



Date: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2021  
Your Ref: TH/SS/LB

Dear Head Teacher

## School Update – June 2021

I'm sure you'll already be aware that a COVID-19 variant of concern has been confirmed within our region. The variant, first discovered in India and now named 'Delta' by the World Health Organisation, does not appear to cause more severe illness than other strains and thankfully, the number of overall cases remains relatively low.

Early evidence suggests this variant transmits more easily than other variants circulating in the UK but there is currently no evidence to suggest it is more resistant to vaccination. Schools and businesses across our region and in South Tyneside have been affected by small, localised outbreaks and as we know from previous experience, this is likely to result in spread among the wider community.

This means that an outbreak in your school amongst your staff or pupils is likely to affect more people than before, increasing the risk of disruption to our schoolchildren and the wider workforce.

I'm writing to ask for your help in keeping the infection rate in South Tyneside low. There are keyways to protect yourself, your school and the wider community:

### Vaccination

Vaccines remain the best protection we have against COVID-19, including this variant.

The vaccination programme is progressing quickly, with younger groups becoming eligible every few days.

Please get your vaccine as soon as possible and if you can, support your staff in getting theirs. The more people who are vaccinated, the harder it is for the virus to spread and to ultimately reach those who are vulnerable. A toolkit is available to help you encourage take up within your workplace – go to <https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/covid-19-vaccine/resources/employer-toolkit/>



Even if staff missed out on taking up the vaccine when it was first offered, it's not too late to book an appointment to have the vaccine. Appointments can be booked by calling 119 or at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-vaccine/>

### Testing

Around 1 in 3 people with COVID-19 don't have any symptoms, so all adults and secondary school age pupils are encouraged to carry out testing twice a week. This helps identify individuals who could be spreading the virus without realising.

Please can you continue to remind parents and carers that they can collect free lateral flow testing kits from pharmacies and local community sites, or order online or by phone for home delivery.

It's also important that the test results – whether positive or negative – are reported to the NHS and not just the school so that the spread of the virus can be monitored. I would therefore encourage you to remind parents and carers to report online at [www.gov.uk/report-covid19-results](http://www.gov.uk/report-covid19-results)

PCR tests are more reliable than lateral flow tests, so anyone who develops symptoms – no matter how mild – should arrange a PCR test straight away.

You'll be aware that the guidance recently changed just before half-term and now all close contacts of positive cases are asked to book a PCR test as soon as possible to try to stop the spread of the more transmissible variants.

Again, it's vital that close contacts continue to isolate for 10 days even if they have a negative PCR test and a template letter for parents is available for schools to issue in order to relay this message. Please use the many channels you have to share this information with parents and carers such as ParentMail.

### COVID-Secure Schools

This strain of the virus is no different from any other in that it is more likely to spread in enclosed areas used by lots of people, including break areas, bathrooms and meeting rooms.

Please remember to ventilate room wherever possible, continue with thorough handwashing procedures, and please wear a face covering in congested areas where you cannot maintain social distance.

Despite the change in guidance for schools on the use of face coverings, discretion may be needed in the case of schools where there are outbreaks, local cases increase or where variants of concern have been identified. In any of those instances I will review the situation and may recommend the reintroduction of face coverings as an additional public health measure. Additionally, if you feel that you have areas in your school that are congested or parents and carers are coming into the school yard and not social distancing adequately, then please ask them to use face coverings on these occasions to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

I would also remind you to regularly review your risk assessments in order to continue to make our schools a safer environment for pupils and staff.

Finally, I want to thank you all for your continued efforts in helping to ensure our schools stay open and our pupils continue to get the best education possible. I am well aware that the school experience for pupils and staff has been disrupted but urge you to continue to report in cases to our COVID Inbox at [Covid@southtyneside.gov.uk](mailto:Covid@southtyneside.gov.uk) so we can continue to support you and work together to protect our families and communities.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Hall', with a horizontal line drawn above it.

Tom Hall  
Director of Public Health