

Director of Public Health for North Yorkshire

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Dear Headteacher,

We would like to personally thank you and your staff for all the extremely hard work you have put in, on top of all your other responsibilities, to tackle the ongoing threat of COVID-19 across North Yorkshire and to ensure that children and young people continue their education in school as much as possible. We hope you were all able to get some rest over the half term holiday.

Following what for many of you will have been a challenging first half of the autumn term, we are writing with additional information that gives a public health steer towards what measures you may wish to implement after the half term break. This guidance is given based on the picture of COVID-19 locally and nationally at time of writing, and may need to be adapted to suit your individual circumstances or any significant change in the local or national picture. We will continue to review our guidance on a regular basis, in addition to providing bespoke advice at individual setting level for any schools identifying concerns.

There remains the possibility that the Government may implement 'Plan B' measures as part of the [Autumn and Winter Plan](#), in response to unsustainable pressures on health and social care. Although it is currently unclear whether mandatory face coverings will be extended into educational settings, a move to Plan B will indicate a clear steer that more stringent COVID-19 measures are required. Should Plan B be announced we will look to rapidly update and share our guidance accordingly.

Although Plan B has not yet been implemented, the local position in terms of COVID-19 remains challenging. In some districts, rates in recent weeks have been the highest seen throughout the pandemic, with cases among 10-14 year olds across Harrogate District in particular reaching 3501 cases per 100,000. County rates have been driven by spread among school-aged children, with a secondary peak in parent age groups.

The number of cases seen in both health and social care is also increasing; the number of people in local hospitals with COVID-19 has risen steadily throughout October, with an increasing number of cases also seen in care homes. This comes at a time when health and social care settings are already facing challenges with workforce shortages, increasing workloads, and preparations for a difficult winter. The picture in health and social care locally is a picture shared nationally. We are also aware that in schools you have faced considerable challenges through staff absences as well.

Keeping COVID-19 rates as low as possible over the next few months is crucial to keeping children in classrooms, allowing time for vaccinations for young people to be rolled out and take effect, and minimizing the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on young people. Keeping rates low will also increase the number of people currently eligible for vaccination, as individuals cannot be vaccinated if they have had COVID-19 in the last 28 days. Data from 25th October shows that 14.9% of 12-15 year olds across North Yorkshire have been vaccinated so far, alongside 68.6% of 16-17 year olds. We continue to encourage all young people (and any staff members who have not yet been vaccinated) to take up the offer of vaccination through whichever routes are applicable for their age. In addition, today (Friday 29th October) the government released a statement urging testing to be completed 'before the end of half term' before returning to school. We encourage you to make contact with parents and teachers to promote this [message](#) before their return.

Since the beginning of the new academic year over 160 educational settings have been in touch with the public health team to report cases and seek additional support with managing outbreaks. Factors we have identified that have played an increased role in transmission include shared transport, household spread causing transmission between year groups/settings, residential trips, and the unavoidable close contact that comes from working in a school/early years environment. This does not cover all sources of transmission, and other activities identified in local and national guidance as high risk continue to be so, but it may help to pre-emptively target measures to areas of most concern. There remains significant concern around the role of aerosol transmission in all settings, alongside the need to continue precautions against droplet and surface-based transmission.

In light of the above we would recommend schools consider the following actions, taking into consideration local COVID rates and the number of cases in individual settings:

1. **Continue to promote regular twice-weekly lateral flow testing for all staff and pupils aged 11+, including prior to returning to school after half term.** Encourage all test results to be reported to the NHS and encourage early reporting of positive cases to school to allow for early case identification and outbreak prevention.
2. **Encourage access to vaccinations in students and staff, as appropriate.** Communication assets can be found at <https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/covid-19-vaccine/resources/>
3. **We recommend early reintroduction of face coverings in settings experiencing cases to minimise onward spread.** Face coverings continue to be an effective mechanism to reduce transmission – we have included additional evidence in the updated Q&A. These should initially be introduced for a period of 2 weeks, then reviewed in line with the number of cases currently in the setting. Regardless of outbreak status individuals across all settings who wish to wear a face covering should be encouraged and enabled to do so.
4. **Face coverings should be worn by everyone on shared transport** (e.g. school buses, public transport) in line with existing guidance. Students and parents should continue to be reminded about the importance of this measure. We will continue to work with transport providers ensure measures are in place to support this.
5. **Continue to follow the attached guidance regarding siblings of cases.** For those children and young people considered to be high risk, you may wish to extend this guidance to those children with cases among other household contacts (e.g. parents) who they may not be able to isolate away from whilst at home.
6. **Continue to reinforce messages on good hand and respiratory hygiene,** including regular hand washing with soap and water, provision of hand sanitiser, and promoting “Catch it, Bin it, Kill it” messages. Encourage children and young people who are unwell with respiratory illnesses other than COVID-19 to wear a face covering, or to stay at home until they are well.
7. **Maximise ventilation in classrooms and other shared spaces.** Keep windows open as much as is practicable and particularly in areas that have been shown to have poor air quality (if your school has access to CO₂ monitors). [Updated guidance](#) on ventilation has been released by HSE, which we have linked to in our guidance (attached).
8. **Reduce mixing between year groups and classes** wherever possible to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 between groups who would not frequently mix as part of mainstream education. Where possible, avoid events that would cause wider mixing between groups such as whole school assemblies and inter-school events.
9. **Limit visitors to the school** and consider carefully whether events that bring parents or governors into the school can be managed safely or should return to online. We have produced guidance for how events can take place in a safer manner which is available at <https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/guidance-events>. We would recommend events that do take place are kept to a minimum and maximise ventilation and outdoor space.
10. **Carefully consider whether educational trips and residential visits should go ahead.** This is especially important because being on transport together for long periods, and/or sharing overnight accommodation, increases the chance of transmitting COVID-19. Consider the impact on resilience for the wider school should teachers need to isolate.

We have included a letter that can be shared with parents and carers to update them on the COVID-19 situation

across North Yorkshire, and the role they can play to support reducing the risk through schools and the wider community. The key measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission continue to be good hand and respiratory hygiene, keeping indoor spaces well ventilated, wearing face coverings in indoor and crowded areas, and keeping a respectful social distance where possible from others. Testing and vaccination will also continue to be crucial over the next few months, both of which parents have a key role in supporting.

In addition to the school COVID-19 vaccination programme for 12-15 year olds, some appointments are now being made available through the NHS National Booking Service (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/> or calling 119). The availability of appointments will vary week to week and NHS colleagues are looking to further develop this offer with additional sites as the programme continues to progress.

We are aware that some schools have experienced anti-vaccination activity or had anti-vaccination materials shared. We would ask that you report any anti-vaccination activity directed towards your schools, including shared materials or notifications about protests, to NYCC either through your nominated school advisor or directly to Stuart Carlton (stuart.carlton@northyorks.gov.uk) or Amanda Newbold (amanda.newbold@northyorks.gov.uk).

As ever, please do continue to contact the public health team through education.COVID19@northyorks.gov.uk if you have any concerns about cases you would like to discuss, or require any further support. We have again attached the latest version of our guidance and Q&A that you can also use for support.

Kind regards,



Louise Wallace
Director of Public Health for North Yorkshire



Stuart Carlton
Director of Children and Young People's Service