

3rd June 2021

Public Health
4th Floor Civic Centre
West Street,
Oldham OL1 1UT

Dear Parent/Guardian

As you may be aware, we are once again seeing an increase in cases of COVID-19 in Oldham. This increase is related in part to the relaxation of lockdown restrictions as well as the spread of the Delta variant of the virus (originally identified in India).

I understand you might be concerned about the reported increase in cases of the Delta variant. We are currently seeing higher case rates among children and young people, however there is no evidence to suggest this variant causes more severe illness than any other variant currently circulating in the UK. Our priority is to keep all students and staff safe and well, and ensure we are able to identify any new cases at an early stage, including when people have no symptoms. Early identification will help us to prevent onward transmission and minimise our case rates in the borough.

Testing for contacts of confirmed cases

As a precautionary measure, following discussions with Public Health England, I am asking **all pupils who are identified as a contact of a positive COVID-19 case to access PCR testing**. By using PCR testing, positive results can be sent to specialist labs to help us to identify variant of concern cases and their spread. Even if this PCR test result is negative, contacts must continue to self-isolate for the full ten days in line with government guidance. As always, if your child tests positive for COVID-19 please inform their school or college as soon as possible.

You can go online at www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test to book a free test by clicking the box that says your local council has asked you to do this. For those without internet access, you can also order or book a test over the phone by calling 119. If someone has tested positive using a PCR swab test in the last 90 days, they do not need to take another test.

I recognise that for some children and young people, testing will not be appropriate. This includes younger children or pupils who have additional needs that would make carrying out the test distressing and/or challenging. Where this is the case, the household of the contacts can access asymptomatic rapid testing instead. Details of these are available via the Oldham Council website www.oldham.gov.uk/testing_without_symptoms

Testing for pupils who feel unwell

The three main symptoms of COVID-19 are recent onset of a new continuous cough and/or a high temperature and/or a loss of, or change in, normal sense of taste or smell.

Anyone who has these symptoms should stay at home or return home as soon as possible to isolate and arrange a PCR test by calling 119 or visiting www.nhs.uk/coronavirus.

I am also asking that **pupils who feel unwell but who do not have any of the three main symptoms of COVID-19 to get a PCR test**. In this situation your child does not have to self-isolate unless the test result comes back as positive.

Regular testing

Secondary age children and their families should also continue with twice-weekly lateral flow device tests. These are for people with no COVID-19 symptoms. A positive lateral flow test result should be registered with NHS Test and Trace and a PCR test should be taken to confirm the result. While waiting for the confirmatory PCR result, all contacts should isolate immediately for 10 days.

Support to self-isolate

Keeping yourself away from other people when you could be infectious is the most effective way of stopping COVID-19. You are not alone if you find doing this hard. Planning ahead can make things easier. For more help and support go to www.oldham.gov.uk/coronavirus.

If you have to self-isolate due to COVID, then you may be eligible for self-isolation payments. For more information go to <https://www.oldham.gov.uk/selfisolationpayment>.

Face coverings

I am also strongly advising that secondary school and college students **should wear face coverings in communal areas in school**. This is due to the increasing number of cases locally and in other parts of Greater Manchester. Students do not have to wear face coverings in classrooms, however, some pupils may choose to wear a face covering in a classroom due to their individual situation.

The virus that causes COVID-19 is spread through our breath, our nose and mouth, when we talk, sing, cough, sneeze, or do anything else that involves breathing. A face covering greatly reduces the distance our breath can travel, and that helps to protect everyone.

The more cases we find, the better chance we have at stopping COVID-19 spreading. My thanks for your continued support

Yours sincerely,



Katrina Stephens
Director of Public Health