

Date: 8 December 2021

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Dear Directors of Education,

**Letter to all early learning and childcare (ELC), schools and higher and further education settings: Omicron variant**

This letter is to clarify what action is required of education, early learning and childcare (ELC) settings in response to the Omicron COVID-19 variant that has recently emerged.

To date, the Omicron variant appears to be more transmissible than Delta. Evidence on severity is still being gathered and assessed. The effectiveness of vaccination to protect against severe disease is not yet known, but the booster is expected to provide protection.

Robust efforts to slow transmission are being undertaken while we learn more. Therefore, local Health Protection Teams are contacting cases and close contacts by phone and SMS to advise individuals linked to known or suspected Omicron cases that more stringent self-isolation measures than for Delta are being applied.

Schools will be contacted to support case finding and risk assessment. It is acknowledged that bubbling systems are no longer in place for most schools, therefore contact tracing may necessitate whole classes to isolate if close contacts, as previously defined, cannot be identified.

The advice to cases and contacts linked to Omicron cases continues to evolve. **Currently any Omicron case or contact identified by Test and Protect or the local NHS Health Protection Team must self-isolate for 10 days. This applies to everyone, irrespective of age, and the self-isolation period cannot be reduced by testing negative or being vaccinated.** Contacts should [arrange for PCR testing at their local testing site](#).

There may be occasions, following risk assessment, where secondary Omicron contacts (contacts of contacts) may be asked to self-isolate and get tested. This would usually involve households of contacts, and they (the secondary contacts) would no longer need to isolate if they are negative on PCR test.

**If a case is suspected of being infected with the dominant Delta variant, isolation guidance remains unchanged ([NHS Inform](#)).** However, in the infrequent occasions

when there is a mixed variant picture within a setting, a risk assessment may lead to a more precautionary approach where all contacts are advised to isolate for 10 days.

We appreciate this will cause significant concern about the potential educational and staffing impacts in areas where Omicron is identified, but we are taking action now to prevent further measures being necessary and we are keeping them under continuous / daily review. This is a fast moving picture and we will be in touch again soon.

We urge you and your staff to continue to do all you can to help protect yourself and others by:

- Getting vaccinated (whether your first two doses, or your booster when you are eligible) – this is the single most important thing you can do.
- Testing regularly using LFDs
- Use of face coverings, hand hygiene and social distancing where possible

Anyone who has any of the 3 main symptoms of COVID-19 should self-isolate and arrange a PCR test at [NHS Inform](#). The cardinal symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are recent onset of a new continuous cough, a high temperature and a loss of, or change in, normal sense of taste or smell.

Anyone contacted by Test and Protect or public health teams should please co-operate and follow their advice.

In this ever-changing world of COVID-19 pandemic, advice may change rapidly. Your patience and co-operation is valued while we will learn again to live with this new variant.

Best wishes



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Copied to:  
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