

NHS Test and Trace: COVID-19 testing for Students

Dear Parent or Carer,

You may have heard that testing for those without coronavirus symptoms is beginning across the country using new, quicker COVID-19 tests known as 'lateral flow devices' (LFD). This letter is to help give you more information about the testing programme in schools.

Up to one third of people who have coronavirus are asymptomatic. By testing we will help to reduce the spread in school and college settings through asymptomatic transmission. I am therefore strongly encouraging all those returning to school to be tested.

LFD tests have been widely used to detect COVID-19 in asymptomatic individuals. No test is perfect, but the speed and convenience of LFD tests supports detection of the virus in asymptomatic individuals who would not otherwise be tested. They are clinically approved and are crucial in the fight against the virus. As the tests are more sensitive with higher viral loads, there is a risk of returning a negative result when viral loads are low (for example, in the early stages of infection). This is why Public Health England recommends two LFD tests 3 to 5 days apart (or 3 to 4 days for home testing), to enhance detection by picking up any cases which were not detected during the first test and to catch any new infections.

If you test positive using an LFD, it is likely that you are infectious at that moment, whereas people testing positive on a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) or lab-processed test could be in the less infectious early or late stages of disease. This means that by using the lateral flow test we can identify people with a high viral load who are the most likely to spread the virus further. A negative LFD test result should not be read as a means to relax or ignore social distancing or other virus prevention measures intended to reduce transmission – LFD is an additional tool that contributes to reducing risk.

For people who have previously tested positive for COVID-19 there is a chance with these tests that they may test positive again due to residual particles. However, you may still choose to opt into doing the tests. Please be aware that these people will still have to self-isolate if they get a positive result.

Plan for testing

All secondary school and college age students are being offered 3 tests on site as they return to school as set out in the letter.

Testing is voluntary and parents/carers must complete the attached consent form. Students will not be tested if these form has not been returned.

How the tests work

Those taking the test will be supervised by trained staff. The lateral flow tests are quick and easy to undertake, using a swab of the nose and throat. Results (which take around half an hour from testing) will be shared directly with the individual participant. The school will inform the student of a positive test result. Where participants are under 16, parents or legal guardians will also be informed. The student will also receive a text/email notification of a positive or negative result from

the online NHS system. Tests are free of charge.. I enclose an instructional leaflet with some more information, along with the Privacy Notice and information on Data Protection.

What if my child tests positive?

Participating staff and pupils who test positive will be informed about their results individually. Where participants are under 16, parents or legal guardians will also be notified. Parents/Carers will need to come and collect their child from school.

If a pupil tests positive on a lateral flow device, they will need to self-isolate for 10 days and follow the guidance from NHS Test and Trace.

What happens if the test is negative?

While a small number of pupils may need to repeat the test if the first test was invalid or void for some reason, pupils who test negative will be able to return to school and resume their activities as normal. Pupils will be informed of negative test results via text/email. Where participants are under 16, parents or legal guardians will also be informed.

What if staff or students have been in close contact with someone in school/college who tests positive?

The staff member or student will be notified that they are a close contact by the school/college and will need to self-isolate for 10 days in line with Government guidance.

What if my child develops symptoms?

This testing programme at school is for people with no symptoms. If your child develops symptoms at any time (including a high temperature; a new, continuous cough; or a loss or change to their sense of smell or taste) they must immediately self-isolate and book a test by calling 119 or visiting <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>.

We will support our staff and pupils throughout, but please contact us if you have any questions. You can contact the office by emailing studenttesting@caldew.cumbria.sch.uk .