IMPORTANT UPDATE: Accessing COVID-19 testing for school pupils

Key points

- There is high demand for testing.

- Some parents are finding they cannot book a local test **for their child** via the national system and are being directed to test centres many miles from home.

- Now, if parents cannot book a test **for their child**, schools can make a referral to the local NHS system on their behalf and a test will be offered at a local NHS site.

- Only those with COVID-19 symptoms (temperature, cough, or loss of sense of taste/smell) will be offered a test.

- Parents cannot access testing for themselves via this route.

Some parents are reporting that they can't arrange testing for their children, or are being advised to travel long distances to access drive-through testing centres.

All types of COVID-19 testing have seen a significant rise in demand over the past two weeks and as a result, it is currently more difficult to access testing.

Testing slots for drive-through and walk through centres and home testing kits are made available via the national website in batches. Once they are all booked, these testing options are no longer shown on the website and the website will only show those testing options that still have capacity. So if all the testing slots are booked up for Cumbria, the website will show the next nearest sites with testing

availability. This is why some people see testing sites a long distance away being shown on the website.

In the case where no testing is being shown as available, it is worth waiting and trying again either first thing in the morning, or after 6pm at night (as this is generally when batches are released).

Why is the testing getting booked up so quickly?

Testing is getting booked up quickly due to a genuine rise is demand. Nationally, we are seeing a slight increase in the number of people testing positive for COVID-19 (even though the amount of testing has not changed). We are also going into the autumn/winter period when we see a lot more viral infections circulating that can cause high temperatures and coughs.

In addition, we are also seeing a lot of people getting tested when they have other symptoms, such as runny noses and sore throats or if they are a contact of a positive case.

In order to help manage capacity and keep testing available for people that really need it, it is important that:

- parents only book testing for their children if they are showing one or more of the three recognised symptoms of COVID-19 (high temperature, new continuous cough or a change to/loss of sense of taste or smell). Children who have other symptoms in the absence of those listed above (e.g. sore throats) should not be getting tested.
- Parents only book testing if their children have symptoms. Individuals identified as close contacts of positive cases do not need to be tested unless they develop symptoms.

Is any other testing available locally?

The Public Health team at Cumbria County Council has worked with local NHS partners over the past week to put in place a limited amount of additional testing for school aged children (those aged 4 and above), available throughout September.

It is important that this testing is reserved for children who have genuine COVID-19 symptoms and is only used when all other testing routes have been attempted.

Therefore we recommend that schools use the following process when supporting parents to arrange testing for their children:

Step 1	Check that the child has symptoms of COVID-19 and definitely need to isolate and access testing: Only children with one or more of the following symptoms needs to get tested: · high temperature · new continuous cough · change to/loss of sense of taste or smell).
Step 1	Firstly, advise the parent to try and arrange testing via one of the following routes: · The testing website: https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/ · Telephone – by dialling 119 if the family do not have access to the internet
Step 3	If parents have not been able to access testing as advised under step 1, encourage them to try again first thing in the morning, or after 6pm at night (as this is generally when batches of testing availability is released)
Step 4	If the parent has been unable to access testing as advised under steps 2/3 above, a member of staff from the school can call the Cumbria County Council COVID-19 and obtain information about additional local testing options.
Step 5	Once the Call Centre gives you information about arranging testing via a local NHS site, please then arrange testing on behalf of the child. *Please note this booking information is for school staff use only.* Schools are likely to be asked to provide the following information: Child's name, date of birth, address, contact details for parents, date of onset of symptoms, description of symptoms The call centre is extremely busy and will contact parents directly following a referral from school.