

Dear Headteachers,

In response to increasing rates amongst school aged children, we have taken the decision to ask that secondary schools introduce face coverings in communal areas. There is robust evidence that extended time without face-to-face teaching is detrimental for cognitive, social, emotional and academic development, learning and long-term prospects. The Government policy objective for children and young people during the COVID-19 pandemic is to maximise school attendance with its associated educational, safeguarding, wellbeing and health benefits.

Case rates in the 11-16-year-old population have been consistently high throughout the Autumn term. Although there are promising signs of a reduction in these age groups, rates remain high, and local and regional teams continue to deal with many school outbreaks affecting both staff and students. While the immediate health risks of COVID-19 infection to children and young people are low, the harms of missed or disrupted education are significant. The current epidemiological picture is affecting attendance, educational disruption and roll out of the vaccination programme, and we must ensure actions taken do not further reduce attendance.

UKHSA and Department for Education have continued to hear feedback from health protection teams, regional partnership teams and Directors of Public Health (both individually and through the ADPH) about control measures available to prevent COVID-19 infection and have shared this information across Government. Recent robust updated evidence supports the use of face coverings in reducing transmission in non-healthcare settings. Transmission of COVID is impacted by ventilation, length of exposure and activities that generate more aerosols such as shouting. Face coverings worn in communal spaces (such as hallways, stairwells and lunch queues) in areas of high prevalence may be beneficial to reduce transmission and will have limited impact on education delivery. Feedback from the education sector has highlighted some challenges in relation to teaching and learning when face coverings are used in education, for example they can make communication more difficult, particularly for SEND pupils. These potential impacts should be carefully considered before recommending the use of face coverings in classrooms, which should only be considered for individual settings as part of outbreak management.

Existing measures should not be removed, and the importance of regular testing and reporting still remains, as does our work to encourage uptake of vaccinations for all those eligible.

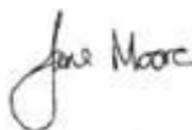
I have attached a letter for you to distribute to parents to encourage their uptake with the additional measures.

Thank you for all of your hard work over this term. We know how difficult things are in schools at the moment with infection levels alongside other school matters and how hard you and your staff are working to continue to support children. Thank you.

Yours faithfully,



Mike Sandys  
Director of Public Health  
Leicestershire County Council



Jane Moore  
Director of Children and Family Services  
Leicestershire County Council