

## Media Release

**Date: 20 September 2021**

### **Public Health relaxes guidance on extra-curricular activity after stable first two weeks of term**

Following the first two weeks of term, in which, as expected and planned for, COVID-19 cases emerged in education settings, numbers of cases have remained relatively steady with no exponential increase. For this reason Public Health is relaxing the guidance for students identified as contacts of a positive case.

Students identified as contacts of a positive case in an education setting **are now able to attend all in-school or outside school activities/sports/clubs/events during the 10 days in which they are taking daily lateral flow tests.**

This change follows a two-week period in which, as a temporary measure, Public Health had asked that students did not attend extra-curricular activities for 10 days after being identified as a contact of a positive case.

Dr Nicola Brink, Director of Public Health, said:

‘Our programme of testing before return to education settings after the summer break, together with the current testing arrangements for contacts of cases and those in secondary school, is helping to reduce the spread of infection. This is a valuable tool in helping minimise the disruption to education. We have detected cases in multiple schools but this has not necessitated any school closures and contacts of cases have been able to continue with their education as long as they test negative.

‘As I said last week, our request that students identified as a contact in an educational setting did not take part in extra-curricular activities was always a temporary measure just to help us during the early part of the school year.

‘We needed to take incremental steps in these first couple of weeks of term to allow us to assess the current situation and ensure that we didn’t see a surge of cases. We have tested a large number of symptomatic children and young people during the last two weeks. Whilst some have had COVID-19, there are others whose symptoms were not caused by COVID-19. Some of these will have been caused by other respiratory viruses.

‘I want to thank everyone who has followed the guidance and I’m now really pleased that our advice can be updated with students identified as contacts able to again take part in activities, clubs and sports. I particularly want to thank the students for their support and help during this time.

‘While we have seen cases in educational settings - this was always expected and we have planned for it – what is important is that we have not had a large spike of cases. The initial measures in place around extra-curricular activity were always designed just to help us during a short period where thousands of students went back to school. Our priority was and will always be ensuring students’ education is disrupted as little as possible. However, I would emphasise that if your child is a contact of a case and is doing lateral flow tests that these should continue over the weekend before the child attends any extra-curricular activities’

The letter from Dr Brink, which education settings send to parents/carers when their child is identified as a contact, has been updated.

Other than the change to guidance on extra-curricular activity, the previous advice remains the same. This means that any student identified as a contact can continue to attend education, providing that:

- they have a negative lateral flow test for the next 10 days, every morning before school or extra-curricular activities on weekends and;
- they remain well with no symptoms of COVID-19 (this excludes runny nose as a single symptom in the absence of other symptoms, for example headache, fever, muscle aches and a sore throat). **If they child develops any symptoms, or receives a positive lateral flow test result, parents/carers must keep them at home and arrange a PCR test immediately by contacting the clinical helpline on 756938 or 756969** (please do not use lateral flow tests if symptomatic); and;
- parents/carers are able to collect their child from their setting promptly if they begin to develop any symptoms whilst at school.