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Dear Head Teacher

As we enter a second month of the national restrictions, I once again wanted to take this opportunity to thank everyone within our community for all you are doing to help keep the numbers of coronavirus cases in Doncaster as low as possible. If we can all continue with this effort it will really make a difference to slowing down the spread of the virus across the borough.

Since I last wrote to you, there have been some really positive developments, including the start of large-scale community testing in Doncaster and the roll out of vaccination programme. Both are giving us all reasons to be optimistic for the months ahead. However, it is still vital that we remain committed to the basics and follow all the current preventative measures recommended for stopping the spread of the virus.

We are currently seeing numbers across the board decrease, this includes our weekly case rates and hospital and ICU numbers. Although these are still decreasing at a fairly slow level, we believe this is due to the new strain of the virus (B117) – now often referred to as the ‘Kent strain’ – which we know is much more transmissible which means that larger outbreaks are a greater risk. With this in mind it is important that we continue with the basics of washing hands, covering faces and keeping our space from others. We are not currently seeing the strain (B1351) known as the ‘South African strain’ here in Doncaster but we have to remain vigilant.

There are some other key details that I would also like to highlight to you here:

Testing update

A large-scale community testing programme is now underway in Doncaster, with the aim of identifying cases in people who ARE NOT displaying coronavirus symptoms and, in turn, reducing coronavirus transmission rates in the community. Unlike in areas such as Liverpool, we are taking a targeted approach to testing, selecting areas that may need extra help to access testing facilities, in the first instance.

As part of this, a programme of regular testing for groups of key workers who are unable to work from home is up and running and we also have a mobile testing unit which can visit key sites in Doncaster.

In addition, community testing sites, using Lateral Flow Devices (LFDs but also known as 'rapid' or LFT tests) have been established across the borough in key geographical areas, to provide regular tests for residents who do not have coronavirus symptoms.

Currently we have sites in Hexthorpe, Stainforth and Conisbrough for people who live and/or work in these areas. Please visit www.doncaster.gov.uk/covidtesting for more information about these sites.

This link to our testing FAQs is also a really good resource to find out all about the testing programme here in Doncaster. Please feel free to share it.

Retesting

I am aware there has been some confusion regarding whether people who test positive for Covid-19 need to take another test before returning to work.

I would like to confirm that once an individual's isolation period has ended and, as long as they have not developed further symptoms, they do not need another test and may return to work.

It is important to note that it is possible for PCR tests to remain positive for some time after a Covid-19 infection so, for this reason, if an individual has previously received a positive test result for Covid-19, they should only be re-tested within a 90-day period if they have developed any new coronavirus symptoms.

Individuals who tested positive for Covid-19 with a Lateral Flow Device (LFD but also known as 'rapid' or LFT tests) should not be tested again using an LFD within 90 days. If they have new coronavirus symptoms during this period, then they should be tested using a PCR test. PCR tests can be booked by calling 119 or by visiting nhs.uk/coronavirus.

Confirmatory testing

New government guidance dictates that specific groups of people who conduct their own Lateral Flow Device (LFD but also known as 'rapid' or LFT) tests at home and self-report the results should isolate immediately and have a PCR test within 48 hours to confirm a positive LFD result.

These groups are: NHS England staff, adult social care employees, primary school workers who test at home, and hauliers who use self-test reporting tools. PCR tests can be booked by calling 119 or by visiting nhs.uk/coronavirus.

For everyone else who has had a positive LFD test result, a further PCR test is not required and they should self-isolate immediately for ten days.

Vaccination rollout

We are on course in Doncaster to meet the February 15th vaccination target, which is great news. I know that although this cohort did include teaching staff, some of your teams may have been eligible due to them providing direct and regular care to clinically vulnerable children. We will keep you fully updated as and when we get guidance around further vaccinations for you and your staff.

Half Term messages

We would be grateful if you can support us to send some key messages out to your parents ahead of half term.

It is vital that we stay at home and stay local during the holiday as we are still in a national lockdown.

Continuing to observe the 'hands, face and space' guidance is critically important as is continuing to follow the rules after vaccination.

Getting a test and self-isolation if people have symptoms and staying at home when symptoms first develop for 10 days and other people in the household must also self-isolate.

Caring for our mental health and those around us is paramount and we have a range of advice and guidance on the council's website about coping with COVID - <https://www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/health-wellbeing/good-mental-health>

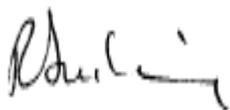
You may find this Public Health England blog useful – Staying safe over February half term - <https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2021/02/09/staying-safe-over-february-half-term/>

I hope you find the above information helpful. I know what a difficult time it has been for so many people across our community, but I am incredibly proud of the Team Doncaster approach we are taking and would encourage everyone to continue to do all they can. Thank you for all your efforts so far, they really are appreciated.

If you need any further support or guidance, please do get in touch with me or my colleagues within the council who will be more than happy to help. We are here to support you as much as we can.

Together, let's keep doing everything we can to make a difference. Let's Do it for Doncaster.

Kind regards,



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