



St Joseph's Covid Update 5 26/1/21

Lateral Flow Testing

We are now into Week 4 of this lockdown and I am pleased to see that the high level of engagement is continuing from the vast majority of our children. You are doing a wonderful job of supporting them with their learning. I am also proud of the way that our teachers have worked to meet the extra demands placed on them in working with children in front of them in class, as well as those engaging so well at home. Please remember that we are here to help you and if you need further support do ask. Thanks to one of our parents there is the possibility that we may be able to access some old NHS mobile phones which could be combined with our data cards to provide wifi hotspots without having to swap SIM cards in and out of your own phones. If this could help improve your internet access please let me know.

I am writing today to inform you about the **Lateral Flow Testing for Staff** which will be starting this week at St Joseph's. Along with the other protective measures we are taking, testing will allow us to take further measures to help the staff, and children in school, to work in as safe an environment as possible. Up to one in three people who have Covid-19 have the virus without symptoms so could be transmitting the virus unknowingly. Tackling the pandemic requires identifying asymptomatic, infectious individuals. By introducing Lateral Flow Testing for staff, we will help to reduce the spread in our school. I am therefore strongly encouraging all staff to take the tests. The tests arrived today and will be distributed to staff this week once all training has been completed.

Should a member of staff receive a positive result, we will need to take immediate action and close down their bubble. Through contact tracing, it may be that their positive result will also impact on other bubbles/groups. **I therefore urge the parents of any child who is attending school to have contingency plans in place for this eventuality.** Given the nature of the test and the fact that staff test themselves prior to their arrival at school, this means that instructions to self-isolate will be given at extremely short notice. Initially, we will be doing the tests in the evening whilst the staff familiarise themselves with the process but we will then move to the advised morning tests, which will mean staff notifying the school by 8am. It is only at that point that I will be notifying you as parents that your child needs to self-isolate for up to 10 days. Any staff member testing positive will be directed to take a confirmatory PCR test at a testing centre. If that test is negative the bubble will be able to return to school, however until that result is in we have to treat the case as a positive one and put in place the necessary isolation procedures.

If a teacher is found to be asymptotically positive, they will still be able to provide lessons for the children while they are well enough.

Critical Workers

I am hearing from other schools that they are being inundated with requests from critical workers for full-time school provision for their children. That is not the case here and I want to say thank you again to our critical worker families who are only using us when there is no other alternative. As this lockdown has progressed, each week there has been an increase in the number of key worker families seeking places. Our risk assessment determines the safe limits for each classroom and I have had to say no to a child coming in on a day this week when we were at capacity for that class. We try to allocate places for the following week on a Thursday so please give us as much notice as possible for which shifts you will need our help with. I have attached again the criteria register for categories of critical workers which we will apply if we are over capacity. If you are a critical worker and you have not yet sent in that form to hawkenk@st-josephs.plymouth.sch.uk please do so before Thursday of this week. We would like nothing more than to be open for all our children; we know they learn best when at school; we know home learning is tricky; but there is an important reason for this lockdown. Although you may have seen that the COVID rate in Plymouth is falling, that is not the case in Devonport, Mt Wise and Morice Town, where it is still rising. We need to do all we can to reduce the rates of transmission. Please follow the government advice that children should be kept at home if at all possible.

Children's Mental Health Week (1st - 7th February)

Our safeguarding and safety training supplier has produced ten top tips for helping with any Mental Health issues that may arise during lockdown, or at other times. This link [Mental Health tips](#) will take to their site where the tips can be seen.

We have also had resources shared with us by Plymotion, a group who promote sustainable travel. They sent us :

Five days of wellbeing activities, to support **Children's Mental Health Week runs 1st – 7th February 2021**, in video and pdf format for primary and secondary schools/pupils. We believe that being active and away from screens is especially important for your pupils' wellbeing in these challenging times. Please distribute to teachers, parents and pupils:

Primary School Playlist: <http://tiny.cc/6xi8tz>

Half Term (15th - 19th February)

It is our expectation that families will have made provision for child care during the half-term holiday and that staff in school can have a well deserved break. Only if you are in one of the three highest categories on the key worker prioritisation criteria list, you need to work, and you have no alternative child care available, will we consider providing childcare during that week. If there is that need it is quite likely that the care would not be at St Joseph's but may be at another of the Catholic Schools in the city. If you do have that level of need please contact hawkenk@st-josephs.plymouth.sch.uk by Monday 1st February so we have time to plan for any provision needed.

There will be no home learning set for children during the half-term week. The first day after half-term, Monday 22nd February, was intended to be a staff training day. We are awaiting guidance from our Multi Academy Trust to see if school based, and remote learning should recommence on that day or on Tuesday 23rd. As soon as we know we will inform you but I think it is best to prepare for that day being a non-school day also. The government has said that it will give schools at least two weeks' notice before any wider opening of schools is expected. I am not expecting that notice to be given for a return straight after half term. Any school closure or opening announcements so far have been given to the whole country without any prior notification to schools so I expect you will know about any wider opening plans at the same time as schools do. Let's all hope it is not too far in the future when it will be safe to make that decision.

Best wishes

BJ Gill