

**COVID-19 and Schools Update**  
**09 December 2021**

**Introduction**

1. The NASUWT - The Teachers' Union, in addition to the support we are providing to our members across the UK, is committed to ensuring that parliamentarians remain informed of developing challenges in schools and colleges as the country responds to the COVID-19 crisis.

**Omicron and additional COVID-19 mitigations**

2. On 8 December 2021, the Prime Minister confirmed the introduction of additional measures to minimise the transmission of COVID-19 in the context of a rapid growth in the number of Omicron infections.
3. The Government statement followed the publication of 7 December 2021 [Minutes](#) of the SAGE (Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies) on the Coronavirus Response.
4. SAGE has confirmed that:

**“The number of Omicron infections in the UK is now increasing rapidly**, with evidence of community transmission, and hospital admissions from Omicron should be expected to follow soon (high confidence)...

“With the speed of growth seen, **decision makers will need to consider response measures urgently to reduce transmission** if the aim is to reduce the likelihood of unsustainable pressure on the NHS.

**“Evidence suggests that measures could be reintroduced with expectation of a similar level of adherence as has been seen in the past.** Adherence is likely to be higher if messaging and policy have clear rationales and are consistent. Consistency across the UK may help with messaging.

“The generation time for Omicron is not known, but it is possible that it is shorter than for Delta, which would mean that case-based interventions (for example finding and isolating cases through contact tracing) become less effective because people become infectious sooner. **This would increase the relative importance of population-based rather than case-based measures, namely measures which affect everyone, not just those who are confirmed as being infected.**

“Testing and self-isolation if positive remains very important. **Testing before mixing events can help reduce the risk.**

**“[M]easures to reduce airborne spread such as ventilation, well-fitting masks and distancing or reduced density of people in indoor environments may be even more important.**

**“Other vulnerable settings (for example care homes and prisons) will also need particular attention.**

“Taking measures which slow or delay the wave of infections would allow more time for vaccination including ensuring increased coverage and boosting with existing vaccines.”

*[Emphases added]*

5. The Government has not announced any additional COVID-19 control measures in schools and colleges in England.

6. Commenting on the announcement by the Prime Minister that ‘Plan B’ measures are to be introduced in England in response to the Omicron variant, the NASUWT said:

***“Given the Prime Minister’s acknowledgement that the Omicron variant may be significantly more transmissible, it would be appropriate to extend further control measures in schools and colleges.***

***“Further measures including extending the use of face coverings in classrooms, an immediate and extended programme of onsite Covid testing of pupils, and robust rules and support for close contacts to self-isolate would have a significant impact on helping to break the chain of Covid transmission and minimise further disruption to pupils’ education.”***

### **Keep schools and colleges open safely**

7. On 30 November, the Union [wrote to the Secretary of State for Education](#) calling for additional measures to be introduced in response to the Omicron variant and to keep schools and colleges open safely. These measures are consistent with the latest SAGE advice, and include:
  - a. Extending the requirement for the wearing of face coverings to include classrooms as well as in communal areas
  - b. In addition to promoting the need for regular twice-weekly LFD home tests to be undertaken and reported, making available additional onsite testing, especially to those schools where there are lower incidence of LFD home tests being reported. Ongoing onsite testing in both the pre- and post-Christmas periods would contribute to protecting health and provide greater confidence to schools, parents and pupils.
  - c. Strengthening the rules relating to close contact self-isolation. It is right that a close contact of a person who has tested positive with the

Omicron variant should be required to self-isolate immediately. However, it is also clear that capacity across the country at COVID-19 test centres to identify the Omicron variant is not sufficient – it is estimated this stands at just 50% of available COVID-19 testing capacity. This will inevitably delay the identification of Omicron cases and the disclosure of PCR results. In light of this, a more cautious approach is now needed.

- d. Using the inspection system to support schools to ensure that all essential COVID-19 mitigations are in place.
  - e. Providing schools and colleges with additional financial assistance to support their implementation of COVID-19 safety measures, including any requirements to recruit additional staff, equipment and materials.
8. The NASUWT believes that these measures are proportionate and responsible and could contribute significantly to avoiding further widespread disruption to children's education.
  9. To date, the NASUWT has received no reply from the Government to our proposals.
  10. The NASUWT has written to all [school and college employers](#) in England advise them of the importance of taking early action to increase the use of COVID-19 control measures and urging them to raise with local Directors of Public Health the need to agree additional COVID-19 mitigations across local areas.
  11. The Union has also written to [all local Directors of Public Health](#) urging them to use their powers to protect health and safety in schools, colleges and the wider community.
  12. The NASUWT will continue to press the Government urgently to introduce COVID-19 safety additional measures across all schools and colleges.

For further information, please contact:

Dr Patrick Roach

General Secretary

[nasuwt@mail.nasuwt.org.uk](mailto:nasuwt@mail.nasuwt.org.uk)

[www.nasuwt.org.uk](http://www.nasuwt.org.uk)