



**Date:** 7<sup>th</sup> September 2020

Dear parent/carer,

### **Returning safely to school or childcare**

I would like to start by saying thank you for all you have been doing to support your child/children over the past five months. Despite the lifting of some restrictions, these remain very challenging times and for many the lines between home and school and/or home and work have become increasingly blurred.

I realise that for many of you September brings the first opportunity in a while to think about your child/children returning to their school or childcare setting. After such a long period at home, I understand that this may be difficult to consider and raise some anxieties. However, I wanted to reassure you that we are supporting schools and childcare settings across the county to reopen fully to all children safely.

Understandably a key concern circulating is that having more children back in their settings may increase the transmission of COVID-19. I'm sure in recent weeks you will have seen a number of sources in the media sharing information relating to the safety and risks of increasing the number of children in these settings. I wanted to therefore share some updated information with you which you may find helpful and put your mind at ease.

The full reopening of schools and childcare settings must be considered in the broader context of transmission of the virus. Nationally, we have seen a consistent fall in the number of daily deaths from COVID-19, as well as a reduction in those in hospital settings receiving treatment for the virus. Additionally, locally we have some of the lowest numbers of confirmed cases in the South West. As of the 2<sup>nd</sup> September, we had 5 confirmed cases in Cornwall in the previous 7 days, and only 2% of all confirmed cases in Cornwall have been in the 0-19 age group. You can keep up to date with the local data for Cornwall as well as the national data by visiting [www.cornwall.gov.uk/coviddata](http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/coviddata).



Additionally, the decision to reopen schools and childcare settings is based on evidence emerging from numerous studies from across the world. This research is essential in helping us understand the virus and inform decisions, and evidence is increasing daily. As the virus is relatively 'new', it still remains difficult to draw definitive conclusions and all evidence is treated with a certain level of caution. However, in line with the Chief Medical Officer's statement regarding the re-opening of schools, there is a growing body of evidence pointing towards the following:

- Transmission in children is likely to be low, with child-to-child transmission infrequent, particularly in younger age groups.
- Children are infrequently found to be the index case (first case) in a household, and transmission is usually from an adult within the household.
- There is a very low fatality rate for children, with 14 deaths per 1 million infections in the 5-14 years age group. Every death of a child is undeniably a tragedy, however fortunately this is rare.
- There is a very low hospitalisation rate of 0.1% for children aged 0-9 years, and 0.3% for those aged 10-19 years.
- The majority of children and young people who catch the virus will have mild symptoms, or even no symptoms at all.
- Transmission in school or childcare settings is most likely to occur between adults, with the risk of transmission between adults and children increasing with child age.

Furthermore, there is overwhelming evidence from high quality sources demonstrating that a lack of schooling can have significant detrimental psychosocial consequences, as well as increasing inequalities, decreasing opportunities, and worsening physical and mental health issues. No action is risk free, but the balance of evidence suggests that returning to school or childcare is beneficial for children and young people.

Despite the evidence and the local data this is by no means time for complacency, and I urge everyone to take extra care with basic hand and respiratory hygiene, remain aware of symptoms, and to book a test as quickly as possible should symptoms develop. These measures are essential in curbing the spread of the virus. You can book a test either online by visiting [www.nhs.uk/ask-for-a-coronavirus-test](https://www.nhs.uk/ask-for-a-coronavirus-test) or by dialling 119. Please remember that it is only those with at least one of the three main symptoms (high temperature, new continuous cough, loss or change in smell/taste) who should access a test. Other household members and contacts identified by NHS Test & Trace do not need to have a test unless they also develop symptoms or are asked to do so by a public health or healthcare professional. However, if you have any concerns about your child's health, please call your GP or 111 for advice.



You will no doubt be familiar with the rigorous guidelines that are in place in many different settings across the country, and schools and childcare settings are not immune to these. There are strict measures specifically set out for schools and childcare settings, and I am confident that those across the county will be doing all that is logistically possible to ensure these are followed, to allow a safe return for both children and staff. You will likely have heard about your school or setting's specific measures already, however some of these may include:

- Keeping children and staff away from the school or setting if they are symptomatic, have a symptomatic household contact, or have been identified as a contact by NHS Test & Trace.
- Grouping children in class groups, or year groups where appropriate to maintain delivery of education, in addition to encouraging social distancing.
- Increasing infection prevention control measures such as emphasising hand, surface, and respiratory hygiene.
- Directional controls to reduce face-to-face contact.
- Implementing one-way systems where appropriate and minimising movement around the school or setting.
- Staggered drop off and pick up times where necessary.
- Utilisation of optional face masks where appropriate in secondary schools.

In addition to these measures, all schools and childcare settings have undertaken a comprehensive risk assessment, covering staffing levels, building layouts, and other issues that may have an impact on safety. The local Public Health team has experience of outbreak management and are working closely with colleagues in the council to support schools and childcare settings, including regularly providing updates to help implement these measures, follow the correct guidance, and deal with situations promptly and appropriately when they arise.

It is not possible to guarantee that there is no risk, but by continuing to work constructively and collaboratively with teachers, parents, and the trade unions, I believe we can do this in as safe a way as possible that mitigates the risk whilst ensuring that children and young people can benefit from education, socialisation, and quality childcare.

Yours sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rachel Wigglesworth', is positioned above the printed name.

Rachel Wigglesworth

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