# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Future arrangements for COVID-19 Testing for children and young people and for staff working in special schools and colleges** |
| **DATE** | **5 October 2021** |
| **BY** | **Jeremy Miles MS, Minister for Education and Welsh Language** |

I am immensely grateful to the staff working in our schools and colleges for all they have done to support learners returning for the new term and to our childcare settings for supporting our younger children.

Since the start of September we have seen unprecedented levels of lateral flow and PCR testing, particularly amongst school aged children, enabling us to find more cases.

By finding and isolating positive cases we can help to stop onward transmission of COVID-19. Thanks to the effective roll out of the vaccine the current high rates of COVID-19 cases that we are seeing are not resulting in high levels of more serious illness.

I want to do all I can to minimise disruption to education and childcare. I recognise that some schools and parents have been confused and concerned that pupils can attend school or college if they are a household contact as long as they are asymptomatic. I have listened to these concerns and considered what additional assurance can be provided while also enabling learners to continue to attend school.

I am amending our advice and guidance to learners in secondary schools and colleges who are under 18 and have a household member who has tested positive for COVID-19. It will be recommended that in addition to PCR tests on Day 2 and Day 8 they should undertake daily lateral flow every day for seven days. This should start on the day a household contact is confirmed positive from a lateral flow or PCR test result. Where appropriate we want to reduce the testing of children without symptoms but due to the increase in prevalence and the concerns expressed about household contacts it is vital that we do all we can to keep children in school.

The changes will formally come into effect from Monday 11 October. Any learners in secondary school or college who are under 18 and confirmed as a household contact should start using lateral flow tests for 7 days immediately to help provide further reassurance that they are not infectious to others.

In considering the merits of testing, asymptomatic testing in particular, it is important to consider the potential harms. I have been concerned at the level of PCR testing being undertaken of children under 5 years of age which has increased fivefold since the beginning of August.

Testing can be distressing for the child, it can be difficult to obtain an appropriate sample and of course children of this age are much less likely to pass on the virus to others.

Following advice from our testing advisory group I have agreed that we will no longer recommend that children under 5 years of age take COViD-19 tests without symptoms. Where children under 5 do have symptoms we would not routinely recommend tests unless directed to do so by a doctor or if parents believe a test is absolutely necessary and in the best interests of the child.

I have also considered the role of testing in relation to pupils who are potentially more vulnerable and the adults working with them.

While the vast majority of children in special schools are no longer considered vulnerable to COVID-19 it is recognised there is a much higher proportion of children and young people with clinical risks. Vaccinated staff working in special educational provision who are identified as a contact, household or otherwise, will, subject to a risk assessment, be required to receive a negative PCR test before attending work and then undertake daily lateral flow tests.

Testing alone cannot eradicate the risks associated with contracting and transmitting Covid-19. Testing helps to identify and isolate positive cases to mitigate the risk of passing the virus on to others but other more effective behaviours such as washing your hands regularly and wearing a mask when appropriate remain critical.

Finally the vaccination programme for 12-15 year olds has now started and we encourage those that want the vaccine to come forward and get the vaccine as soon as they are offered it.