



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

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I am writing further to your letter of 21 July about the NHS Test and Trace process and schools.

In your letter, you ask for guidance to schools to be clear on requirements for staff or pupils showing symptoms to be tested for Covid-19 and expectations on schools to report suspected cases.

If someone becomes unwell, the guidance to schools states that, "they should self-isolate for at least 10 days and should arrange to have a test to see if they have Covid-19." This is in line with the wider Public Health England guidance for households. While a school cannot force a person to book a test, they should strongly encourage them to get one. Schools do not need to inform the local PHE health protection team of single suspected cases but should alert them to any overall rise in sickness absence due to suspected Covid-19.

Schools should make sure that parents/guardians are aware of the need to inform them immediately if a child tests positive for Covid-19. Schools should then contact their local health protection teams for advice. In addition, NHS Test and Trace will contact every person that tests positive, and if it is confirmed that they have been in a school within 48 hours of starting to display symptoms, the local health protection team will be informed and mobilised to contact and advise the school on who else should be sent home and asked to self-isolate for 14 days.

You asked if schools have the right to refuse to admit a pupil who has symptoms but who has not received a negative test for Covid-19 or who has not complied with public health guidelines around the duration of self-isolation.

Where a child has symptoms of Covid -19 and has not received a negative test, the school should advise the parent to keep the child at home, in line with Public Health England guidance on self-isolation, and not to return the child to school until the self-isolation period has expired.

We would hope that in the vast majority of situations, the school will be able to agree with parents/guardians that it is not appropriate for their child to be in school given the potential risk to other pupils and staff.

In the event that a parent/ guardian insisted on a child being in school, the school can take the decision to refuse the child if, in their reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect their pupils and staff from possible infection with Covid - 19. Any decision would need to be carefully considered in light of all the circumstances and the public health advice.

You have asked for clarity on the nature, scope and frequency of information that schools can expect to receive in respect of Covid-19 cases in their areas when schools open fully this autumn. As already stated, when a positive case is identified within a school, the local health protection team will inform the school and will work with them to determine the action needed – in particular, to identify who should be asked to self-isolate. Whole school closure based on cases within the school will not generally be necessary and should not be considered, except on the advice of health protection teams.

Regional School Commissioners will monitor individual school closures and provide support where necessary. Since decisions on local lockdowns are taken at a national level, any required actions will be communicated to schools once the decision is made. Schools are therefore not expected to use local data to make their own decisions.

Weekly Surveillance reports which make specific reference to educational settings are available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/weekly-covid-19-surveillance-report-published>. There are also links to other Covid – 19 data on this page.

I hope this information is helpful and I look forward to continuing to work with you as we move towards the full opening of schools at the start of the autumn term.



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education