

Joint statement from the Cheshire and Merseyside Directors of Public Health on the phased re-opening of schools

Statement intended for Cheshire & Merseyside Local Authority Chief Executives

On Friday 5th June, a revised calculation of the R value showed a rise for the North West to just above 1. This was calculated by the Cambridge/Public Health England Joint Modelling Team.

In light of this rise, the Cheshire and Merseyside Directors of Public Health (CM DsPH) have considered the phased returning of schools carefully, reviewing the latest available evidence and good practice.

Taking this evidence into consideration, it is the view of the CM DsPH that where Head Teachers have rightly paused to consider if they should expand the number of children coming back to their school, the CM DsPH would support their decision to now progress their plans for a phased return of Reception, Years 1 and 6 if they deem it safe to do so, noting the following:

- The R value is just **one factor** that needs to be taken into account with regard to the easing or tightening of lockdown measures. The number of cases and deaths at a local level must be factored into decision-making, which **must also be balanced against the wider impact of lockdown on certain sections of the population**.
- The evidence from the North West Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell (STAC) ¹ shows very low transmission child to child and child to adult in schools. There is evidence that children of all ages have less severe symptoms than adults if they contract Coronavirus and that younger children are less likely to become unwell if infected with coronavirus.
- Each school should have carried out robust risk assessment to determine the safest ways to reopen. Schools should also ensure strict adherence to health and safety arrangements such as social distancing and any containment arrangements such as bubbles of staff working together.
- In addition, each school should fully understand the “management of a suspected/confirmed case – on site in staff/pupils (as outline in the CM Public Health Supplementary Guidance for Schools during the Covid-19 Pandemic).
- A carefully phased approach is planned together with parents starting with Reception, Year 1 and Year 6. This will allow more time for the virus level to fall further within the community before larger numbers of children return to school.
- Everyone has a role to play in keeping schools and communities safe. The CM DsPH would like to reinforce the message for the general public to adhere closely to the

guidance on social distancing, using face coverings where social distancing is not possible, prioritising good hygiene practices, using caution when meeting up with potential contacts.

- As part of the NHS 'Test and Trace', anyone who is experiencing symptoms should order a test immediately at www.nhs.uk/coronavirus or call 119 if they have no internet access. If the test is positive, the national contact tracing service will take the necessary actions

Infections and deaths are now at their lowest and everyone has a role to help reduce them further. The CM DsPH will continue to review the latest intelligence and surveillance and update as required.

Further guidance

1. Cheshire and Merseyside Public Health Supplementary Guidance for Schools during the Covid-19 Pandemic for the remaining Summer term 2020.



2. Public Health England North West COVID-19 Template Resource Pack for Schools



References

1. COVID-19 North West Science and Technical Advice Cell [STAC] Meeting. Schools and Re-opening after Covid-19 Lock Down, Review of Current Scientific Evidence, 28th May 2020

9th June 2020

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Working together to improve health and
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