

Director of Public Health Office
Sheffield Town Hall, Pinstone Street, Sheffield, S1 2HH
www.sheffield.gov.uk



3rd January 2021

Dear Headteacher,

Thank you for all that you are doing to keep our schools open and safe and for all the work you may have undertaken through the Christmas holidays. We all know how important school is for our children – for their education and for their emotional wellbeing. Following the recent national developments over the weekend regarding schools reopening we understand that you will have questions and some concerns. We are writing to outline our local advice.

We do recognise that we have to balance educational provision and the safety of school staff and pupils. Sheffield remains at this time in Tier 3 restrictions. Our latest case data up to 1st January 2021 tells us we have 175 positive COVID cases per 100,000. You will have seen the increased case rates in the South and South East of the country. London case rates at the 28th December 2020 were 762 positive COVID cases per 100,000. Transmission of the new variant of the virus means that difficult decisions are having to be made regarding the opening of schools after the Christmas holiday and placing parts of the country into Tier 4 restrictions.

There is no doubt this is more transmissible than the initial virus. There is not clear evidence to support that it is more transmissible in children per se nor that it is having a more significant impact on either children or adults. The Royal College of Paediatricians and Child Health have a helpful steer on their website. <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news-events/news/rcpch-responds-media-reports-increased-admissions-children-young-people-covid-19>

Here in Sheffield whilst our case levels are likely to increase we are confident that at this time **primary schools should reopen**. The decision for secondary schools to have a staggered opening is in order to get the testing programme up and running and is not reflective of increased virus transmission or high case rates in Sheffield.

We are very aware there is a lot of confusion and conflicting information on social media and elsewhere. Our position is based on the available scientific information as it is today, we are mindful this is continually developing, and we are reviewing it constantly.

We would support all our local primary and special schools to reopen. We know that head teachers and governing bodies are continually reviewing school-based risk assessments and having to consider staffing and capacity issues. Where schools are confident that they have adequate staffing and their risk assessments are in place schools should reopen. All schools will remain open for the children of key workers.

The Local Authority Public Health team will continue to monitor and review the situation locally. We also recognise parents and teachers fears, anxiety and concerns. The schools and school staff continue to do an amazing job. For this we thank you. We will also be speaking directly to secondary schools on 4th January 2021 about establishing the national testing programme.

We do appreciate that this has been a confusing and unsettling time for schools trying to manage the safe and effective return to school. Thank you all for your continued hard work and dedication to our children & young people.

For pupils and school staff returning to school on the 4th January 2021 we'd remind everyone of what you can do to continue to reduce COVID-19 in your community.

What can you do to reduce Covid-19 in your community



Got Symptoms?

- a high temperature
- a new, continuous cough
- a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste

If you have **any** of these symptoms, however mild, **you must stay home, don't go into school and book a free test** via our easy, accessible tests centres here in Sheffield. Most test results are now coming back within 24 hours. You can book a test by calling 119 or online at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19>

We have slowed and reduced the spread of the virus in Sheffield. We need to continue to do this by following the restrictions. This will then allow us all to get back to enjoying more activities and time with our friends and families soon.

Yours sincerely

Greg Fell
Director of Public Health, Sheffield