

DATE: 10 January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

The lockdown announced by the Prime minister on the 4 January is not how we wanted to start the new year. Despite this, we hope that you and your family are keeping safe and well.

We are in the eye of the storm with this pandemic. We desperately need to drive infection rates down, and to give the time and space to our critical services to deliver the care they need for both Covid and non Covid related conditions, and to allow the rollout of the vaccine at as fast a pace as possible.

The single most important action we can all take is to stay at home to protect the NHS and save lives. Only leave the house when absolutely necessary. People need to stick to the rules, and ask themselves just because they can do something, that does not mean they should. Please: be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

In the spirit of this, we wish to remind you that your child should stay at home and access remote learning if it is appropriate to do so. This will lower the number of households mixing and reduce transmission of the virus.

There is an immediate challenge that the lockdown provides for our Early Years settings, schools and colleges to ensure that your children can access their learning. Many of our settings are currently experiencing challenges to facilitate the delivery of high-quality remote learning alongside safe on-site learning when the workforce is reduced through illness and self-isolating. This situation may require school leaders, as a last resort, to prioritise the return of children based on individual need, and on the safety of the school.

Vulnerable children and children of health workers will be allocated places before children of other critical workers, and the number of places available is for the head teacher of each school to determine based on a reviewed risk assessment, staffing available and the balance with the requirement to provide high quality remote education daily and welfare checks for those children not in school without overburdening staff. This will be reviewed throughout the lockdown period and may be increased/reduced depending on changes to the local situation, including staffing available, and on public health advice. Nursery classes in mainstream schools should be considered as part of the whole school and the same principles should apply regarding working out staffing to teach face to face and a risk assessment before offering places.

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To reduce community transmission, we need to ensure that the number of children and young people accessing the offer of provision in a school or college is kept to the lowest number possible. Therefore, in line with updated government guidance issued on Friday, even if you are a critical worker, if your child(ren) can remain at home rather than attend school, on some or all days, then they should. Please only use the offer of provision when it is crucial for you to undertake your critical role.

Whether or not your child's education setting is putting in place the rapid testing programme right away, it is very important that we reassure you that all settings will be continuing to regularly review and put in place all the protective measures recommended by Public Health England and the Department for Education to reduce the risk of transmission. These will include social distancing, hand washing, good ventilation, use of face coverings as appropriate, and ensuring people with symptoms do not attend. These remain the most effective ways to reduce the spread of the virus, even with rapid testing in place.

We ask that you continue to show the same patience and compassion to leaders and staff in our settings that you have demonstrated throughout this pandemic. We have learned from the first two waves that if we pull together as a city, with everybody playing their part, we can and will get through this.

Stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives.

Matt Ashton
Director of Public Health

Steve Reddy
Director of Children and Young People's Services

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