You are no longer required to get a PCR test if you have symptoms – PCR tests are reserved for clinical

	<b>continue to take a PCR test, stay at home</b> and follow government advice if positive.	settings and for certain people who are at high risk.
Self-isolation rule after positive test	From Thursday 24th February, the legal requirement to self-isolate following a positive test was removed, however, the public health advice is still the same: <b>adults and children are advised to stay at home, and limit contact with others, for at least 5 full days when they test positive. At the end of the five full days, they should continue to stay at home and limit contact until they receive two negative LFD test results on two consecutive days.</b>	PCR testing will no longer be available for everyone with symptoms. Instead it is envisaged that people will treat and manage COVID like other respiratory infections such as flu – so if you are unwell and have any of the symptoms, you are advised to stay at home until you are well.
Close contacts	Contact tracing has ceased since 24 <sup>th</sup> February. Close contacts of a positive case are no longer required to undertake daily lateral flow tests for 7 days or self-isolate.	No change

**After 31<sup>st</sup> March, is there any advice on how to stay safe with COVID?**

COVID virus is still among us and we need to continue to take actions to keep each other safe. There are 5 safe behaviours that we can maintain to ensure that we can carry out our daily lives as safely as possible:

The infographic consists of six colored panels arranged in a 2x3 grid, each with an icon and text:

- Top Left (Purple):** HM Government logo. Text: **HOW YOU CAN CONTINUE TO KEEP YOURSELF AND YOUR LOVED ONES SAFE**
- Top Middle (Blue):** Syringe icon. Text: **VACCINES**. Get vaccinated to reduce your risk of catching Covid-19 and becoming seriously ill, and to reduce the risk of spreading the virus to others.
- Top Right (Light Blue):** Open window icon. Text: **FRESH AIR**. Letting fresh air in if meeting indoors, or meeting outside to disperse Covid-19 particles and reduce the risk of spreading the virus.
- Bottom Left (Teal):** Face mask icon. Text: **FACE COVERING**. Consider wearing a face covering in crowded, enclosed spaces.
- Bottom Middle (Green):** House icon. Text: **STAY AT HOME IF UNWELL**. Try to stay at home if you are unwell.
- Bottom Right (Light Green):** Hand washing icon. Text: **HAND WASHING**. Wash your hands regularly to limit the spread of Covid-19.

Vaccination is the first line of defence in keeping safe from COVID. Latest scientific evidence demonstrates its safety in pregnant women – one key point was that of those pregnant women in Intensive Care Unit (ICU), nearly all of them were unvaccinated. Other evidence shows that people who are vaccinated had a lower chance of having 'long COVID' – this is where COVID symptoms lasts weeks or months after the infection has gone.

It's never too late to get vaccinated. You can book your own or your children's COVID vaccine following this link: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/>

In addition to 12-15 year olds and 5-11 year olds who are at high risk, all 5-11 year olds will now be eligible for COVID vaccination:

- 5-11 year olds who are high risk: If your child has been identified to be in this group, you should have been contacted by your GP Practice. If this has not happened, please contact your registered GP practice.
- All 5-11 year olds: All children in this age bracket can book to get protected against COVID from April 2022 onwards. The details of this programme is being planned at the moment, it is expected that vaccination will happen in local vaccination sites and in some schools.

Yours sincerely



Dagmar Zeuner  
Director of Public Health  
London Borough of Merton  
Email: [Dagmar.zeuner@merton.gov.uk](mailto:Dagmar.zeuner@merton.gov.uk)