
Early Learning and Childcare

Alison Cumming, Interim Director

E: alison.cumming@gov.scot

To Local Authority Chief Executives

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COVID-19 – Access to Testing for Staff in Schools and ELC Settings

This letter sets out the options for all staff in schools and local authority ELC settings (including school age childcare) to access testing for COVID-19. It addresses the circumstances where testing is essential as well as those where staff who are concerned that they may have been exposed to COVID -19 may consider accessing testing. Any school that is concerned about further action required in relation to a COVID case must liaise with their local NHS Board Health Protection Team, as per their local authority arrangements

1. Symptomatic staff and close contacts

It is important that the whole community around the school or setting is vigilant for the symptoms of COVID-19 and understands what actions they should take if someone develops them, either onsite or offsite. The key symptoms to be aware of are:

- new continuous cough
- fever/high temperature
- loss of, or change in, sense of smell or taste

If a staff member develops symptoms suggesting COVID-19 infection, they **should self-isolate and book a test as soon as possible**. This can either be done

- through the employer referral portal as per local arrangements Councils have in place, which enables access to a priority slot at a test site if the sites are busy or
- by self-referral - online at [NHSinform.scot/test-and-protect](https://www.nhs.uk/infomanagement/test-and-protect) or by calling 0800 028 2816.

It is essential that staff who have such symptoms, or who share a household with someone who has symptoms, **do not** attend school, nursery or other childcare settings, and must self-isolate along with all members of their household, as per guidance on NHS Inform and from Test and Protect. Staff who are identified as a close contact of a confirmed COVID case will be asked to self-isolate for 14 days.

2 Other circumstances

Unless staff are symptomatic or are advised to get a test by a healthcare professional, then testing is **not** a requirement. However, if members of staff are on occasion concerned that they have been at risk from infection, then they may request a test whether or not they have symptoms. The limitations of testing when a person does not have symptoms are set out at Annex B.

Such staff should make the request via their local authority employer who can book a test for them using the employer portal (see Annex A). This route is the only way an individual can access a test if they do not have symptoms. Schools/settings should make arrangements to ensure such staff are furnished with the information at Annex A so that they can make an informed choice as to whether to proceed, and understand what the test result means.

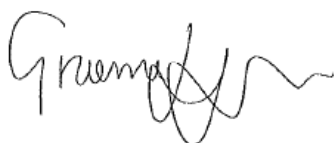
Testing people who do not have symptoms but are concerned that they may have COVID-19 is not available to the general public. We are keen to understand how many staff in different settings take up this offer. We should therefore be very grateful if you could arrange for completion of a monthly return of take up under this option which will be issued by Scottish Government Education Analysis.

We are writing separately and directly to ELC and childcare providers in the private and third sectors to provide them with equivalent information. Local authorities are not expected to play a role in supporting access to testing or associated reporting arrangements for these providers.

We would like to thank you again for your cooperation during the COVID-19 outbreak. The Scottish Government values the continuing opportunity to support education partners during these challenging times, and we appreciate the huge effort from local authorities in ensuring the risk of COVID-19 is minimised for our young people and educational staff.

We are copying to Directors of Education, with the request that this information be disseminated to all local authority schools, ELC and childcare settings.

Your sincerely



GRAEME LOGAN

Director, Learning



ALISON CUMMING

Interim Director, Early Learning and Childcare
Scottish Government

Annex A

Use of the Employer Referral Portal in Schools and ELC Settings

Tests for staff should be arranged through the Employer Referral Portal, which grants priority access.

Each local authority should register with the employer portal so that they can book tests for their staff. In order to obtain a login, they should email portalservicedesk@dhsc.gov.uk with:

- organisation name
- nature of the organisation's business
- region
- names (where possible) and email addresses of 2 users who will load essential worker contact details.

Once employer details have been verified, 2 login credentials will be issued for the employer referral portal. Local authorities then upload a spreadsheet containing names and mobile phone numbers for staff being referred for testing. The system then automatically generates text messages to those staff members with a reference number inviting them to book a slot at their nearest regional or mobile test site.

When the member of staff registers to book a test they will enter their home postcode. A list of their nearest test centres will then be generated to allow them to book a slot. Tests are generally self-swab although some of the regional test sites do offer administered testing. Results are issued to the individual within 48 hours of the test (although turnaround times are generally quicker). It is the responsibility of the individual to inform their employer of a positive result although data will flow back into public health systems.

Annex B

Covid 19; information on testing people who do not have symptoms

Please ensure this note is cascaded to all local authority school, early learning and childcare and other childcare staff and HR departments and made available to staff who may wish to seek a test without having symptoms

COVID-19 is the illness caused by a new strain of coronavirus first identified in late 2019 in China. It can cause a range of symptoms, including a new continuous cough, fever, or loss or change in sense of smell or taste.

COVID-19 has an incubation period of 2 to 14 days. This means that someone who is exposed to the virus, for example by having close contact with another person who is infectious, may take from 2 to 14 days to develop symptoms. Through the NHS Test & Protect approach, people who are identified as close contacts are asked self-isolate for 14 days, in order to reduce the risk of spreading it to others if they themselves develop the infection. No testing is required unless symptoms develop or they are specifically advised to get tested by their NHS Health Protection Team or an NHS contact tracer.

School, ELC and childcare members of staff who are concerned that they may have been exposed to infection may seek a test whether or not they have symptoms. Before proceeding with such a test individuals should consider the pro and cons. If upon reading the below information they decide to proceed with the test, their request will be granted, via the employer referral portal.

Things to consider before requesting a test:

Some individuals, out of concern for their own health or that of others, seek a test even when they have no symptoms. This may give a sense of assurance but can be misleading and cannot exclude the possibility that the virus is present, or that the person may go on to be infected or to develop the illness.

The COVID-19 tests we use in Scotland work by detecting evidence of the virus in a person's nose and throat sample (which is collected using a nasopharyngeal swab to collection secretions from the back of the throat and then the back of the nose). **These tests cannot tell us whether or not someone is incubating the disease**, but only if evidence of the virus is present at the time when they are tested.

This means that testing is a single point in time assessment of whether a person may be infectious but it cannot tell us whether a person is going to become ill in the future. Therefore a negative result cannot reliably be used to inform individual risk or as the basis for reducing mitigations to reduce the risk of transmission such as hygiene and distancing.

Sometimes when the test is taken and returns a positive result, it needs to be repeated. Self-isolation must continue until the repeat result is available and further advice provided thereafter by your NHS team.

Individuals who are concerned they may have come into contact with an infected person, but are unsure about undertaking testing, also have the alternative option of approaching NHS Inform for further information.

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