



1 February 2022

**Dear Principal**

**The schools antigen testing programme is now being extended to special schools and special classes when a positive case arises in a pod or class. This is in response to requests from special schools.**

**All primary schools should also note that a confirmatory PCR is not required for children (unless advised by public health).**

### **Children and COVID-19 (Primary Schools and Special Classes and Special Schools)**

Pupils (or anyone between 4 to 39 years of age) who has symptoms of COVID-19 are offered antigen tests. A positive (detected) antigen test result is taken as a confirmed COVID-19 result.

When a Principal is notified that a child who has been in school during the infectious period has a positive (detected) COVID-19 antigen test result, school principals are asked to text the other parents in the pod to let them know how they can access free antigen tests for their children in the identified pod. If there is more than one COVID-19 positive case in a class then antigen tests can be arranged for the entire class. The Antigen Free phone number is: 1800 110055 or parents may order antigen tests online via [www.hse.ie/schooltest](http://www.hse.ie/schooltest)

All children in the pod/class can continue to attend school as long as they remain asymptomatic and they do not have a positive COVID-19 antigen test result.

Note – If a pupil (under 13 years) is identified as a CLOSE CONTACT of a case in their HOUSEHOLD they will have to restrict their movement as per national guidelines for household close contact. Asymptomatic household close contacts aged 0-12 years old should restrict their movements for 7 full days. Restricted movements should begin from date of last contact with positive case (if known) or if not, from date of notification as a contact. Further details can be found at the following link:

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/contact-tracing/if-your-child-is-a-close-contact/>



### **Public Health Risk Assessment (PHRA) in a special educational setting**

Where a positive case occurs in a special educational setting, Public Health will undertake a public health risk assessment.

The purpose of this public risk assessment is to identify the appropriate next steps in the best interests of all of the children in these settings. This is in recognition that within these settings there is a higher probability that there are children with medical vulnerabilities and children who may have greater difficulties with infection prevention and control measures.

### **HSE live Covid-19 Principal school line**

For specific queries relating to confirmed cases of Covid-19 within a school, where the advice is not clear from the HSE website, please continue to use the 'HSE live Covid-19 Principal school line' on (01) 240 8785. The phone number will operate 7 days a week, from 8am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday and from 10am to 4.30pm Saturday and Sunday. The operator will take basic details and provide these directly to the relevant Public Health department. There is no need to provide information on individual cases to this helpline, the Department of Public Health will request this information if it is necessary. Each Public Health Department will have designated clinical staff to respond to queries that are escalated from the principals' line to the departments.

Deirdre Shanley

Assistant Secretary