

# Covid-19 Briefing

## Briefing for Pupils, Parents & Carers

28<sup>th</sup> August 2020



**COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR**  
Education, Skills & Children's Services

DMD36147

# Thank You

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Today marks thirteen days since schools opened their doors to pupils again after the Covid-19 lockdown and we can now reflect on the experience of returning to in-school education. We do recognise that not everything has been perfect from the outset but open dialogue with parent, pupils, staff and other partners has allowed us to address issues and ensure that these first days have gone as smoothly as possible.

Schools worked hard to ensure that all measures for safe operation were in place and an audit of school readiness to return indicated that, across all our schools, 94% of all requirements were in place at the point of opening, including all major safety measures. The remaining items were addressed within the first few days of opening.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our pupils, parents, carers, families and staff for the critical role each of you played in making the re-opening of schools successful. Whilst we realise that many things still feel different, we really are delighted to have our pupils back in school.

## Attendance & Registration

Since schools opened on 12<sup>th</sup> August, attendance rates have been very high. Understandably, there have been a small number of absences related to illness or precautionary self-isolation.

We are required to report attendance information to the Scottish Government on a daily basis and would ask that parents and carers support us in doing so by informing your school office as promptly as possible about the timescale and reasons for absence.

## Covid-19 Symptoms & Testing

The Comhairle issued information for pupils, parents and carers last week via schools regarding Covid-19 symptoms and when and how testing should be considered.

If you have not received a copy of this guidance, you can request it from your school office. It includes important information about when you should keep children out of school or nursery and when it is safe for them to return.

## Covid-19 Symptoms

- **a high temperature** – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (37.8°C or higher)
- **a new, continuous cough** – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)
- **a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste** – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.

If you believe that any member of your household is displaying any of the symptoms of Covid-19 described above, you must act promptly.

- **Self-Isolate:** All members of the household must immediately self-isolate. Children in the household must not be sent to school or nursery.
- **Ask for a Test:** All members of the household with symptoms should be referred for a Covid-19 test. Telephone 01851 601151 or [click here](#)
- **Inform:** Ensure that you promptly notify employers and any schools or nurseries that your household is self-isolating and awaiting testing.

**Call: 01851 601151**

## Face Coverings in Secondary Schools

From Monday 31<sup>st</sup> August, it will become a requirement for pupils in secondary schools in Scotland to wear face coverings. The introduction of this additional safety measure sits as part of a suite of controls and measures in place to keep pupils and staff as safe as possible in

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schools and we ask that parents and pupils continue to support these in the interests of all that attend school. The information below sets out how face covering requirements will be implemented in Western Isles secondary schools.

- Face coverings must be worn in all communal areas, including corridors, social areas, toilets and other non-classroom areas identified by the school where pupils may congregate.
- Face coverings are to be worn when moving between classes and at break times. They should be reapplied after eating meals.
- Coverings do not need to be worn in classrooms and should be safely stored away in a sealable bag when not being worn. They should not be left lying on surfaces or desks.
- As was already the case in the Western Isles, face coverings must also now be worn on all school transport.
- Face coverings can be worn in classes and other areas if pupils wish to.
- The responsibility for having a face covering rests on the individual but schools will have a supply of face coverings available if a pupil forgets to bring one, it is lost or becomes damaged.
- Exemptions will be permitted, particularly on medical grounds, and any intention to not wear a face covering must be discussed with school management and an exemption agreed.
- Reusable face coverings are encouraged and they should be washed regularly at a temperature of at least 60°C
- Single use face coverings should be disposed of appropriately in bins provided in schools.
- There is no specification about the nature or type of covering to be used. The Scottish Government has provided this [video](#) to demonstrate how to make a simple face covering.
- Face coverings must not be shared with others.
- Refusal to wear face coverings without valid exemption will be treated in line with the schools existing discipline policy.

### Wider Face Covering Advice

Face covering guidance in other areas remain unchanged. If any pupil or staff member wishes to wear

a face covering at any time beyond where it is required, they are welcome to do so.

It continues to be a requirement to wear a face covering on all forms of school transport.

### Access to Drinking Water

As part of the risk assessments undertaken prior to schools opening, it was identified that communal water fountains in schools presented a Covid-19 cross-contamination risk and they were put out of use for the initial period of school opening.

We recognised that this would reduce access to drinking water during the school day and have advised that pupils should be encouraged to take a water bottle from home, where possible. This was already common practice in many schools. In addition to this, we provided:

- a supply of 500ml filled water bottles that schools are able to distribute when a pupil has no alternative, at no charge;
- free refillable water bottles that schools can distribute to anyone who doesn't have one or wishes to have an additional one;
- access to safe and supervised refill stations at canteens or designated refill points.

As with all aspects of risk assessment, restrictions on water fountains are under review and, when advice indicates that it is safe to do so, access will be reinstated with appropriate safety measures in place.

### Restrictions on Education Buildings

It continues to be the case that schools and other education buildings are required to restrict all but essential visitors as one of the key safety measures in place to protect pupils and staff.

We appreciate that this may be frustrating for parents and carers and thank you for your patience and understanding in respecting this restriction. School offices continue to be contactable in the normal way and schools are working to provide information to parents and carers and share learning in new and different ways.

Visitor restrictions continue to be in place and are under continuous review. Parents will be informed when restrictions can be relaxed.

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### **Restrictions on Schools Handling Money**

School offices are currently not permitted to handle cash and an online payment system has been implemented for the schools where canteen meals were previously paid in cash.

We appreciate that this also impacts on activities such as fundraising events and activities typically undertaken by schools. As with other risk assessment measures, this remains under review and we will confirm with both schools and Parent Councils when this safety measure can be stopped.

### **Test & Protect Readiness**

We do hope to see our schools continue to stay free of any confirmed cases of Covid-19 but we would like to reassure parents and carers that the Comhairle continues to prepare and test our readiness for any potential report of a case or outbreak of Covid-19 related to a school.

We have recently completed a desktop exercise with NHS, public health and emergency response colleagues to test both the responses of the Comhairle and that of our partners.

### **Contingency Plans**

The Comhairle continues to hold in reserve our contingency plans for partial or restricted opening of schools or implementation of blended/flipped learning. If there are any reasons in the future where either individual schools or our whole school estate is required to close or move to restricted opening, parents can be assured that we have plans in place, ready to be enacted in these circumstances.

### **Livestream Q&A**

The Comhairle is currently making plans for another livestream question and answer session next week. This event will provide the opportunity for parents and carers to ask questions and receive feedback on any areas of concern they have in relation to the information in this briefing or any other aspect of the re-opening of schools.

When the exact details of the event are finalised, this will be promoted via the Comhairle's social media platforms and through school offices, including how questions can be submitted.