

1 January 2021

Dear Parent/Carers and students of Ridgeway Academy

Happy new year! I hope you all enjoyed the festive period despite the restrictions and that all your family and friends are well. Apologies for writing again to you over the holidays, but I wanted to give you details of our plans for the roll out of lateral flow tests for all students and staff.

COVID Testing for those without coronavirus symptoms is being rolled out across the country in education settings in January using new, quicker COVID-19 tests known as 'lateral flow tests'. The aim is to identify asymptomatic COVID carriers and protect our community by reducing the spread of the virus. Along with all our current protective measures, these tests will help staff and students to remain in school safely. Up to one third of people who have coronavirus experience no symptoms. By testing we will help to stop the virus spread and help to keep our school open as safely as possible. The test is voluntary, but I would encourage everyone to take it.

Please use this link [here](#) and complete your child's consent form by **Wednesday 6 January 2021**. Please note that if your child is identified as a contact of a student that has tested positive and we do not have consent to complete the lateral flow test, they will need to self-isolate for the full 10 days, as per Government guidance. We are planning to initially test all consenting Year 11 and 13 students in the week commencing 11 January 2021. If, as promised on Monday, we have received the testing equipment, PPE and staff have completed the training modules scheduled nationally for Monday and Tuesday, our preference is to invite Year 11 and Year 13 students to complete their first test on Friday 8th January, so they are tested before they return to school. Our preference would be to invite Year 7-10 and Year 12 into school for a first test on 15 or 16 January, before they return to school on Monday 18 January. I will write again next week to confirm our logistical progress.

I have attached an instructional leaflet with further information and ask that you discuss this with your child prior to their test. If you are happy for your child to be tested, please fill in the google form by Wednesday 6 January.

Those taking the test will be supervised by trained staff. The 'lateral flow' tests are quick and easy using a swab of your nose and throat. For under 18s, staff will oversee the swab process, but students will complete the test themselves. Positive results will be shared directly with staff and pupils participating. Where participants are under 16, parents or legal guardians will also be informed. If positive, the student will need to be collected from site to self-isolate. You will need to book a PCR test via the usual means (details can be found in the FAQs section at the end of this letter).

Once school reopens for onsite provision and following a positive case, we will identify students who have had direct and prolonged contact with the positive case and continue to test these students daily. If you have not consented for your child to participate, then we will be asking for your child to be collected from site. The rapid test validation studies have been conducted by Oxford University and Public Health England, they were shown to be as accurate in identifying a case as a PCR test (99.68% specificity).

The tests have lower sensitivity but they are better at picking up cases when a person has higher viral load, hence the need to test frequently. Please find below some FAQs regarding COVID testing. As you can appreciate these are difficult times for education settings who were made aware of the government's testing plans and delayed reopening at the same time as the general public.

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank those of you who have already expressed interest in volunteering to support us further. Our workforce planning indicates that we need 11 people to oversee 5 testing bays once the school is back to full capacity. If you are able to commit to one or more days a week for possibly up to 6 weeks to support with administration of testing, supervision of students and cleaning of the test area, we would welcome your expression of interest. In the first instance, please contact School Business Manager, Marianna Ring marianna.ring@ridgeway.herts.sch.uk. You are not required to have a DBS certificate as you will be supervised, however, we are committed to safeguarding our students and you will be required to undertake safeguarding training.

Finally, like many of you I am getting my children back into good routines for school and sensible bedtimes (even though they will be remote learning). It is important that students keep to good routines throughout the day, hence the delivery following our NORMAL TIMETABLE of lessons each day with a mix of live and recorded lessons on google classroom. Students need to be ready for 8.30am each morning and expect to work through the day.

Wishing you all a happy and healthy 2021.

Yours sincerely



Sarah Mitcherson
Headteacher

Key Questions

What if a pupil tests positive?

Participating staff and students who test positive will be informed about their results individually. Where participants are under 16, parents or legal guardians will also be notified. Guidance on safe travel and additional precautions will be provided along with test results. A student will only be told if they test positive on a 'lateral flow' test, so if you do not hear you can assume it was negative. A small number of students may need to repeat the test if the first test was invalid or void for some reason.

Students will need to take a further 'PCR test' (similar to those done in local and regional testing sites) on the same day (or as soon as possible) - www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test or call 119 to book a follow-up test. When arranging a PCR test yourselves, you should choose to visit a drive-through test site if possible, as it is faster than requesting a home test. During this time while they wait for the PCR result (via text / email) they will need to self-isolate.

If the PCR test returns a positive result you will have to self-isolate and follow the guidance from NHS Test and Trace.

What happens if the test is negative?

They will be able to return to school and resume their activities as normal, as will any identified contacts. At this point the daily testing of contacts would cease.

What if a close contact at school/college tests positive?

A close contact of someone in school who has tested positive for COVID-19 will be able to remain in school if they agree to be tested once a day for 7 days and the test is negative. If they do not want to take the test, they will need to self-isolate as per the national guidelines. This does not apply to household members or close contacts outside of school who will still need to self-isolate. Further details will be provided at the time, but if you would prefer to self-isolate instead of doing daily testing, you can.

What if my child develops symptoms?

This testing programme at school is for people with no symptoms. If your child develops symptoms at any time (a high temperature; a new, continuous cough; or a loss or change to their sense of smell or taste) they must immediately self-isolate, and book a test by calling 119 or visiting <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>.