



Friday, 3 December 2021

Dear Families,

We are writing with an update about Covid-19 and how it affects life at Sydenham School. This letter includes information on:

1. Face coverings in communal areas and on public transport
2. Vaccinations
3. Staff absence
4. January mass testing - a staggered start to term and a call for volunteers
5. Lateral flow testing
6. Reporting a positive case.

### **1. Face coverings in communal areas and on public transport**

Thank you to all families who responded so rapidly to our Sunday evening request for your child to bring a face covering for communal areas and public transport. We've been bowled over by how responsible our student body have been about it.

As outlined in our communications on Sunday, the total cost of providing face coverings for students who forget their own is prohibitively high for the school. Please ensure your child has a system in place to ensure they always have their face covering in their bag or pocket when they leave. *We will not be able to provide face coverings for students who have forgotten them.*

We have been reminding students in the bus queues outside school about face coverings on public transport. Please remind your child about the need to automatically wear a face covering on buses and in shops.

### **2. Vaccinations**

As you may be aware, Sydenham has had a comparatively high uptake of the Covid vaccine amongst students. The higher the vaccination rate, the better our overall level of protection is. We're very grateful to all who have been vaccinated. *If your child is of an eligible age but has not yet been vaccinated, we strongly urge you to consider getting them vaccinated.* You can book them for a vaccine via this link: [Book or manage a coronavirus \(COVID-19\) vaccination - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk) If your child is in the Sixth Form, please note the specific arrangements for the second dose for 16-18 year olds.

You will be aware that the government is introducing booster vaccinations for secondary school aged children (who are over 12). When we have more details about how this might operate via school we will contact you.

### **3. Staff absence**

Since the half term holiday, Covid-19 has meant we have been having to manage very high levels of staff absence. This will mean that your child may have had more cover lessons than we would hope. We are grateful for your understanding in this matter.



The challenge this poses for the school is significant, and we know we are not alone in feeling the strain of this. The overall effect of higher levels of teacher absence across schools is that accessing agency supply staff is increasingly difficult.

You may be aware that some schools have had to send some year groups to remote learning at home to manage this situation. We hope that this will not be necessary at Sydenham School but thought it important that you understand the challenge the pandemic continues to pose to the provision of front-line public services such as schools.

#### 4. Arrangements January mass testing and call for parent volunteers

As with all schools, we have been asked by the government to run mass testing in January 2022, as we did when school reopened in March and September 2021. This will mean a staggered start to the school term, with the details as follows:

Date	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Years 12 and 13
Tuesday 4 <sup>th</sup> January	At home	At home	At home	At home	Lateral Flow Test	At home
Wednesday 5 <sup>th</sup> January	At home	At home	At home	Lateral Flow Test	In school	Lateral Flow Test
Thursday 6 <sup>th</sup> January	At home	Lateral Flow Test	Lateral Flow Test	In school	In school	In school
Friday 7 <sup>th</sup> January	Lateral Flow Test	In school	In school from 8.40am	In school	In school	In school

We will be in contact in the run up to Christmas about the plans for remote learning whilst the testing is being rolled out and arrival time slots for each tutor group.

#### **Consent for Testing:**

If you have already given consent for a previous session of mass testing, you do not need to give consent again. Please complete [this form](#) if:

- You have never given consent for your child for testing at Sydenham School (e.g. they are new to the school since September)
- You have changed your mind since the last time you filled out the form.

If you do not wish your child to be tested, please still fill out the form, but indicate on there that you do not give consent for testing on question 15. This will be a huge support to our staff team, who have to follow up every missing consent form before the end of term.

If you have any questions about the lateral flow testing please contact Emer O'Driscoll at [e.odriscoll@sydenham.lewisham.sch.uk](mailto:e.odriscoll@sydenham.lewisham.sch.uk). The video in our [March newsletter](#) gives an insight into how lateral flow testing operates at Sydenham School. This [letter](#) includes the technical details about the testing and data protection.



Please note that students who are 16 or above should give consent for themselves. We will contact all Year 11s who have, or will be, turning 16 before January to ask them to complete the form. Please discuss this with your child and if you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact Emer O'Driscoll.

If your child is worried about the tests in any way, please contact Emer O'Driscoll at [e.odriscoll@sydenham.lewisham.sch.uk](mailto:e.odriscoll@sydenham.lewisham.sch.uk) so that we can make arrangements to support them before we break up for Christmas.

**Call for Parent/Carer Volunteers:**

As mentioned above, getting agency staff in schools is increasingly challenging. Our HR team have already identified that the significant staffing requirement for the mass testing centre will be difficult to fill. Our staff team will fill gaps where we can but we may not have enough additional staff to do this throughout the whole week once students start to return.

We were hugely grateful to the parents and carers who volunteered in our previous mass testing sessions. To enable us to operate the testing centre again this year we would be very appreciative if you are able to offer to help in the test centre. Full training will be provided. If you are able to help in the week beginning 3rd January, and would like to learn more, please complete this [form](#). If you have any questions about it please contact Emer O'Driscoll at [e.odriscoll@sydenham.lewisham.sch.uk](mailto:e.odriscoll@sydenham.lewisham.sch.uk).

**5. Continued lateral flow testing**

Lateral flow testing continues to identify asymptomatic cases. In combination with the levels of vaccination it is helping us to keep the level of the Covid-19 virus in the school community at a relatively manageable level at the moment. It is of vital importance when also trying to identify any potential Omicron cases within the school community, so that we can reduce the risk of the need for large numbers of students or staff to self-isolate in the run-up to Christmas.

Please support your child to continue to test twice per week as we move towards the end of term.

**6. Positive cases**

Thank you to all families who have reported positive Covid-19 cases to us. Please continue to do so via the [covid@sydenham.lewisham.sch.uk](mailto:covid@sydenham.lewisham.sch.uk) email address. If your child tests positive on a lateral flow test please ensure they book for a PCR test as soon as possible. This is particularly important to enable any possible future identification of the Omicron variant, which will trigger different contact tracing mechanisms within the school community.

We very much hope that December 2021 is less disrupted than December 2020. Please accept our ongoing thanks to all families who are helping us manage this as a school community. If you have any questions about the content of this letter, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully

Gloria Lowe  
Headteacher