

# Self-isolation of pupils coming into contact with a person testing positive for COVID-19

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 12 Ionawr 2021  
Petitions Committee | 12 January 2021

Reference: RS21/14837-1

Petition Number: P-05-1087

**Petition title:** Stop the mass isolation of healthy school children!

**Text of petition:** Children isolating for 14 days is so detrimental to their mental and physical well being, it is disproportionate to the risk of their exposure to corona virus in the first place.

Some children are enduring their third period of isolation in as many months! Children with additional needs or from disadvantaged backgrounds are even more adversely affected.

Working (non isolating) parents are suffering with employers not always sympathetic in these tough economic times.

**Additional information:**

Solutions:

Introduce instant corona virus testing for school children who have been potentially exposed to the virus. This is being rolled out in our care homes and airports, so why not in our schools?

To reduce the so called risk of a “false negative”, the test could be taken a few days after the potential exposure .

Any reduction in the 14 day isolation period will be a huge benefit to the children.



It should be noted that often the children isolating has never had contact with the infected child (often the case in secondary schools).

## 1. Summary

The current position, as of writing, is that schools in Wales are delivering **online learning until 18 January 2021** and are only open to children of key workers and vulnerable pupils. The Welsh Government is keeping under review arrangements following that date.

## 2. The role of ‘bubbles’ in schools and the purpose of pupils’ self-isolation

As the Minister’s letter outlines, the rationale behind the requirement for pupils to self-isolate, should someone in their ‘bubble’ test positive for COVID-19, is to prevent wider transmission of the virus in the community.

The concept of ‘bubbles’ has been developed with the aim of limiting disruption to learners from any positive COVID-19 cases in schools to as few pupils as possible. For primary school pupils and younger year groups in secondary schools, bubbles are more likely to be classes. For older secondary school pupils they are likely to involve whole year groups.

The Welsh Government has issued operational guidance to schools.

## 3. Developments since the Minister’s response to the petition

Since the Minister’s letter, which was dated 2 December 2020:

- The Welsh Government has **reduced the length of time** that people are required to self-isolate for, having come into close contact with a positive COVID-19 case, **from 14 days to 10 days** (announced 9 December 2020).

- The Minister for Education decided that secondary schools and colleges should cease face to face learning a week early before Christmas, on 11 December 2020, delivering online learning for the final week of the school term (announced 10 December 2020). Most primary schools also moved to online learning several days before the end of term.
- The Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) agreed a common approach for the return to school after Christmas, whereby schools would have flexibility in the first two weeks in how they deliver learning (announced 17 December 2020). The expectation was that schools would provide face to face learning for the majority of their pupils by 11 January 2021, leading to a full return in the days before 18 January 2021 at the latest.
- However, following further deterioration in transmission levels, case numbers and pressure on the NHS, the four UK Chief Medical Officers jointly recommended on 4 January 2021 that the UK Alert Level should move from Level 4 to Level 5.
- The Welsh Government announced on 4 January that **schools, colleges and independent schools should move to online learning until Monday 18 January 2021**. The Welsh Government said it would use this period to **continue to work with local authorities, schools and colleges to plan for the rest of term**. Schools will remain open for children of key workers and vulnerable pupils.
- On 4 January, the UK Government announced for England a move to online learning (other than for children of key workers and vulnerable pupils) until February half term. In Scotland, schools will only open to children of key workers and vulnerable pupils, with others learning online until 29 January 2021,

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