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Directors of Education
Via email

cc. Chief Executives

22 June 2023

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to you regarding the “Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance on reducing the risks in schools” which was published and updated throughout the pandemic to support schools to reduce risk and promote a supportive environment for learning and teaching.

Standing down COVID-19 specific guidance

The Scottish Government has received advice from Public Health Scotland that it is no longer necessary for COVID-19 specific public health guidance to be produced and maintained on the Scottish Government website, and that a move back to guidance that covers a broader range of health protection issues is appropriate.

The Scottish Government has discussed this recommendation with stakeholders and agreed that the provision of Scottish Government COVID-19 specific guidance should come to an end, due to our progress against the National Framework. We are aware that since the pandemic, schools have continued to find the principles of the COVID-19 guidance for schools helpful in dealing with a number of health protection issues beyond COVID-19 outbreaks, including improving handwashing and cleaning procedures in schools and have agreed that any new guidance should build on this.

Providing guidance for the future

Public Health Scotland has recommended we adopt the general health protection guidance developed by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) for educational settings in Scotland. This guidance can be found on the UKHSA website: [Health protection in children and young people settings, including education - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/health-protection-in-children-and-young-people-settings-including-education)

To adapt the guidance for Scotland a guidance development group has been formed through the Scottish Health Protection Network (SHPN). The group is chaired by Public Health Scotland and brings together a wide range of stakeholders across schools, early learning, trade unions and health protection. The group plays a key role in agreeing any additional

information, beyond that already included in the UKHSA guidance. This will help ensure that the guidance remains relevant to schools, early learning and childcare settings in Scotland.

It is our intention that the UKHSA guidance and additional information will provide a practical guide for staff on managing cases of infectious diseases across educational settings without placing additional significant burden or demands on staff. The guidance will support the good work staff are already doing in schools and early learning and childcare settings to promote the health of learners and will ensure they are able to access the advice they need to continue to do so.

Once this additional guidance is ready, we will work with partners to transition from the current COVID-19 specific guidance to the updated wider health protection guidance. Until that time the existing COVID-19 guidance will remain available.

Public health messages for schools

Public Health Scotland and the Scottish Government want to take the opportunity to reiterate the core public health messages for schools in Scotland:

- Washing hands thoroughly using soap and water will help prevent the spread of common infections such as colds, flu, COVID-19, threadworms and stomach bugs. Hands should be washed throughout the day, e.g. before and after eating; after using the toilet; after coughing or sneezing; and when returning from breaks. Children need to understand why it is important to wash their hands; be taught how to wash, rinse and dry their hands correctly; and have easy access to running water and soap.
- Staff and pupils should continue to follow the advice set out on the [NHS Inform](#) if they have symptoms of a respiratory infection such as coronavirus, this is summarised below.
 - Adults including staff, volunteers and parents visiting early year's settings, should stay at home and avoid contact with other people if they have symptoms of a respiratory infection such as coronavirus and they:
 - have a high temperature or
 - do not feel well enough to go to work or carry out normal activities
 - They should do this until they no longer have a high temperature (if they had one) or until they feel better.
 - Children who are unwell and have a high temperature should stay at home and avoid contact with other people, where they can. They can go back to school, college or childcare, and resume normal activities when they no longer have a high temperature and they're well enough to attend.
- Where a school has any concerns about unusually high levels of absence, or reports of clusters of disease circulating within the school, they should contact their local NHS Health Protection Team, based in each health board for advice. Contact details can be found on the PHS website: [NHS Health Protection Team Contacts](#)
- Staff should be familiar with expected standard environmental cleaning regimes including being prepared for outbreaks

- Schools should aim to keep their environments well-ventilated and temperature-comfortable for learning and working
- Finally, vaccines are an effective and safe way of protecting yourself and your family from many infections. Schools play a vital role in promoting vaccination uptake among staff and children. This includes childhood immunisations, as well as COVID-19 and flu. Parents can ensure their children are up to date with their vaccinations by checking their Red Book, speaking to their health visitor or immunisation services. Find more details on the [Getting your vaccinations](#) page of NHS inform.

Sharing this letter

It would be helpful if this letter could be shared with head teachers and all school staff in advance of the summer break to make them aware of our plans. Once the updated guidance has been finalised we will share the relevant links with you to allow you to cascade to your network.

Thank you for all your input and support in developing the COVID-19 guidance during the pandemic, we hope this collaboration can continue as we roll out this next stage.

Yours sincerely,

Nicola Craig
Team Leader, Directorate for Learning