

Tuesday 29 June 2021

## Ministers announce updates to children's isolation requirements

Following advice from the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell (STAC) and in consultation with Public Health and Education officials, Ministers have agreed changes to the isolation period for children and young people who have been identified as a direct contact of a COVID positive person.

Children and young people under the age of 18 years old will see a reduction in the period that they are required to isolate if identified as a direct contact. In addition, the isolation requirements will be eased. The following policy will be implemented from 00:01 Wednesday 30 June, at which point children and young people currently isolating who have received a day 5 negative test result will be able to leave isolation and return to school. Secondary school children who have exceeded the new 5-day isolation requirement and have had a negative day 5 test can leave isolation immediately.

Secondary school children identified as a direct contact:

- Isolation requirement: until day 5 negative test result
- Testing regime: day 0, day 5 and day 10

Nursery and primary school children identified as a direct contact:

- Isolation requirement: until first negative test result
- Testing regime: day 0 day 5, and day 10

Due to the decreased risk of younger children in nursery and primary school age groups, the testing regime for nursery and primary school direct contacts differ from those of secondary school contacts. Children and young people who cannot or do not wish to participate in the testing regime will still be required to isolate for 14 days, as per the current policy.

The isolation requirements for children and young people identified as a direct contact will also be eased in response to Ministers' concerns about the wellbeing of children and young people required to isolate.

The revised requirements for direct contacts only are:

- While still being required to isolate at home and not return to school, children and young people will no longer need to be confined to a single room within a household.

- Children and young people will be able to leave the house, under supervision, for fresh air and exercise in open spaces, avoiding crowded areas while adhering to physical distancing and public health guidance.

Chief Minister, Senator John Le Fondré said: "When Competent Authority Ministers reduced the isolation requirement for fully-vaccinated adults who are direct contacts last week, we committed to Islanders that we'd urgently review the policy for children and young people.

"Having received advice from STAC and Public Health, Ministers have decided to reduce the isolation requirements for secondary aged children from 10 days to until a day 5 negative test result is received, and until a day 0 negative test result for nursery and primary aged children. This strikes a good balance of continuing to protect our children and young people from catching and spreading the virus, while also prioritising their mental, physical and educational wellbeing.

"With our current vaccination coverage, the risk of contracting and transmitting the virus is proportionately higher for young, unvaccinated, people with 864 children and young people identified as a direct contact since half term, and 360 of our current direct contacts are school-aged children. Secondary school-age students currently have the highest infection rate. However, with our vaccination rates continuing to grow and most of the Island's vulnerable now fully vaccinated, we must ensure that the approach for children and young people is appropriate. The new policy continues to safeguard our young people and protect them from the virus, while ensuring preventative measures such as isolation requirements are proportionate whilst also taking into account the lesser severity of symptoms amongst young people.

"Jersey is the only place, to date, in the British Isles to have kept schools, colleges and nurseries open all year. This achievement has been vital to our children and young people's wellbeing and educational outcomes, and we have only been able to achieve this because of Islanders' adherence to public health guidance.

"With only a few weeks left of the summer term, I must, once again, ask students, parents, and all Islanders to remain vigilant and keep their guard up. By adhering to public health guidance, schools can remain safely open and we can continue in our commitment to putting children first."

The Minister for Children and Education, Deputy Scott Wickenden, said: "Through the Jersey Children and Young People Survey conducted by the Office of the Children's Commissioner and the Government of Jersey in May 2020, children and young people were able to voice their concerns during the pandemic. They clearly articulated concerns for their health and the health of others, and asked that they be kept safe from harm. This includes protection of their health from disease and ensuring measures such as isolation requirements are necessary and proportionate.

"The new policy balances the risks of physical and mental health and wellbeing with educational outcomes. Minimising the amount of learning missed through isolation is a priority and remote learning will be available for those students required to isolate. We are working with Public Health and Children, Young People, Education and Skills, including head teachers and unions, to ensure that the guidance is embedded."

Deputy Medical Officer for Health, Dr Ivan Muscat, said: "Due to the extremely good vaccination coverage in the Island's older age groups, test positivity in Jersey is now highest among Islanders under the age of 18 at 3%. This compares to around 1.4% in Islanders aged 18-39 years old, and less than 0.5% in those over the age of 40. A higher incidence of infection in secondary schools has also been noted in the UK. This higher incidence appears to be due to the increased social mixing between this age group.

"Children remain at lowest risk from the effects of COVID-19, with most exhibiting asymptomatic or mild symptoms from COVID-19 infection. But severe complications in children while relatively rare are clearly documented. Long COVID can affect all ages and is well described in children. The long-term implications of COVID infection in children will only become evident with time.

"Childhood is a delicate and fundamental period of life, critical for acquisition of social, behavioural and educational development. But completely removing isolation requirements and thereby allowing COVID-19 infection to spread among children and young people who have not been vaccinated would not be an acceptable approach. We are aiming to achieve the best balance that we can within this context."

-ends-

Notes to editors:

16 and 17-year olds who have been fully vaccinated as part of an at-risk priority group are eligible to follow the policy for fully vaccinated direct contacts.

For further information, please contact the Press Office on 01534 440430 or [pressoffice@gov.je](mailto:pressoffice@gov.je)