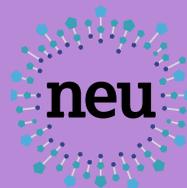


# Guidance for Reps

March 2021



## Safe Re-Opening of Schools

### Wider Re-Opening of Schools:

# 'Things you need to Do' and 'Things you need to Know'

With the NI Executive decision to allow more pupils back to school **we need you** to ensure that your school's Covid-19 Risk Assessment is updated.

### 'Things you need to Do'

DE Guidance states that Risk Assessments should be undertaken to ensure that health and safety legislation and guidance is fully adhered to.

It is a legal requirement that employers must consult with the health and safety representative selected by a recognised trade union or, if there isn't one, a representative chosen by staff.

Updated risk assessments & mitigations must be used by principals to their full effect to ensure a safe school environment for all, with support from EA.

As part of that support EA have produced a number of sector specific risk assessment templates which are available on the NEU NI website:

[Covid-19 risk assessments | NEU](#)

Risk Assessments must be **reviewed regularly** and **updated every time there is a change in circumstance** now with the phased wider reopening.

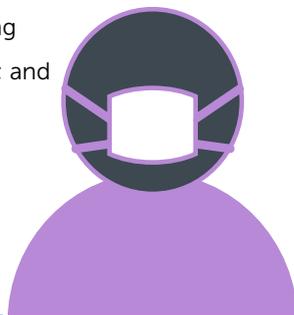
NEU have already published advice on the Risk Assessment process:

[Covid-19 risk assessments Northern Ireland | NEU](#)

[Coronavirus: school/college risk assessment | NEU](#)

**We need you** to ensure that the **revised risk assessment** pays particular attention to:

1. Social distancing
2. Face coverings; and
3. Ventilation



NEU have published detailed advice and guidance on ventilation and temperatures which still applies:

[Coronavirus : Northern Ireland ventilation and temperature advice | NEU](#)

This is in line with the H&S Executive's guidance on ventilation: [Ventilation and air conditioning during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic \(hse.gov.uk\)](#)

## 'Things you need to Know'

The DE Guidance is clear - In line with guidance from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), education settings have been reminded of the need for

stringent adherence to the mitigation measures, set out in:

- the Guidance for Schools and Educational Settings [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Guidance for School and Educational Settings in Northern Ireland | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#)
- and New School Day – Pre-School Education Supplementary Guidance [Northern Ireland Re-opening School Guidance - New School Day - Pre-School Education Supplementary Guidance | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

### Face Coverings

Face coverings play an important role in reducing the risk across our communities.



DE Policy is that:

- Parents/Guardians/Carers are encouraged to wear face coverings in school grounds and when waiting to collect their children.

- In Primary Schools children are recommended not to use face coverings because of the range of mitigation measures schools have in place and the reduced rate of transmission to and from children of this age.
- Post primary pupils must use face coverings during the routine school day.
- It is also considered best practice for teachers and support staff to wear face coverings.

Schools will be aware that some persons (including children) are exempt from wearing face coverings, and this should be treated sensitively.

It is now a legal requirement for all post primary pupils to wear a face covering on dedicated school transport and public transport. All other pupils are strongly recommended to wear a face covering on all school transport if they are able to do so.

### Ventilation

The DE Guidance states:

Emerging evidence points to the importance of good ventilation in reducing transmission through aerosols and airborne particles. The use of ventilation, whether natural or by mechanical means, should therefore be maximised as far as practicable.



Where applicable, ventilation systems should be checked or adjusted to ensure they do not automatically reduce/increase ventilation levels due to differing occupancy levels. Recirculation of air between spaces, rooms or zones occupied by different people should be avoided. It is important that where users can intervene in the control of mechanical ventilation systems they are made aware of the benefit of these for reducing the circulation of infectious material.

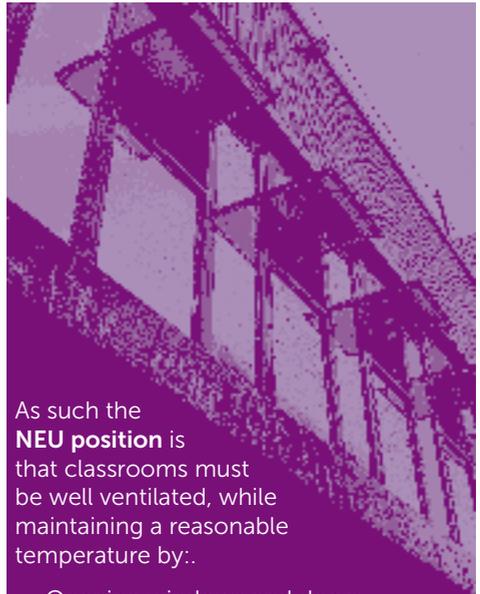
The opening of doors and windows should be encouraged to increase natural ventilation and also to reduce contact with door handles. However, propping open of doors into corridors, external doors, security access systems and any other fire safety doors is prohibited. It should be sufficient for windows to be open dependent on climates and for existing mechanical ventilation where desired to achieve thermal comfort, but users will need to achieve a balance between maximising ventilation and achieving a tolerable working temperature.

To ensure the health, safety and welfare of staff and pupils the ambient temperature in a workplace should not be below 16°C. In cooler weather windows should be opened just enough to provide constant background ventilation, and opened more fully during breaks to purge the air in the space.

To balance the need for increased ventilation while maintaining a comfortable temperature, the following measures should also be considered where appropriate:

- opening high level windows in preference to low level to reduce draughts
- increasing the ventilation while spaces are unoccupied (e.g. between classes, during break and lunch, when a room is unused)
- providing flexibility to allow wearing additional, suitable indoor clothing
- rearranging furniture where possible to avoid direct drafts

Heating should be used as necessary to ensure comfort levels are maintained, particularly in occupied spaces.



As such the **NEU position** is that classrooms must be well ventilated, while maintaining a reasonable temperature by:

- Opening windows and doors whenever possible when teaching indoors.
- CO2 monitors should be used to gauge the efficacy of ventilation and balance it with thermal comfort.
- Where ventilation with outdoor air is not possible, measures should be taken to implement HEPA filtration with indoor air cleaning devices.
- Where possible, teaching and other activities should be moved outdoors or into larger spaces such as halls, taking advantage of the onset of spring and summer.
- Activities associated with a high-risk of aerosol transmission (e.g. singing or use of wind instruments) should be held outdoors, or replaced with safer alternatives.
- Physical education classes should always be held outdoors

# The Scientific Recommendations for making schools safer

The NEU approach is in line with recommendations by **'The Lancet'** – see attached statement – confirming that making schools safer goes hand in hand with reducing community transmission - and is essential to allow schools to safely reopen and remain open.

They set out the following recommendations for making schools safer:

## Physical distancing

### Reduce mixing during travel to and while at school:

Children should travel to school in family groups and/or small fixed social bubbles. Windows should be opened on buses/cars, and children should wear masks. Air

should not be re-circulated.

Where possible, schools should consider modifying start times to allow students who use public transport to avoid rush hour.

Mixing at school gates should be minimised. Opening and closing times, class transitions and other activities that require use of shared spaces by large groups, should be staggered to reduce the level of mixing.

### Reduce class sizes to allow physical distancing:

This can be done through blended in-person and remote learning and use of currently unused large spaces such as churches and community centres, and outdoor marquees, when the weather allows.

Bubbles of students and staff need to be manageable, and must be kept strictly apart. Bubble sizes should be capped



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(many schools have bubbles of several hundred) and teachers should minimise movement between bubbles. This will require recruitment of additional teaching and support staff.

### **Quarantine policies need to account for aerosol transmission:**

Transmission can occur at distances greater than those specified in physical distancing guidelines. All students sharing the bubble of a confirmed or suspected case should quarantine, contrary to current Department of Education guidance which suggests only students who were in close proximity to a case must quarantine. There will be less disruption when quarantine is required if bubble sizes are small.

## Protections for students and staff

### **Test children in schools:**

Regular lateral flow and other rapid tests can be used to identify additional asymptomatic cases to break chains of transmission.

These must be confirmed by PCR testing, as per CDC recommendations. The Department for Education (England) guidance recommends twice a week testing for all staff and secondary school children.

Adherence to testing must be monitored carefully, to understand the effectiveness of these. Importantly, these are not a replacement for mitigatory measures and should not be used to replace quarantine of contacts of infected individuals, as this may increase infection risk. Schools must be supported adequately with testing, which should be conducted by those trained to do this well.

Testing should be accompanied by re-emphasising the need for all mitigatory measures with clear public messaging about accuracy of tests so as to avoid providing false reassurance.

### **Prioritise those at high exposure risk for vaccination, including school staff:**

In order to maximise the chance of keeping classes and schools operating, school staff should be in the next prioritisation group for vaccination along with other frontline key workers. UK vaccine priority lists should be updated to include level of exposure as a risk factor, including for parents.

### **Hand and surface hygiene:**

Handwashing stations, and hand sanitisers should be made available throughout the school. Regular handwashing, and at key points, including entry into buildings, and toilet use should be encouraged.

### **Wastewater testing:**

Wastewater testing can potentially provide a non-invasive tool for early identification of local outbreaks in schools and allow more targeted clinical testing, where needed, providing an early warning and response strategy to contain transmission.

## Ventilation and face coverings

### **Ventilation of classroom and staff spaces:**

Open windows and doors whenever possible when teaching indoors.

Good ventilation is vital and CO2 monitors should be used to gauge the efficacy of ventilation and balance it with thermal comfort. Where ventilation with outdoor air is not possible, measures should be taken to implement HEPA filtration with indoor air cleaning devices.

Where possible, teaching and other activities should be moved outdoors or into larger spaces such as halls, taking advantage of the onset of spring and summer. Activities associated with a high-risk of aerosol transmission (e.g. singing or use of wind instruments) should be held outdoors, or replaced with safer alternatives.

Physical education classes should always be held outdoors

Use of properly fitting face coverings by staff and students aged 5 years and above in all indoor spaces:

This should take into account tolerability, health conditions and children's wellbeing. Consistent and correct use of masks, as well as safe disposal practices should be taught and reinforced. Masks should be provided regularly by the government, as has been done in other countries.

Masks should only be removed when outdoors or eating. Eating should be done outside where possible. If this is not possible, lunch times should be staggered, with few children at a time in well-ventilated rooms.

The use of transparent masks should be considered to improve communication.

## Mitigate inequalities and harms due to remote learning and educational disruption.

### **Support blended and remote learning:**

This will allow schools to move between in-person, blended and remote teaching as required and these decisions should be guided by a traffic light system, informed by epidemiological data not arbitrary dates.

Parents should be allowed to opt for remote schooling, especially in the case of clinically vulnerable children or household members.

Mandating in-person schooling has led to many parents having to de-register their children from school due to legitimate concerns about risk to themselves and their families, after being threatened with prosecution and fines, further contributing to inequities, and impacting mental health.

### **Protect and support vulnerable students:**

Socioeconomic inequalities in education should be addressed by providing adequate technological, financial and practical support for remote or rota learning when needed. There must be IT, wifi and study space provision for all, to support periods during which students need to quarantine or isolate. A large number of students still do not have access to these.

Mental health support must be expanded in all schools. A Young Minds report showed that only 27% of students had been able to talk to anyone about how they were feeling when they returned to school.

Every school should have sufficient counsellors for students to access support from. Children affected by abuse and domestic violence may be at increased risk when having to quarantine or isolate with their abuser. Schools should designate a qualified person in whom students can confide. Students and staff should be regularly reminded that they can speak with this person in a safe and confidential manner. Schools should ensure staff are aware of how to report suspected violence.

## Address the harms caused by educational disruption:

We need urgent action to recognise the harms of missing school for those who have experienced severe educational disruption and are graduating from school this summer. This should be recorded alongside grades and should be taken into account in the transition to jobs, colleges, and universities.

There should also be enhanced skills provision (e.g. summer schools, foundation years) to provide the skills students have missed, so they can thrive in their new settings.

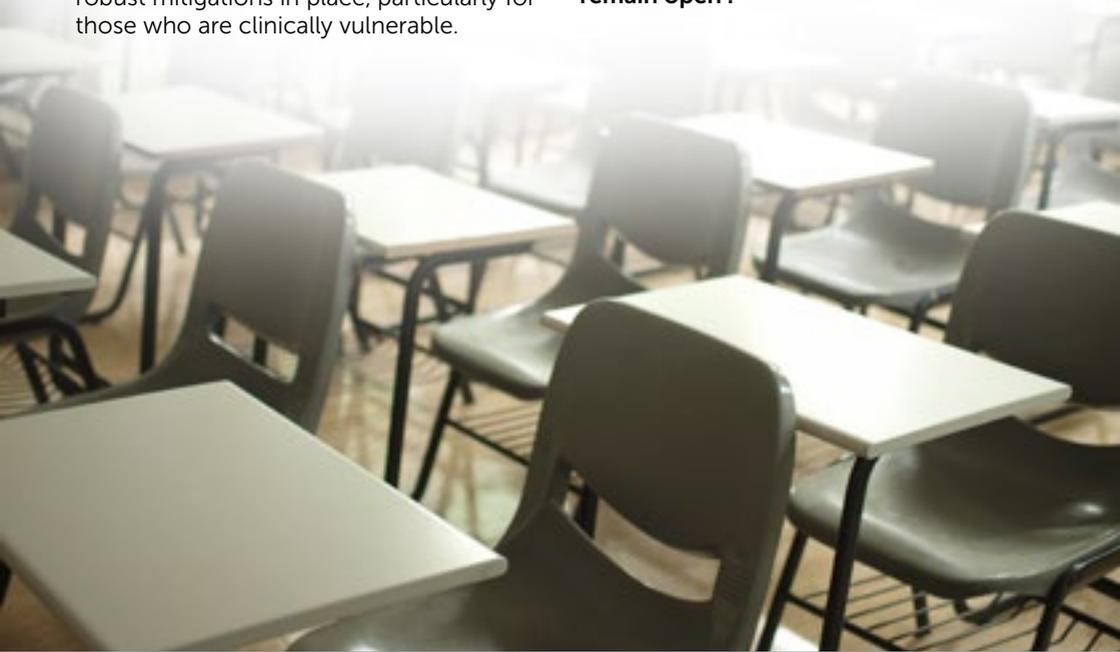
## Mental health support for staff:

We need urgent mental health support for school staff who have been exposed to rapidly changing environments they have needed to adapt to, often with very little notice, and little support from government. This is worsened by legitimate concerns about the risk posed to themselves, in an environment without robust mitigations in place, particularly for those who are clinically vulnerable.

Clinically vulnerable staff should be allowed to continue shielding, and protect themselves from risk of exposure related to in-person teaching. Confidential counselling services should be available for all staff to access.

Education policy should be co-created alongside all stakeholders, including teachers, and parents, to hear their voices, address legitimate concerns, empower them and provide appropriate resources and support to schools, staff and families. It is important to re-emphasise that making schools safer goes hand in hand with reducing community transmission to very low levels. Schools need ample resources, guidance, and support to implement adequate mitigation measures that focus on cleaning the shared indoor air over surfaces.

'The Lancet' concludes by stating that clearly, there are no easy or perfect solutions – **'This will be hard work but essential to protect community health and allow schools to safely reopen and remain open'**.





# Rapid Testing with Lateral Flow Devices

NEU, along with NITC colleagues are supportive of the further mitigation of regular testing of people who do not have symptoms of COVID-19 (asymptomatic/pre-symptomatic).

We have been informed by DE about their phased plan for rolling out LFD testing to schools (link in the attached pdf Asymptomatic Testing file?).

From 22 March, all staff in post-primary schools and all pupils in Years 12-14 will be invited to commence familiarisation to enable twice weekly self-testing using LFDs.

It is our understanding, after meeting with DENI and PHA that pupils below Yr12 will not be tested in the three phases currently outlined.

NEU are keen to support this programme of familiarisation but have raised concerns about 'assisting' students to take the test in a classroom/school environment.

Our advice to members is:

- The LFD programme is voluntary for pupils and staff.
- Consent forms will be completed by those who wish to participate. This administrative burden is acknowledged by EA who have stated that additional resourcing will be assured if recorded under COVID costs.
- The role of teachers is purely to facilitate familiarisation of the LFD test.
- The teaching unions advice that testing is safest carried out at home for privacy and to ensure no potential

positive cases come into school.

- School staff cannot be compelled to supervise or support pupils to conduct self-testing in schools.

The LFD programme aims for two tests to be carried out before Easter, and one prior to return to school as an additional mitigation to reduce asymptomatic cases in school.

DE have stated that this initiative is part of a wider societal process and should, therefore, be viewed as an extra mitigation, not an imposition.

NEU and NITC remain keen to engage with the Department to discuss what support will be needed for the roll-out of lateral flow testing in schools to be successful – but in a way that does not compromise safety in school – or add to the already unacceptably high workload demands on school leaders.

Any member who comes under unreasonable pressure to engage in supervision of testing are advised to contact their union immediately.

[FAQs Asymptomatic Testing in Schools.pdf \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

[Since the NITC statement the EA has backed down and changed their position:](#)

[Teachers will not have to carry out tests for coronavirus in schools on pupils in years 12 to 14.](#)

[The new EA Guidance from the EA and the PHA states that pupils should take the tests at home.](#)

## 1. Introduction

Rapid testing in schools has been identified as an appropriate non-clinical intervention (NCI) for use in schools to identify asymptomatic cases of Covid19. This project will direct the introduction of rapid testing for Post-Primary Schools in Northern Ireland.

Special Schools are not included in this programme as they participate in a parallel programme of LAMP testing which is managed through a separate project management structure.

The initiative is being led by the Public Health Agency working in partnership with the Education Authority. The programme is jointly sponsored by the Department of Health (NI) and the Department of Education (NI) and is linked to a national programme facilitated by the Department of Health and Social Care.

The programme will involve offering twice weekly Lateral Flow Detection testing to pupils in Years 12,13 and 14 and all staff in post-primary schools and EOTAS units. The programme will be introduced for staff in pre-school, nursery and primary schools in April 2021.

Lateral Flow Device (LFD) Testing<sup>1</sup> is a fast and simple way to test people who do not have symptoms of COVID-19, but who may still be spreading the virus.

## 2. Implementing the Programme in Post-Primary Schools

To introduce lateral flow testing a staged approach is needed which will enable you to maintain oversight of the programme and to build confidence in the benefits it can bring for your school.

	<b>Phase 1 – Introducing the Programme and Establishing Participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First review the materials and templates provided and create your school's consent form.</li> <li>• Next issue the programme information to staff and pupils in Years 12, 13 and 14 along with the consent form.</li> <li>• A PDF document is supplied and potential participants can also be signposted to <a href="https://sway.office.com/whz8dJ46jpeKlclV?ref=Link">https://sway.office.com/whz8dJ46jpeKlclV?ref=Link</a></li> </ul>
	<b>Phase 2 – Setting up the Programme Record Workbook</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An excel workbook has been created to assist you in managing the information and data created by this programme.</li> <li>• Open the workbook and carry out the following actions:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Enter your school's DE number in the box in the first tab.</li> <li>○ Read the process overview.</li> <li>○ Run the SIMS Report for Lateral Flow Testing and copy and paste the information into the STEP One tab in the workbook.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/understanding-lateral-flow-antigen-testing-for-people-without-symptoms>

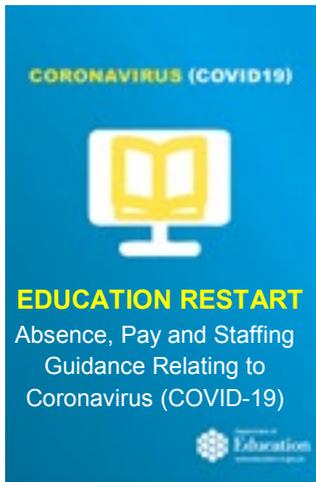
	<b>Phase 3 – Issuing the LFD Kits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As consent forms are returned record these on the STEP 2 tab of the workbook.</li> <li>When you start to record consent returns you are can then filter this list and copy and paste it into STEP 3 of your workbook.</li> <li>When you issue the kits you must record who issued it, who received it, the LOT Number and expiry dates.</li> </ul>
	<b>Phase 4 – Demonstrating the LFD Kits for Participants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Once pupils have received kits you should arrange a demonstration for them of how to use the kit the first time.</li> <li>The pupils then take their kit home to conduct their first test.</li> </ul>
	<b>Phase 5 – Recording the results</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The participants will self-report their result to the NHS portal or by ringing 119. Please note this will not work for participants in ROI – the school may have to report their result for them.</li> <li>If a positive result is experienced the participant and their household bubble will immediately self-isolate, inform the school and take a confirmatory PCR Test. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IF the PCR is negative they return to school.</li> <li>IF the PCR is positive they continue to self-isolate and the school follows the confirmed case protocol for Covid19.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	<b>Phase 6 – Reordering Supplies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The first batch of supplies has been provided by the Education Authority. Resupply is the responsibility of each individual school.</li> </ul>

### 3. Suggested Implementation Plan

The following plan is not prescriptive and can be adapted to suit your school setting:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Issue programme information and consent forms.</li> <li>Run SIMS report and Setup Excel workbook</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin to gather consent forms</li> <li>Issue kits to staff who wish to participate</li> <li>Staff undertake test at home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to gather consent forms</li> <li>Start to issue kits</li> <li>Demonstration of process for pupils</li> <li>First Pupils undertake test at home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue consent return</li> <li>Continue testing kit issue</li> <li>Review pupil progress – How did it go</li> <li><b><u>Order More Kits Now based on your participation numbers.</u></b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finalise kit issue</li> <li>Answer any additional questions from staff and pupils.</li> </ul>

# Staff Absence due to Covid-19



DE have updated their Guidance

The guidance provides the latest advice on absence, pay arrangements and staffing matters linked to COVID-19.

The health, safety and wellbeing of pupils and staff is of paramount importance to all education employers in the sector.

The following information and guidance applies to employees subject to NJC/JNC and TNC terms and conditions including substitute teachers and non-teaching staff providing emergency cover for the period of time they have been engaged to work.

Note: The 100 days full pay on sick leave rule only applies from the 1st March 2021, and the first ten days for any new covid related absence is not included in the 100 day count.

Procedures for other absences not related to COVID-19 remain extant.

If you have any concerns then contact us on [ni@neu.org.uk](mailto:ni@neu.org.uk)

# NITC Response to Rapid Testing

## NORTHERN IRELAND TEACHERS' COUNCIL

18 March 2021

### NITC Response: Rapid Testing with Lateral Flow Devices

The Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) met this morning and discussed the concerns raised by members of all unions in NITC Response: Rapid Testing with Lateral Flow Devices

NITC are supportive of the further mitigation of regular testing of people who do not have symptoms of COVID-19 (asymptomatic/pre-symptomatic). NITC have been informed by DE about their phased plan for rolling out LFD testing to schools.

From 22 March, all staff in post-primary schools and all pupils in Years 12-14 will be invited to commence familiarisation to enable twice weekly self-testing using LFDs. It is our understanding, from the meeting with Management side and PHA that pupils below Y12 will not be tested in the three phases currently outlined.

NITC are keen to support this programme of familiarisation but have raised concerns about 'assisting' students to take the test in a classroom/school environment. NITC advises:

- The LFD programme is voluntary for pupils and staff.
- Consent forms will be completed by those who wish to participate. This administrative burden is acknowledged by EA who have stated that additional resourcing will be assured if recorded under COVID costs.
- The role of teachers is purely to facilitate familiarisation of the LFD test.
- The teaching unions advise that testing is safest carried out at home for privacy and to ensure no potential positive cases come into school.
- School staff cannot be compelled to supervise or support pupils to conduct self-testing in schools.

The LFD programme aims for two tests to be carried out before Easter, and one prior to return to school as an additional mitigation to reduce asymptomatic cases in school.

DE have stated that this initiative is part of a wider societal process and should, therefore, be viewed as an extra mitigation, not an imposition or a substitute for mitigations already in place.

NITC remain keen to engage with the Department to discuss what support will be needed for the roll-out of lateral flow testing in schools to be successful – but in a way that does not compromise safety in school – or add to the already unacceptably high workload demands on school leaders.

Any member who comes under any unreasonable pressure with regard to any aspect of LFD testing is advised to contact their union immediately.

# Dos and Don'ts posters available soon

