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Communities Directorate

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Dear colleagues,

You will be aware of the increasing case numbers of Covid-19 in many school settings, and the level of concern this is causing school communities.

We are writing to flag as a matter of urgency the importance of following the system of controls to prevent the spread of Covid-19 within the pupil body and staff teams.

This week we have noted an increased number of staff who are needing to self-isolate due to close contact with an infected colleague. This is creating problems in some settings, and in the worst cases can lead to pupils being sent home because teachers are self-isolating. Specific to staff, we recommend that where possible, schools should review arrangements around breaks, meetings and other in-person get-togethers with the purpose of maintaining social distancing and reducing the potential for transmission. Whilst students in year groups may mix for some subject areas, staff should not mix wherever possible.

There has also been an increased number of pupils across year groups who have been linked but not isolated as close contacts in the first instance. Unidentified close contacts might therefore continue to attend school, potentially leading to the isolation of more class bubbles. To limit this, we ask you to take account of instances of close contact where you are aware of them. This can include siblings in different year groups, who should stay out of school in the event of a positive case in the household.

Given the level of frustration about the isolating of close contact bubbles associated with positive pupils, please maintain class or year group bubbles as much as possible. The smaller the bubbles or groups, the lower the likelihood of large groups of students needing to self-isolate. Schools are also asked to revisit their cleaning regimes and rigorously limit instances of close contact wherever possible. Remember that touchpoint cleaning throughout the day is just as important as cleaning before and after school. You have all put excellent processes in place throughout what has been a very difficult year, but transmission rates show that we need to refocus attention back onto them and remind people of the importance of observance.

With the increased transmissibility of the delta Covid-19 variant, we are keen to encourage schools to consider the reintroduction of face coverings in classrooms and communal areas. Public Health England has strongly advised this as an effective measure to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 in education settings. Educational drawbacks should

be balanced by school leaders with the benefits of managing transmission, so please use your discretion to determine the best decision in the interest of safety and quality of learning.

As ever the core prevention messages remain central to what we need to do. Regular hand washing, the use of face coverings, social distancing, and ventilation are the best measures we can employ. Please also continue to encourage 18s and over to take up the vaccination offer. Online bookings can be made here: www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/

Yours sincerely

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*Working for
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