

Date: 26th May 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

Twice weekly rapid testing could help reduce the spread of coronavirus variants

You may have seen recent reports that a new coronavirus variant that was first detected in India, is beginning to spread rapidly.

While there is no firm evidence yet to show this variant has any greater impact on severity of disease or evades the vaccine, the speed of growth is concerning. There have been over 3,000 cases of the new variant so far. The government and Public Health teams are closely monitoring the situation. Vaccinations still offer the best form of defence against the virus and early indications are that the vaccines offer moderate to good (60-88%) protection to the new variants after the second dose. So getting a vaccination is strongly recommended.

Two methods of testing are vital to better understand new variants, and to help suppress the spread of infection:

- 1) Regular, twice weekly rapid testing using lateral flow devices (LFD), which can be taken and home and give a result in 20-30 minutes
- 2) Surge testing in areas where cases of new variants are appearing using PCR testing, which is sent off to labs for processing. You do not have to have symptoms to participate in surge testing

Surge testing involves increasing the number of people being tested through deployment of mobile testing units (MTUs) to schools and community locations and even going door to door to offer people tests. If the variant is found to be circulating in an area, surge testing can help limit the spread of the virus by identifying and isolating positive cases as quickly as possible.

There are already 7 London Boroughs where surge testing is taking place – Brent, Ealing, Hackney, Harrow, Hillingdon Redbridge and Kensington and Chelsea. To avoid an outbreak of the new variant in Havering, it is essential we find and isolate cases.

To help keep your family and friends safe, we urge you to take a rapid (LFD) test twice a week, 3-5 days apart. Please ensure you and your family test before returning to school on 7th June after the half term holidays.

Secondary school age children are already provided free tests via their school. Family members can collect tests from a number of community collection points including pharmacies or you can get them delivered straight to your home. This [map](#) shows you the location and opening times of local collection points. For more information, please see <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing/regular-rapid-coronavirus-tests-if-you-do-not-have-symptoms/>

As restrictions start to ease, it is vital we remain vigilant. Please help us stop these new variants from spreading by following the rules, remembering hands, face, space and fresh air, and testing regularly.

Thank you for your help and support.

Kind regards,



Mark Ansell
Director of Public Health