Southampton City Council
Civic Centre
Southampton
SO14 7LY

Friday 23rd April 2021

Dear parent or carer,

Symptom-free COVID-19 testing in Southampton for households, support bubbles and childcare bubble with children in school

As the new term begins, we would like to strongly encourage you to continue to use symptom-free testing and play a part in helping to reduce transmission of COVID 19.

Symptom-free testing played a key role prior to Easter in helping to break chains of transmission and reduce infections following the return of pupils to schools, according to our data. Symptom-free tests detected nearly half the confirmed COVID cases in education settings between 8 March, when the majority of pupils returned to schools for in person learning, and the end of term on 1 April.

Early detection of COVID-19 infections, which may otherwise have gone undetected, meant that early action could be taken by individuals to self-isolate and break chains of transmission at an early stage.

Rapid symptom-free tests are now available to everyone in England, and we encourage everyone to test twice a week, particularly anyone who has sustained contact with school and college-aged children and early years children. This includes all households with children, members of support bubbles, childcare bubbles, and people working in childcare and in any related occupations.

As you may be aware our pupils will not be asked to test at this time as primary school pupils are not being tested.

Although COVID-19 cases are falling across the city, we still need to do everything we can to bring them down further to keep ourselves, our families and our colleagues safe, especially as we move out of lockdown. **One in three people with COVID-19 don't have symptoms**, so people could be spreading the infection without realising it. It is really important that we identify those people so that they can self-isolate and break the chain of transmission. The more people we find who have the virus and then self-isolate, the more quickly we will be able to return to a more normal way of life for everyone.

How to get tested

Schools are not currently able to give test kits to parents, carers or household members. However, the options for accessing a symptom-free test have expanded significantly in recent weeks and getting a test has never been easier. They can now be organised via any of the following options:

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1. **You can book appointments to be tested at Southampton's symptom-free testing sites, including participating community pharmacies.** Testing at these sites is assisted, which means you will swab yourself under the supervision of a trained operator. We recommend having at least one test at a symptom-free testing site so that you can be supported to carry out the test well. Tests that are completed well are more likely to pick up any COVID-19 infection present.

2. **You can use the Community Collect scheme to collect home lateral flow testing kits from local testing sites, community pharmacies, West Quay** a**nd many other locations across the city.** No booking is requited. The testing kits you pick up will contain instructions on how to take the tests and register the results via the online registration portal. Additional collection sites are being added every week, check for the most up to date locations Find your nearest rapid lateral flow test site.

3. By ordering home test kits online **Please do not order online if you can get a test through other methods. This frees up home delivery for those who need it most.**

4. You may be able to access symptom-free testing through your **employer's testing scheme**, if one is available.

Do not attend your test appointment or visit any of the testing sites to collect kits if you develop coronavirus symptoms or are self-isolating. If you have COVID-19 symptoms you must not use the symptom-free testing and you should book a symptomatic test in the usual way.

If anyone tests positive or gets coronavirus symptoms, they should tell the school and:

- self-isolate immediately, along with their household
- get a PCR test as soon as possible to confirm the result
- follow the stay at home guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection

A negative result means the test did not find signs of coronavirus. But this does not guarantee you do not have coronavirus, so you should keep following all coronavirus advice including:

- regular handwashing
- social distancing
- wearing a face covering where recommended

There is also more national guidance and local information here on who can be tested and how you can get a test.

Please do not contact the school regarding household testing as the school will not be able to provide any further information than we have shared above.

With best wishes, and my thanks for all you have done and keep doing to keep your families and Southampton residents safe.

Many thanks

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Further information

Lateral Flow Tests

The type of test being used in symptom-free testing is the Lateral Flow Test (LFT), and these detect the coronavirus antigen that is produced when a person is infectious with coronavirus by a simple process of applying a swab from the nose and throat to a special test kit. They are rapid tests that produce a result within 30 minutes and do not require a laboratory to be processed. The tests have been validated and approved as safe for use in the UK.

No COVID-19 test of any type is 100% accurate. LFTs have a high specificity, which means that very few people are falsely diagnosed as COVID-19 positive and so required to self-isolate unnecessarily. LFTs pick up positive cases when levels of virus are at their highest and people are most likely to pass it on to others. This means that if your test is negative test, you could still have the virus, so you should ensure you follow social distancing measures, wear a face covering and wash hands regularly.

Why should parents and carers get tested?

It's so important that we all keep going and do what we can to stop the transmission of the virus and we strongly urge all parents and carers to use symptom-free testing twice per week.

We now have many great tools we can use to help reduce the impact of the virus and allow us to move back towards normality - social distancing, hand hygiene, using face coverings/masks, ventilation, vaccinations etc – and testing is one more of these, but we need to use them all to have the greatest effect. Getting tested regularly will help in the fight against COVID-19, help keep you and your family safe and save lives.

Even if you have been vaccinated we ask that you still engage in symptom-free testing, because we do not yet know enough about how well the vaccines reduce transmission of infection from one person to another.

Further information

The Southampton City Council website has further details about the testing programme and a series of FAQs. You can also find out about the support available in Southampton if you need to self-isolate.