

20 May 2021

Dear Parent or Carer,

Protecting your community

As you may be aware, a new variant of Covid-19 is spreading in the UK. Some areas of the country are more badly affected, including Harrow and other parts of north west London.

We are now asking all secondary schools and colleges in Harrow to take part in a programme of Covid-19 testing. This programme of surge testing is in addition to the rapid testing you are already doing. It allows us to see if the variant is present in any positive tests.

We aim to test as many young people aged 11 and over as possible **before the start** of half term on 28 May. We also want your child/children, you and any other family members to take this additional test. Tests are also being given to school staff and their families.

Pupils can test at the school next week. Their families will be asked to test at home.

If you have children in years 11 or 13 and they are not at school next week, please arrange for them and all your family to be tested at a PCR site. You can find your nearest one at <https://www.harrow.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-harrow-residents>.

By taking part, you will be helping to stop the spread of this new variant and make a full return to normal life more likely in late June. As many as 1 in 3 people with Covid-19 don't have any symptoms but can still pass it on. So, even though you feel fine, it's very important that you take part.

Harrow's programme of 'surge' testing is focusing on the school and college population, because the data shows that the many households testing positive for it have members in this age group. Because most young people are unvaccinated and are likely to be asymptomatic, we have prioritised this group for testing. Schools and colleges may want to continue with mask wearing as before until they have completed this testing. I am fully supportive of this to protect the pupils while this exercise is carried out.

We are also encouraging everyone that is eligible (currently those over 34 but this may reduce in the coming days, anyone with caring responsibility or with a long-term condition) to get their vaccination as soon as possible. Vaccination is the best defence against Covid-19, so alongside the NHS, we are working to make it quicker and easier to get fully protected. We are also working with Public Health England and other councils in our region, which are leading their own efforts to control the spread of the variant.

How testing will work

We're asking pupils and their family members to take a single additional test next week (called a PCR test). Home testing is quick and easy. Please follow the guidance and registration procedures carefully –. If you don't, you won't get your result back.

If the test is carried out at a school, the pupils will be helped to register the tests on their phones, or phones can be provided. If the kit goes to the home, it will need to be registered there. Families should also write the name of the child and their form number so it can be traced back to a family should it not be registered correctly. A video is available to watch at [harrow.gov.uk/surgetest](https://www.harrow.gov.uk/surgetest)

The way you carry out the test is by a swab that you rub on your tonsils and up your nose, exactly the same as the way you have already been doing if you test regularly. With the PCR test, your sample will be collected by us to be sent to a laboratory for testing to see if it is negative or positive. You will get your results to the number or email address that you give when the kit is registered.

If the test is positive, the sample will be sent for more testing to find out if it is a variant of concern. Anyone taking a test will be told within two or three days if they have tested positive or negative but will not receive information about the presence of the variant.

If you test positive, you must self-isolate with your family to prevent Covid spreading to others.

Consent

If your child/children are already testing, you will have provided consent. We are assuming this consent also includes this surge testing as it's the same sampling method. However, if you wish to withdraw consent, or if you previously did not give your consent but want to now opt in, please let the school know.

When to self-isolate

If anyone in your home has symptoms of coronavirus – a fever, continuous cough or a changed sense of taste or smell – you must all self-isolate at home. Do not send your child to school. The person with symptoms should book their test at [gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test](https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test) or by calling 119.

If anyone in your household tests positive for coronavirus, you must all self-isolate for a minimum of 10 days. Members of the family who become ill during this period will need to self-isolate for longer.

£500 when self-isolating

If you are unable to work while self-isolating and are on a low income, you're likely to qualify for a payment of £500. For more information, go to www.harrow.gov.uk/testandtrace

Increasing vaccination rates

We are appealing to every eligible person in Harrow, if they haven't already, to get a Covid-19 vaccination as soon as possible. Vaccination is the best defence against all forms of Covid. Slots are available to book now at our vaccination centre in Byron Hall, next to Harrow Leisure Centre. Book yours at byronhall.nhsbookings.com/v2/ or www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination today.

We expect that the Pfizer vaccine will be available at Byron Hall from next week.

If you are waiting for your second jab, you may have your appointment brought forward, so you're fully protected sooner – look out for information from your doctor or rebook now through the national booking system if that is how you booked it previously.

We are also working on a plan to bring the vaccine to you, through a number of small community vaccination centres where rates of the new variant are highest.

Thank you for your involvement in this important work. Please do all you can to prevent the spread of Covid and keep Harrow safe.

Best wishes,

Carole Furlong
Director of Public Health