

**South West Association of Directors of Public Health Mainstream Schools Consensus  
Statement  
5 January 2022**

Southwest Directors of Public Health wish to say Happy New Year and a huge thank you to all Head Teachers and school staff for all you have done to keep children and young people as safe as possible over the past term. We look forward to continuing to work closely with you in the coming weeks.

COVID-19 continues to circulate widely in the Southwest, and with the emergence of the more transmissible variant – Omicron – we are now seeing very high rates within the South West and we anticipate these to rise in the short term.

To continue to support schools and to ensure consistency in minimising disruption to young people, Southwest Directors of Public Health have jointly agreed that the additional advice and action issued previously (and set out again below) continues to be relevant and necessary.

This advice sits alongside the SW risk assessment tool to support consistency in both applying thresholds for action; working within the parameters set out within the educational Contingency Framework, [new guidance on actions for schools during the coronavirus outbreak](#) and any [additional guidance](#) produced.

### **SW Regional Consensus Schools Statement**

#### **Aims:**

- To protect population health and minimise widespread transmission of COVID-19
- To support schools and early years settings to stay open and to maximise children's access to education, learning and mental and emotional health
- To strengthen awareness of the identification of symptoms and key messages relating to testing
- To continue to promote and publicise the effectiveness of vaccination as the best protection for everyone
- To provide advice and consistency of approach across the region that helps schools take decisions when thresholds have been met on a case-by-case basis

#### **Situation Summary**

The emergence of a new variant of concern, Omicron, has resulted in additional national measures being implemented including the recommended use of well-fitting face coverings in corridors and communal areas in all schools (for adults and students of Year 7 and above) and for pupils in Year 7 and above in classrooms. Teachers should continue to wear a face covering where it doesn't affect delivering the curriculum.

#### **Mitigations**

Given the ongoing evidence of spread of infection in pupils and the impact on staffing across Southwest educational settings since the 2021-22 term began, we are advising all settings to review their contingency plans within the national contingency framework to implement where possible and appropriate those protective measures listed. This will help to minimise the spread of infection and maintain good quality face to face education.

The rates of infection in South West England are currently very high and we anticipate this will shortly affect staffing levels within educational settings. It is for these reasons that Southwest Directors of Public Health **recommend** schools maintain a precautionary and sensible set of measures until further notice due to very high rates of Covid-19 transmission within our communities.

Particular measures for consideration on a case-by-case basis whilst rates remain high include:

1. Continued good infection prevention control (ventilation, touchpoint cleaning), including in areas where staff gather
2. Promote and publicise the effectiveness of vaccination as the best protection for all eligible cohorts including staff and students, and consider establishing a register of staff vaccination status subject to consent
3. Reduced mixing between groups of students as much as possible including consideration of pausing 'whole school' assemblies for the time being and reviewing other 'large gatherings'.
4. Continued efforts on testing. Examples are included in the DfE participation toolkit, including:
  - a. Close contacts of confirmed cases are advised to undertake daily LFD test for 7 days and to continue to attend school (unless test is positive or develop symptoms). This is also advised for primary school aged children aged 5 and above at the discretion of the parent/guardian
  - b. Promotion of twice weekly asymptomatic testing of secondary students, staff and parents of children at school
  - c. If unwell for any reason students and staff should stay at home. If negative for COVID, unwell individuals should still wait until 24 hours post fever to go back into a setting. Colds and other non-COVID symptoms are circulating but in the first instance cardinal symptoms (cough, high temperature, loss of, or change to taste or smell) should be treated as possible COVID and trigger isolation and testing. This is the case even if others in the setting /group have tested negative for similar symptoms.
5. National DfE operational guidance was updated January 2nd to recommend the use of well fitted face coverings in corridors and communal areas in all schools (for adults and students of Year 7 and above) and in classrooms for pupils in year 7 and above, except in situations where a face covering would impact on the ability to take part in exercise or strenuous activity. Pupils in Year 7 and above are also advised to wear face coverings when travelling on dedicated school or public transport. These are the only changes from the previous SW consensus statement produced for the Autumn Term
6. Reduce mixing of staff by holding meetings virtually, including cross setting meetings

### **Next steps**

After reviewing your risk assessments please do consult with your local authority Public Health team if you need further support. This consensus statement has been reviewed since the DfE guidance was refreshed on 2 January 2022 and believe it to be a precautionary approach to current high levels of circulating virus. It will be reviewed again prior to 26 January when DfE review their guidance to ensure we remain consistent. Again, can we take this opportunity to thank you for all your hard work over the last term and wish you a very Happy New Year.