



## STAY VIGILANT AS SCHOOL COVID-19 CASES INCREASE

Since schools returned from the October holiday period, we have seen a significant rise in confirmed COVID-19 cases affecting at least 14 of our 22 schools and nurseries. At this time, we ask that all pupils, parents and carers stay extremely vigilant for potential symptoms and respond immediately to any concerns. The most common symptoms seen in Western Isles cases are listed here but people must look out for the development of any symptoms of illness, however mild.

If you or anyone else in your household are displaying potential symptoms, isolate immediately and contact the NHS Western Isles Covid helpline on 01851 601151 or by e-mail [wi.covid19queries@nhs.scot](mailto:wi.covid19queries@nhs.scot) to seek advice.

If you are concerned about having been in contact with the virus or have very mild symptoms, we would advise taking a Lateral Flow Device (LFD) test in the first instance before contacting the NHS helpline.

At this time, any child who is unwell with recent symptoms of any illness (in the last 7-10 days) **must not attend at school**. If symptoms are observed or develop during the school day, children will be isolated within the school until they can be collected by an adult and returned home.

### Common symptoms of COVID-19 in the Western Isles are recent onset of:

- a new cough;
- a fever (including high temperature or chills/shivers);
- loss of sense of taste and smell;
- sore throat;
- runny nose/cold;
- unexplained headache;
- diarrhoea.

### KEEPING SCHOOLS & NURSERIES SAFE

At the present time, all Comhairle schools and nurseries are increasing protection measures and strengthening risk assessments to address a significant rise in cases across the Western Isles since the end of the October holidays.

Increased measures will vary in different locations depending on their individual risk assessments and number of cases in the area, but they may include:

- reintroduction of pupil bubbles;
- maintenance of at least 2m physical distancing between adults;
- provision of maximum available ventilation in all classrooms and learning spaces
- avoidance of any gatherings such as assemblies or meetings;

- restriction on all but essential visitors to the school;
- short-term cancellation of any trips or off-site activity;
- timetable changes to reduce movement and contact between different pupil groups.

### ILLNESS SYMPTOMS: STAY AT HOME

Whilst we are seeing an increased rate of positive cases linked to schools, we ask for the full co-operation of parents in ensuring that children with symptoms of illness are kept at home. It is important at this time that we take steps to avoid infectious illnesses of any kind circulating in schools.

- Where there are symptoms that may be COVID-19, the household should isolate and test (see latest advice on testing below).



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## Pupils, Parents & Carers

- Children with recent illness symptoms should not return to school or nursery until they have been symptom-free for 48 hours.
- Where a child has had a negative PCR result, they must still not return to school until they have been free from symptoms of illness for 48 hours.
- Where illness symptoms are linked to long-term chronic health conditions or are present for more than 7-10 days but known not to be COVID-19, this should be discussed with the Headteacher/Nursery Manager.
- If a child is not unwell and has not been instructed to self-isolate, they should attend school as normal.

We appreciate that these enhanced restrictions may cause inconvenience to parents and family life, but they are critical at this time to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 or other infectious illnesses within schools.

## CONTACT TRACING

As confirmed cases in schools have been rising, there have been increasing queries about current contact tracing procedures. They are determined by the latest Scottish Government advice and agreed in very close collaboration with the NHS Western Isles Health Protection Team who lead on Test & Protect arrangements.

Included with this briefing is a Contact Tracing Process Map and a summary of Contact Tracing Procedures prepared by NHS Western Isles.

In addition, the following points are important to note:

- Schools can only act on confirmed positive PCR results notified to us by the Health Protection Team. It cannot initiate contact tracing based on reports of positive LFD tests or informal reports of positive PCR results from sources other than the NHS.
- When a case is confirmed in a class, an evaluation of the degree or risk is undertaken and both high and low risk contacts are

identified. A whole class or playroom will not typically be asked to isolate.

- In line with national guidance, the vast majority of 'business as usual' school or nursery contacts are considered low risk, including immediate seating contacts. Where this is the case, a letter will be issued from the school to inform you of this status. Low risk contacts do not need to isolate as long as they have no symptoms.
- Where a child is identified as a low risk contact on multiple occasions in quick succession, such as when there are several cases within a class group over a few days, duplicate letters are not issued.
- Anyone identified as a high-risk contact will be notified by NHS Test & Protect staff. They will require to isolate and will be offered a test.

## TESTING UPDATE

The NHS COVID-19 Helpline and the Testing Centre are experiencing unprecedented demand and this may result in longer waits for testing appointments and notification of results. It should be noted that results can take up to 48 hours to be reported.

To assist in reducing demand on PCR testing at the current time, NHS and schools will be advising that, in the following circumstances, school-age children take LFD tests rather than refer for PCR testing.

- **Low risk close contacts that do not have symptoms**
- **Children with mild cold-like symptoms that do not have a known link to a positive case.**

If a positive LFD test is received, please register the result on the online portal (details provided in test kit booklet) and Test and Protect staff will then be in touch with you.

LFD testing kits are available from local pharmacies or can be ordered online for home delivery, with delivery usually within two days:

<https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests>



Secondary school pupils can access routine LFD testing kits by registering with their school office. We are currently working with NHS Western Isles to arrange for supplies of testing kits to be available for collection from primary school offices, where possible.

## **SAFETY AT SEASONAL EVENTS**

With gatherings, events and parties likely to be increasing as we approach the Christmas season, and bonfire night parties being planned for this weekend, we would encourage the following practices to help keep our community safe.

- Avoid large gatherings, particularly indoors
- Aim to participate in small groups, where appropriate
- Keep at least 2m apart from people from other households, even outdoors
- Wear a face covering wherever possible
- Ensure there is access to handwashing/sanitisation or carry and use your own sanitiser
- Ensure indoor spaces are well ventilated and sufficiently large for attendees to be spaced out
- Consider duration of events. Shorter events reduce risk
- If food is being provided, use pre-packed foods and single-use disposable cutlery/plates
- At organised events, aim to keep a record of attendees and contact numbers
- Discourage attendance/participation by anyone with symptoms of illness

## **MAINTAINING CORE SERVICES**

Where schools are responding to COVID-19 outbreaks affecting pupils and staff, there may be instances where a school will be required to redeploy staff, change class groupings and adjust

or cancel non-essential activities to make sure that core provision of services are maintained.

If schools have to do this at any time, it will be done so in compliance with the school's risk assessment and parents will be informed through communication from the headteacher or school office.

## **PARENT/CARER ACCESS TO SCHOOLS AND NURSERIES**

In an update to current Scottish Government COVID-19 guidance for schools, parents and carers are now permitted to access school buildings for individual meetings about their children or where there is a requirement to access school to support wellbeing.

In all circumstances, any meetings taking place in a school involving parents as external visitors must be pre-agreed by the headteacher and be compliant with the building risk assessment.

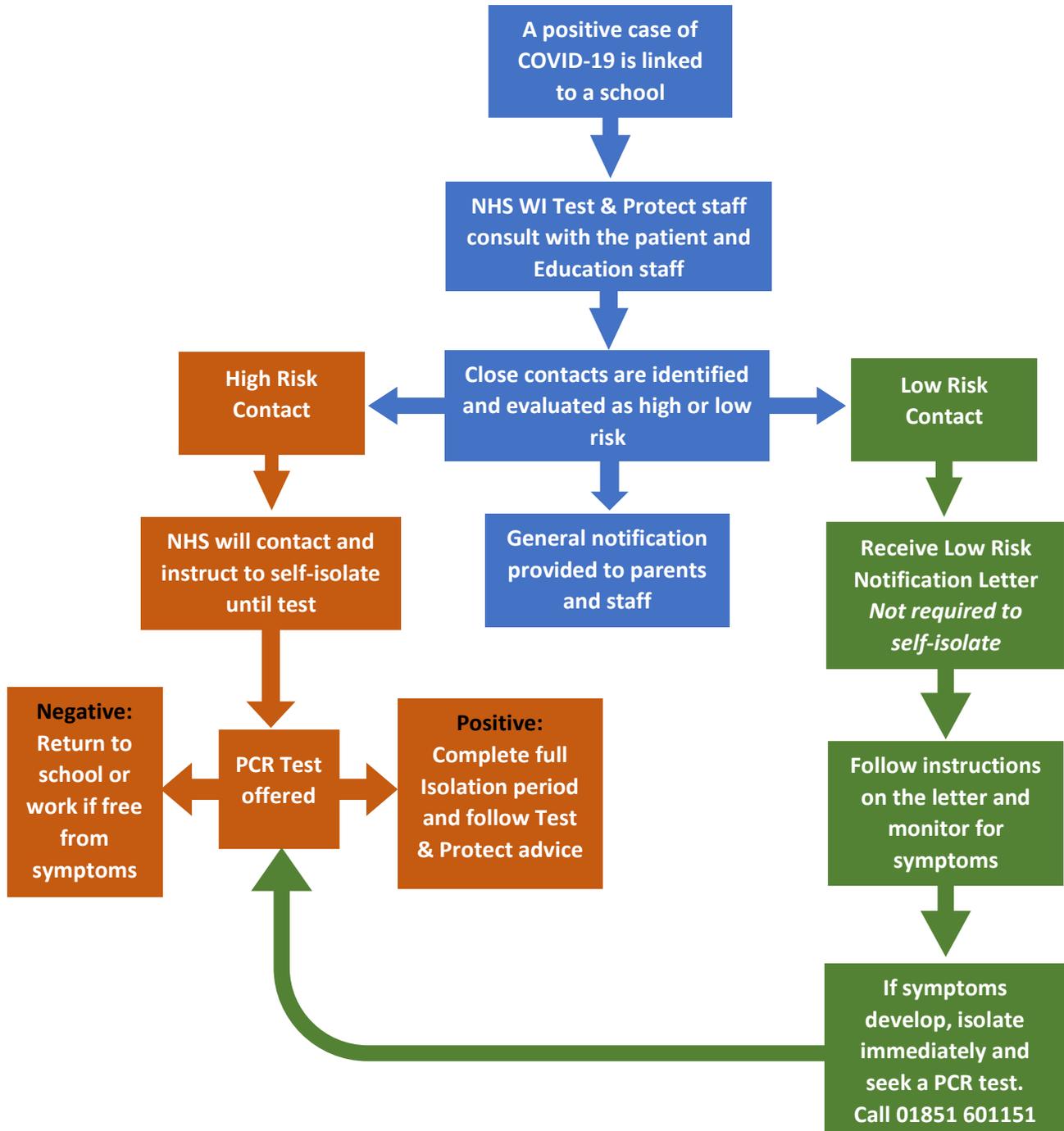
## **EXTERNAL ACCESS & COMMUNITY LETS**

School buildings continue to be required to operate strict restrictions on external visitors and are required to limit this to essential visits only at the present time, except for the concession for parents detailed above.

Whilst virus infection rates remain high across the islands, schools will not be able to accept requests for internal community lets or bookings for use of rooms or halls. This is being kept under regular review and we hope to be able to begin to allow schools buildings to be booked again when local virus transmission rates reduce.

### **Attached:**

- Contact Tracing Process Map
- NHS/CnES Contact Tracing Procedures





# Contact Tracing & Self-Isolation in Schools



There is national guidance that relates to contact tracing and self-isolation in schools. It's important that parents and guardians are aware of some of the key points:

- If there is a positive case of COVID-19 in your child's school class, we would not isolate the entire class, however you will receive a letter from the school as a 'low risk contact' to ensure you are aware there has been a case/cases and to provide advice on looking out for symptoms and taking precautions. We do not identify the case. However, everyone identified as a 'low risk contact' will be encouraged to take regular Lateral Flow Device (LFD) tests, which are available from local pharmacies, or your school (Contact Tracing staff can advise you on other locations you can obtain these free of charge).
- In line with Scottish Government guidance, we only isolate those who are considered to be 'close contacts' of a positive school case. So that would be children who, for example, live in the same house as the positive case, or those who had indoor playdates or sleepovers.
- We do not start contact tracing following a positive Lateral Flow Device (LFD) self-test. When someone tests positive through an LFD test, they are asked to self-isolate and arrange a PCR (laboratory) test. Only when a PCR test is positive does contact tracing take place.
- Children identified by Test & Protect as close contacts of someone in their school should self-isolate and arrangements will be made for that child to have a PCR test. Following a negative PCR (and assuming the child has no symptoms), the close contact can return to school. If a parent/guardian refuses a PCR test for the child who is a close contact, 10-day self-isolation will be required and the child must not return to school for that period.
- If your child has not been contacted by Test & Protect or their school as a close contact, but you think that your child should have been identified as a close contact of a positive case, contact the school (for in-school contacts) or Test and Protect (for out of school contacts - 01851 601151).

