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**Dear Directors of Public Health,**

When we last wrote to you on 17 June, nurseries, schools, and further education providers had just reopened their doors to more children and young people. We are writing to you again to thank you for the huge effort that you have put into achieving our goal of full reopening for the autumn term, and to update you on developments and next steps.

We know how much effort you have put into making sure that your local communities, and individual nurseries, schools, and colleges, can again provide the face-to-face offer that is central to our education system. We know that being able to go to school will improve the wellbeing and life chances of this generation, and that those children from the most deprived families will benefit most from being back at school or college. We have been delighted to see children across England spending time with their friends and getting back into the rhythms of the new normal.

Our approach to fully reopening education and childcare provision remains based on our latest understanding of the science, and on a comprehensive system of protective measures set out by the Department for Education and Public Health England. We expect each nursery, school and college to have implemented these measures and, in doing so, to have created a Covid-secure environment for their young people and staff. That includes having plans in place, including a remote education offer, for if pupils, students or staff need to self-isolate.

On 28 August [we announced](#) that all possible measures will be taken before we close schools or other education and childcare providers. This is in recognition of the absolute priority we attach to the importance of children and young people being able to continue to grow and thrive. [Annex 3](#) to the Contain Framework sets out the expectation that these settings will remain open in the event of a local lockdown, with partial closures only taking place where local conditions demand it, and where all other possible restrictions have been implemented or considered.

You are each at the heart of local planning for outbreaks in your communities. While we hope that few will be centred on education or childcare settings, we have already seen some schools needing to ask groups of pupils to isolate at home to limit the risk of transmission from those who have been in contact with a positive Covid case. In making their decisions about how to respond to

Covid cases in or around their settings, and to local restrictions that might be needed where community infection rates are higher, education leaders are rightly looking to Directors of Public Health for guidance and leadership. You and teams are supporting good decision making so that settings can remain open wherever possible, and that children can continue to receive the care and education that they need.

We recognise that the circumstances of infections will differ depending on the type and location of settings and many other factors, and we know you will wish to ensure that approaches to handling responses are consistent with evidence-based public health principles and infection control procedures. [Guidance to nurseries, schools and colleges](#) – including around infection and outbreak control – has been developed with public health colleagues. This guidance sets out a consistent approach which should be helpful to you practically in continuing to ensure evidence-based approaches are implemented across your local and neighbouring areas. We are grateful to you for working with local education and childcare leaders in implementing those measures and reassuring them about the proportionate measures they need to take. PHE national specialists and regional directors of public health are available to support you in helping ensure consistency of local advice and decision-making.

In discharging your vital role and providing your expert advice, we ask that you and your teams continue to consider the following crucial points:

- Please maintain open lines of communication with education and childcare providers, and with DfE's local teams including Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) and ESFA Further Education Territorial Teams. They will be able to provide some local education context whenever helpful. Please consider having an RSC representative on your Covid Health Protection Board and, given their size and reach especially with younger adults, direct representation of colleges or universities is proving beneficial in some areas.
- Please help schools, colleges, and nurseries to take a proportionate approach to responding to positive cases. Local education leaders may be understandably nervous, but you will be aware that in most circumstances they should only ask close contacts of positive cases to self-isolate and need not close or send wider groups home.
- Nurseries, schools and colleges should only ask those who have been in contact with someone who has tested positive to self-isolate. The prevalence of the virus remains low, and the vast majority of children test negative. It would be disproportionate to send home children who have been in contact with all those who display symptoms but do not have a confirmed positive test result, and it will have a negative impact on the wider public health outcomes of those children.
- Where education providers – and especially colleges – have links to local employers, the impact of any outbreaks in the work environment will of course need to be considered.

- Please reinforce with schools, colleges, and nurseries the importance of:
  - recommending tests only for those students or staff with one or more of the main coronavirus symptoms or on specific health professional or NHS Test & Trace advice.
  - not asking other members of the bubble or household to have a test (unless they too are symptomatic).
  
- Please also reinforce with schools, colleges and nurseries that the Public Health England dedicated advice service, accessed via the DfE coronavirus helpline, is available to provide support on the action to take to respond to any confirmed positive cases where a young person or member of staff is found to have spent time in a school, college or nursery while they may have been infectious. The advice team would carry out a rapid risk assessment to confirm who has been in close contact with the individual during that period, and provide the necessary public health advice. This approach will free up capacity of PHE's Regional Health Protection Teams to deal with more complex cases.
  
- We recognise that many of you have put more detailed local arrangements in place for your schools with your own health protection teams - continue to follow those local arrangements where they are available to take action in response to a positive case.
  
- Please reassure education and childcare leaders that previously shielded children will usually be able to return safely to school, college or nursery. The latest evidence indicates that the risk of serious illness for most children and young people is low. In the future, we expect fewer will be included on the shielded patient list and far fewer children and young people will be advised to shield whenever community transmission rates are high. Children or young people who received a shielding advisory letter early in the epidemic should be encouraged to talk this through with their GP or specialist at their next appointment.

Towards the end of this month, universities and other higher education providers will also begin welcoming back a full cohort of students for on-site learning – and often residential living – for the first time since March. We know that many of you have already been liaising with local universities to help them ensure they can operate in a Covid-secure way, and have robust plans in place in the event of an outbreak or a local lockdown.

The challenges for higher education will be different than for schools, and we would ask you to engage in depth with universities in your area to help them to establish the protocols that will be necessary in a range of scenarios. Bringing students back to university is vital to their education and to the future prosperity of the UK. In some cases that will mean large numbers of young people moving into new towns and forming new households. Guidance accompanying the reopening of universities will support them in planning for local restrictions (using a 'tiers' model similar to that for schools and other settings), but the diversity of accommodation and social settings that students engage with will require bespoke planning and you are well placed to

understand these local differences and their implications.

In particular, we ask that you and your teams continue to give urgent attention to:

- The formulation, in collaboration with each higher education provider, of a robust outbreak plan. That will need to consider the particular make-up of the student body and its accommodation, including those students who commute into university from their family homes.
- The measures each university will need to put in place to respond to local restrictions – including closing some or all of its face-to-face learning – while ensuring that such closures do not lead to a migration of students away from their term-time accommodation back to their family homes (if different). We must work together to contain the virus and avoid seeding new infections elsewhere, whilst being mindful of the mental and physical wellbeing of students and all those affected by restrictions.
- Working with universities to ensure students with symptoms of coronavirus are aware of their options for accessing testing, including how to access walk-in facilities wherever these are available locally and where possible to work on a tailored testing strategy that will increase confidence and reduce risk at the end of term when many students will want to return home for the Christmas break.

Some of these considerations will apply equally to other education or social care institutions that may have residential accommodation, including boarding schools, residential special schools, some colleges, and all children's homes.

We remain hugely grateful for all your work and support.



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