16 September 2020


Dear Families

Please read the message below from Judith Harwood, Service Director for Education, at Plymouth City Council:-

**Important message for Parents/Carers**

It has been great to see so many children and young people returning to school and the work that has been conducted locally to ensure a safe return.  It is inevitable that for some children and  young people they will feel unwell and for many this could include Covid related symptoms.

This message contains important information about how you can get a test. You cannot get a test by arriving at the Testing Centre without an appointment and you should not go to the hospital (Emergency Department) or your GP for a test.

Evidence to date has shown that children usually have much milder symptoms and they have tended to pick up the infection from home rather than from school.  However, it remains extremely important that any child with symptoms of Covid stays away for school, to avoid the risk of spreading infection to others, including the more vulnerable.  These symptoms are:

•	high temperature – feeling hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)

•	new, continuous cough – coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)

•	 loss or change to your sense of smell or taste – you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different from normal

Over the last week we have seen a number of children being referred for a Covid 19 test in accordance with national guidance. If your child has been in close contact with a confirmed case, they will be asked to self-isolate at home. Please DO NOT try to get your child tested unless they have developed the symptoms of COVID19. A negative test result does not mean that they can go back to school; it simply means that they had not fully developed the illness at the time of the test, and they could develop the illness at any point in the 14 days.

We are very aware that in Plymouth, as elsewhere, there have been delays in

accessing tests. This is a national issue as laboratory capacity for analysing tests is being directed to areas in the country with the highest numbers of COVID-19 cases.  We are doing all we can to work with national agencies to increase the capacity available.

We understand how frustrating this can be, particularly with children returning to school and being asked to stay off school until they can get a COVID-19 test. However,

it is crucial that we keep our schools open, and continue to keep our children and communities safe.

We therefore ask that you continue to follow government guidance and keep your child at home, and book a test as soon as you are able. You only need to get a test if your child has the symptoms listed above.  If your child has these symptoms, it is really important that you do not send them to school. The test is best done in the first 5 days of having symptoms.

The current routes for getting a test are :

•        Parents book a test online at https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/coronavirus-in-children/ or by calling 119

•        If parents or carers are unable to book a local slot then they can email d-ccg.cornwalldevon.urgenttesting@nhs.net explaining that the test is for a child attending a Plymouth school and they will be supported to access local testing.

If you cannot book a test immediately, we ask that you try again as the system is currently very busy and your patience is appreciated.

If you are not able to secure a test, it is important that your child remains away from school for the 10 day isolation period. As part of creating a Covid safe school, children must not return before the isolation period is over.  Please work with your school to keep all children and young people safe.

You can also use the NHS 111 online coronavirus service if:

• you're worried about your symptoms

• you're not sure what to do

Call 111 if you cannot get help online.

More advice on what to do can be found here.

https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/

We would like to reassure you that we are working hard to put additional local arrangements in place to boost our local testing availability until national testing capacity can be increased and we will update you as soon as the situation changes.

**Judith Harwood**
Service Director for Education, Participation and Skills
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