

# **Covid-19 and the impact on schools and nurseries in Dumfries and Galloway – a message from NHS Public Health Team**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic over the last eighteen months, children and young people of all ages have experienced widespread disruption to their lives - this has affected their school work, their involvement in school and other activities, their opportunities to meet and spend time with friends, and for some this has led to poor mental health.

Having lived with the effects of the virus for eighteen months, there is now greater understanding of how it affects individuals of all ages including children and young people. We have seen that children and young people usually have a much milder illness than adults when they are infected with Covid, with very few needing medical treatment. The latest evidence from Public Health Scotland also indicates that schools have to date been relatively low risk environments for transmission of COVID-19 infection. We have also seen the benefits of the vaccination programme, with the majority of people who are fully vaccinated experiencing much milder symptoms, and significantly less needing to be admitted to hospital. Our vaccination uptake across Dumfries and Galloway has been excellent.

Public health and education experts, whose advice has informed national guidance on mitigations in schools and nurseries now feel that the harms that would be caused to children and young people by asking large numbers to self-isolate for long periods of time, or by closing schools and nurseries and limiting activities, outweigh the potential risks of the virus in the school and nursery environment, particularly when other mitigations are in place to limit the spread of the virus. While there is always a risk that some children and young people may develop a Covid infection in any setting in which they have contact with others it is likely to be a mild, cold-like illness. Adults working within the school or nursery environment are increasingly protected by being vaccinated and measures such as the use of face coverings, along with good ventilation and cleaning.

In the past few weeks we have been seeing high numbers of people throughout the region testing positive for Covid, but with far fewer people seriously ill than we saw earlier in the pandemic. These cases include school pupils and those children attending nursery, with most infections starting in home and social settings, and a much fewer number happening within the school or nursery itself.

The most recent national guidance on isolation, effective since the 9<sup>th</sup> August 2021, sets out what individuals should do if they have symptoms of Covid and are awaiting a test, test positive for Covid, or are a close contact of someone who is awaiting a test or has tested positive. The information is available online via this link <https://www.nhsinform.scot/isolation>

Should anyone in the region be identified as a close contact and require to isolate, they will be contacted by Test and Protect. If you are not contacted in relation to your child and they attend a school or nursery setting where Covid cases have been identified, that is because your child and members of your family do not need to isolate, in line with the guidance published on the 9<sup>th</sup> August.

Since the start of this school term, some schools and nurseries have been affected by temporary closures, but it should be emphasised that this has been due to operational and staffing issues, rather than to the spread of the virus in the school or nursery community.

Where there are staffing issues as a result of Covid, or spread of the virus in a school or nursery setting, our aim is to prevent closure wherever possible, in order to allow our children and young people to continue with their learning and focus on their overall wellbeing.

Individual schools and nurseries all have their own unique circumstances which will be taken into account when considering a full or partial closure, though our aim will always be to prevent closure wherever possible.