

9th December 2021

Dear Parent/Carer,

As we countdown to Christmas and look forward to spending quality time with our loved ones over the festive period, we would like to take this opportunity to update you on the management of Covid-19 in our schools and how this has changed with the presence of the Omicron variant in Highland.

We are aware that the Omicron variant has been identified in some of our schools. Our schools continue to work closely with the Health Protection Team and are following their advice and guidance to reduce risk of further spread of the virus. Where there is a case, or a suspected case, of the Omicron variant identified, the isolation guidance has additional protective measures in place to help keep you and your loved ones safe.

What has changed with the Omicron variant?

The isolation guidance for Omicron is different than for other variants of Covid-19. Health guidance is developing as knowledge of its impact improves.

Where an Omicron Covid variant is diagnosed, the following steps will be put in place:

- Positive cases will isolate for ten days
- Close contacts should PCR test but must also isolate for ten days irrespective of result, age or vaccination status
- Households of close contacts (Secondary contacts) should isolate and seek a PCR test but may resume daily activity following negative tests of the whole household and as long as the household is well
- The close contact, however, must remain in isolation for ten days irrespective of result
- There may be variation of approach taken on a case-by-case basis by the health protection team, as knowledge develops of the new variant

We will work together with NHS Highland's Health Protection Team to inform you where there is a confirmed case of the virus in your school. In keeping with Scottish Government's updated policy for school settings, parents of pupils in the classes involved will also receive information issued by the school, with clear instructions on what to do next.

Further known or suspected cases within the school are immediately referred to the Health Protection Team who then risk assess the situation and coordinate the response and any communication around this.

We are sharing information as readily as we can, but we must also protect confidential patient information and can only issue health related information and advice approved by the Health Protection Team.

You can help us to manage the spread of the virus. If your child has symptoms that could be from COVID they should stay at home and have a PCR test booked. In line with national guidance, it's very important that you stay at home (self-isolate) if:

- you have symptoms that may be caused by coronavirus (COVID-19)
- you've had a positive test result
- you have been identified as a close contact
- someone you live with has symptoms but has not yet been tested or received their test result. Household isolation will help to control the spread of the virus to friends, the wider community and the most vulnerable.

The most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are recent onset of:

- a new continuous cough and/or
- high temperature
- a loss of, or change in, normal sense of taste or smell

However, people with COVID-19 can present with a wide range of symptoms including headache, sore muscles and joints, tiredness, sore throat, cold-like symptoms and diarrhoea and vomiting. Thank you for your cooperation and understanding in this challenging and changing situation.

Yours faithfully



Nicky Grant
Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning