

31st December 2021

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

Dear Parent/Guardian

As you will be aware, COVID-19 is sadly still with us as we go into 2022. We are once again seeing a rapid increase in cases of COVID-19 in Oldham and across the country. Ahead of the new term, we wanted to thank you for your support during this incredibly challenging time.

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. The Local Authority will continue to work closely with school leaders to minimize any disruption to learning. School leaders and public health teams will be monitoring the impact of cases on pupils and workforce. If schools do need to return to remote learning, the school will notify you at the earliest possible stage.

Vaccination

The evidence shows that the new Omicron variant is more transmissible than the Delta variant, so it's more important than ever that people get vaccinated and get their booster jab as soon as they are eligible. Vaccinations are now available to anyone aged 12 or above. Vaccinations continue to play a vital role in keeping children healthy. Getting vaccinated is an important way to protect yourself, your family, and your community.

If you are aged 12 and over, you can book a vaccination online. In addition, if you are aged 16 and over you can visit one of our local vaccine clinics without an appointment. The details can be found from the Oldham Council webpage or via this link, https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/201170/coronavirus/2674/covid-19_vaccination_programme

For children aged 12-16, there will be further school based vaccination sessions this coming term for second doses, or first doses if your child missed out last time. Information on this will come out from your school nursing service.

Testing before returning to school

We are asking all pupils, their households and staff to take a lateral flow test (LFD) before returning to school after the holidays. Secondary school pupils will be able to do this at school. For staff, and primary school pupils, then we are recommending a home LFD. Ideally you should do the test in the morning before leaving the house or, if this is not possible, the evening before is acceptable. This is voluntary and your choice and we hope you will take part. Children aged under 5 do not need to be tested.

LFDs can be collected from pharmacies in Oldham, or can be ordered online at: <https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests>. In addition, we have pharmacies and pop-up sites that provide LFDs “on-site”. The details can be found https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/201170/coronavirus/2557/get_a_coronavirus_test/2

Testing for pupils who feel unwell

The three main symptoms of COVID-19 are still 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

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 LFD result should be registered with NHS Test and Trace and a PCR test should be taken to confirm the result.

You may have heard that there is currently very high demand for both PCR and LFD tests. The gov.uk websites where tests can be ordered and booked are updated at several intervals throughout the day, therefore if you do find that tests are unavailable we recommend that you try again later in the day. We have been given assurances by NHS Test and Trace that testing supply will be increased so we hope that the current problems with supply will be resolved soon.

Support to self-isolate

Keeping yourself away from other people when you could be infectious is the most effective way of stopping the spread of 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>.

As well as the measures above, it is important that we all continue to wear face coverings, wash our hands, and keeping our distance from people where possible. It is through working together that we will have a better chance of stopping COVID-19 spreading. We know that school leaders have really appreciated the support of parents and carers in managing the impact of the pandemic and as we move into this next period, we thank you for your continued efforts.

Yours sincerely,



Katrina Stephens
Director of Public Health



Gerard Jones
Managing Director of Children & Young People