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8 December 2020

Contact Tracing

Dear Parents/Carers

I am writing concerning our procedures for contact tracing when a member of our school community tests positive for Covid 19. It is important that parents understand how this works and how challenging this is for all involved.

This letter also includes some important information about how this process will work over the coming months.

What have schools been asked to do?

Schools are effectively part of the national track and trace system. We are not funded to carry out this role, have had no training, and would rather not be doing contact tracing. However, schools have been instructed by government to carry out this task. We take this very seriously as we want to keep our students, their families, and the wider community, safe.

We have been asked to identify all close contacts of those who test positive for Covid 19 at the school and request that these contacts isolate in line with national requirements. We do this on behalf of NHS Track and Trace.

Identifying close contacts is very challenging and time consuming. Our experience so far is that it takes up to **12 hours** of work to track contacts for **one positive case**. There is also additional follow-up work for those in school to respond to enquiries and complaints. If there is more than one positive case, the pressure on the school to respond is considerable.

Weekend cases

We have staff on duty each weekend to respond to positive test results. These staff do this voluntarily. Contact tracing also requires teachers to respond at weekends.

Our experience has been that contact tracing at weekends is very difficult. This is because we are accessing information remotely, are not in school to check room layouts and distancing, and struggle to get hold of all the people we need to speak to. As a result, contract tracing is not as accurate and we are more likely to make a mistake.

Given the above, we may increasingly ask a whole year group to stay at home on a Monday for one day whilst we complete the contact tracing process. This will ensure that we can accurately identify close contacts and ensure that the students coming into school do not spread the virus to others.



Weekday cases

If we are informed of a positive case during the school day, we act quickly to identify close contacts. These close contacts must be isolated from the rest of the school community and sent home. This means that parents must come and collect their children. I appreciate that this is an inconvenience for parents. I would ask for your patience and understanding if you are asked to collect your child, and that you arrange for your child's collection quickly as if there are a large number of students they may be waiting outside.

It may be necessary to send a whole year group home while we carry out contact tracing.

Christmas

Schools in many parts of the country have been asked to be on duty until midnight on Christmas Eve to carry out contact tracing. I feel strongly that this is unacceptable.

If you child becomes symptomatic over the weekend of 19 and 20 December, it is important that you email us at covid@farmors.gloucs.sch.uk and have your child tested as soon as possible.

If your child subsequently tests positive, we will carry out contact tracing for the last two days of term.

If you have not informed us of your child becoming symptomatic by **midnight on Sunday 20 December**, you may be asked to provide NHS Track and Trace with information about your child's close contacts at school.

This position is subject to change if schools become legally obliged to carry out contact tracing during the school holiday or the government agree to fund dedicated staff to carry out this task!

Please be aware that any child identified as a close contact of a symptomatic individual from Monday 14 December will be asked to isolate for a period which includes Christmas Day. Teaching unions are pressing the government to allow schools to teach students remotely for the last week of term to avoid this possibility, but at this time we are instructed to stay fully open for the last week of term. If we identify your child as a close contact next week, please do not shoot the messenger.

Why might my child be identified as a close contact?

An individual who tests positive for Covid 19 is considered infectious for 48 hours prior to the symptoms emerging. Therefore, all those who have been in close contact with this individual during this period are asked to isolate for 14 days (which is the maximum time it takes for symptoms to emerge if they have caught the virus).

To be identified as a close contact, an individual will meet the following criteria in relation to the individual who has tested positive:

- They were within 1 metre for 1 minute or more, which includes:
 - Face-to-face conversation or contact within 1 metre for 1 minute or more
 - Contact within 1 metre for 1 minute or longer without face-to-face contact (e.g. stood near to in a queue or during break)

- They were coughed on or had skin-to-skin physical contact
- They were within 2 metres for 15 minutes or more (e.g. in class or on a bus)
- They travelled together in a small vehicle.

If there is any uncertainty about whether an individual may be a close contact, we may err on the side of caution. For example, we may isolate all students on a particular bus route or a whole class where they are moving around and have contact with lots of other students.

The purpose of asking close contacts to isolate is to keep the virus from spreading. Being asked to isolate is an inconvenience and can be frustrating, but it is very important that we comply with this.

For data protection reasons, and to protect the individual who has tested positive, we cannot:

- **Disclose who has received the positive test.**
- **Disclose why your child has been identified as a close contact.**
- **Enter into discussions or negotiation about whether your child *should* or *should not* isolate.**

The national system is that individuals are told they should isolate and are not told why. As part of this national system, we follow the same procedure.

Whole year-group closure

We may decide to ask a whole year group to work from home for a period of time. This may be because:

- There has been more than once positive case in the year group in a short space of time.
- We cannot accurately identify close contacts.
- So many students from the year group have been asked to isolate that it is more effective to switch to remote teaching for the whole cohort, rather than have some in school and some at home.

In the last case, some of the students may be identified as close contacts and be asked to isolate, whilst others may be asked to stay at home but do not have to isolate.

What happens if my child tests positive?

Please inform us of a positive test immediately by emailing covid@farmors.gloucs.sch.uk.

We will send you a letter which outlines the information we will need your child to provide. You will then receive a telephone call around one hour later. This call will take between 30 and 60 minutes.

We would ask that parents:

1. Ensure we have your correct contact details.
2. Answer the phone (it may show as 'no caller ID' out of hours).
3. Help your child provide full and accurate information.

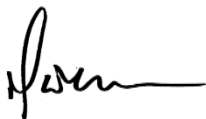
We would strongly advise that you limit who you tell about the positive test while the contact tracing process is being carried out. Please advise your child not to put it on social media or tell all their friends immediately. Sadly, some children receive an unpleasant response from those asked to isolate, or from parents who have been inconvenienced. These people are in the minority however, as most students and parents have been exceptionally helpful, supportive and understanding.

How can you support us?

I would ask for the understanding and support of all parents as we carry out contact tracing. We fully understand that having your child in isolation can be worrying and problematic. However, please be patient and courteous to staff at the school who are operating under tremendous pressure.

Thank you to the students and parents who have been so helpful in providing information where positive cases have occurred. Let's hope that the need to do this will be behind us soon and we can concentrate on more constructive tasks.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Evans', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Matthew Evans

Headteacher