Letter to Parents, Carers and students from Trudi Grant, the Director of Public Health for Somerset and Julian Wooster, Director of Children’s Services

**Dear All,**

As we come to the end of a period of national restrictions, we would like to thank you on behalf of our County for all for the hard work and sacrifices you have made this year to help keep Somerset safe. We know it has not been easy and many of you have had to make significant changes to the way you live your lives. We are very grateful for your continued adherence to the guidance.

It is vital to have young people back in education - it is the best place for them to be. The new national restrictions have kept colleges open and we will continue to see that as we go back into the more localised tier system.

Somerset’s infection rate is still just below the rest of the country, but we did see cases starting to go up before the lockdown. The lockdown is starting to reduce rates again and we are hoping to get them as low as possible ahead of the festive period. We want to assure you that college staff and the local public health team are working quickly to identify close contacts and take the necessary actions when we get confirmed cases. We are grateful to those who have had to undertake periods of self-isolation – your actions have really helped to keep the rates of coronavirus low.

We know we are likely to see more cases in colleges and want to make sure we can keep as many in face to face education for as long as possible. To achieve this, it is really important that we all continue to follow the guidance and do what we can to avoid the high levels of cases seen in other parts of the country. This will reduce the potential disruption to education.

**With that in mind please follow these guidelines:**

* Everyone must adhere to local and national restrictions that are in place. If these are restrictions are breached, colleges may need to make a judgement about whether this has created a level of unacceptable risk to other students and staff and act accordingly.
* **Face coverings** should now be worn by adults and pupils outside of classrooms and when moving **around the premises** in colleges. Additionally, you must now wear a face covering (unless exempt) while travelling on either college designated or public transport. Please be sensitive to those who are exempt and cannot wear a face covering.
* As we move into Tier 2, the guidance for people who are clinically extremely vulnerable is that they should return to their education setting, unless they have been specifically advised not to by the specialist team. If a member of the household is clinically extremely vulnerable, others in the household **should still attend** college.
* You should **only** book a test if you have any of these three coronavirus symptoms – runny nose or other cold-like symptoms are not included:
1. **High temperature:** any new high temperature where individual feels hot to touch on their chest or back.
2. **New continuous cough:** coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours.
3. **Loss of, or change in, sense of smell or taste**
* **You do not need** to get a test for anyone else in the household unless they also have any of the three symptoms listed above. **However, all members of the household need to self-isolate whilst waiting for that test result, even if they were not tested.**
* If anyone in the house receives a positive test, other members of the household must continue self-isolating for 14 days and **only get a test if they develop coronavirus symptoms.**
* If a student in a class, or designated cohort, tests positive for coronavirus the college and the local public health team will work together to identify contacts. Anyone who is advised to self-isolate **does not require a test unless they subsequently develop symptoms. You do not need to self-isolate unless you are told to do so.**
* **If you are asked to self-isolate, please ensure you comply and stay home for the full 14 days.** This is because it can take several days following contact with an infected person before an individual develops symptoms or the virus can be detected.

**Please find attached our helpful Covid Checker for testing and isolation graphic.**

We know this has been a difficult year for our communities across Somerset and thank you all once again for your support and understanding during this time. We really appreciate it.

With thanks and best wishes





**Trudi Grant Julian Wooster**

**Director Public Health Director Childrens Services**