

Cumbria County Council Public Health Update

26 May 2021

ALERT – SIGNIFICANT CHANGE TO COVID-19 GUIDANCE

All close contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases should now be advised to get a PCR test

We have been advised today by Public Health England North West that with immediate effect, all close contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases should get a PCR test. This guidance applies to all settings – early years, schools, FE colleges and universities. It applies to all children, young people and adults.

This change in guidance is being made to provide an additional measure to help stop the spread of the B.1.617.2 variant of COVID-19 (which was originally detected in India).

There is currently no known community transmission of this variant within Cumbria, however the variant is now circulating in a number of Local Authority areas across the North West. As a result, any PCR-confirmed COVID-19 case identified in the North West of England will now be assumed to be the B.1.617.2 variant until/unless proven otherwise.

FAQs

Does this change apply to positive LFD tests and PCR tests?

No, it is only the close contacts of individuals with CONFIRMED COVID-19 (i.e. people who have had a positive PCR test) who need to get a PCR test.

Does this change in guidance just apply to education settings?

No, this is a universal change to the guidance. All close contacts of a confirmed COVID-19 case will now be advised to get a PCR test.

How should close contacts access PCR testing?

Close contacts should access PCR testing via the normal routes. They can book a test [online](#) or if they do not have access to the internet, telephone 119. The quickest way to access a PCR test is to attend a local testing site (booking in advance is required and PCR tests are available in the mornings). If transport is an issue, they can arrange for a test to be sent to their house.

When booking a test online, you will get to a screen that says: 'Why are you asking for a test?'. Close contacts should tick the following box 'I've been in contact with someone who's tested positive for coronavirus'.

We have recently had close contacts who have ended their isolation period. Should they get a PCR test?

No, there is no need for close contacts to get a PCR test if they have now ended their isolation period. If you have staff, pupils, students or children currently isolating due to being close contacts, they should be advised to get a PCR test as soon as possible.

Is there an ideal time during the 10-day isolation period when a close contact should get a PCR test?

Ideally, an individual should get a PCR test as soon as possible after being identified as a close contact (however, getting a test at any point during the 10-day isolation period is acceptable).

We have a close contact who is due to return to the setting and has not had a PCR test. Are they allowed to come back?

Yes, as with all testing, it is strongly advised but cannot be enforced. Therefore, if you have a close contact at your setting who has not been tested, they are allowed to return to the setting when they have completed their 10-day isolation period, as long as they do not have any symptoms of COVID-19.

If a close contact is awaiting a PCR test result, we advise waiting for the result before they return to the setting if at all possible. They should definitely not return to the setting until their PCR test result is known if they have developed symptoms. If advising a delay in return to the setting for a close contact (pending a test result), please ensure you consider any financial, social or mental wellbeing implications for those involved.

We have a close contact who has tested positive themselves for COVID-19 within the past 90 days. Should they get a PCR test?

In this case, the close contact should only get a PCR test if they develop new symptoms of COVID-19 during their isolation period (or at any other time during the 90 days following their previous positive PCR result). They should not get a PCR test during the 90 days unless they develop symptoms of COVID-19.

Please email the Public Health team on EducationIPC@cumbria.gov.uk if you have any queries.

Claire King

Consultant in Public Health, Cumbria County Council