

2nd March 2020

Dear Parents,

Coronavirus update

I fully appreciate how worrying and upsetting this weekend has been for everyone at St. Mary's School and indeed Tetbury as a whole. Suddenly coronavirus is very close to us all and naturally our first thought is for our children and how we can protect them. It is clear from the many messages I have received and the activity on social media that there is a huge amount of anxiety amongst our parent body and the wider community and that is understandable.

I have received too many emails to be able to answer them all individually but I hope this letter will help answer some of your questions.

What advice has the school taken and why weren't we told sooner?

I have worked closely with Public Health England, Gloucestershire Children and Young People's Services and other local and national experts. The immediate priority was to identify and contact people who had close contact with the infected person to reduce the risk of further infection. As PHE have stated in their letter, they are confident that the school has followed all the correct procedures. PHE were very thorough in tracing all contacts and they were able to conclude that the infected person had not come into close contact with pupils. Throughout this process I was led by these professionals and as such I was required to follow their guidance on how and when we communicated with the school community.

Who was the infected person and why were they in school?

As I am sure you understand, it is important that the identity of the member of staff who has been infected is not public knowledge. If you have been watching the news, you will know that none of the people infected by the virus have been named. One reason for this is to protect them from any negative media attention or comments on social media directed at them and their families.

The member of staff concerned had returned from a visit to northern Italy but had not visited what are now known as the 'lockdown areas'. At the point at which this person came into school, there had been no advice from the Government about the whole of northern Italy as it was only just emerging as an impacted area. As soon as we were aware that there was an increased risk, the member of staff went home. Measures were taken to ensure others who had returned from the region were not on the school premises even though they did not have any symptoms and had not visited the affected towns. The infected person was in the school building for a matter of hours and in that time they did not have any close contact with pupils.

Were any other infected people in the school?

As you will know there have been two confirmed cases of coronavirus in Gloucestershire and one of those is a staff member at St. Mary's. The other person had also returned from Italy. I am not aware of any other infected person having been in the school.

How likely is it that my child or any member of my family has contracted the virus?

As PHE have clearly communicated in their letter, they have carried out detailed contact tracing which means they have traced everyone in and outside school that the member of staff has had close contact with. They are confident that they have traced all the contacts and they have given these people specific advice about how to self-isolate and monitor their own health. The advice from PHE at the moment is that adults and children who were in school at the time but did not have direct contact with the infected person are considered to be low risk of contracting the virus and do not need to self-isolate.

Is the school safe and shouldn't it be closed for longer?

A team of professionals from Gloucestershire hospital trust attended the school on Saturday and carried out a deep clean. We are assured by PHE that the school environment is not a risk to public health and there are no health reasons for keeping the school closed. The school is only closed today and tomorrow because we are short staffed due the number of adults in self-isolation. We have been advised that as soon as we are able to operate safely children should return to school however as situations develop this could change.

How many staff are in self-isolation and have they been tested?

I am currently aware of 7 staff who are in self-isolation for 14 days from the last point of contact with the infected person. Staff who are in self-isolation are not being routinely tested but we have a daily text from PHE checking on our health. My understanding is that we will be tested if we develop symptoms. Children who came into contact with any of these staff are considered to be low risk and this is confirmed by PHE.

How can I talk to my child about coronavirus?

It is very important that your children do not see your own anxiety about the virus. If your child is anxious and worried – listen to them and calmly discuss their fears. Help them to feel that you understand their anxiety. Explain that there are lots of different viruses like colds and flu and that this is another one. Reassure them that the majority of people who have the virus only have mild symptoms and recover quickly.

Our Education Psychologist suggests that the following websites that you may find useful:

<https://parenting.nytimes.com/childrens-health/coronavirus-kids-talk>

<https://time.com/5776857/how-to-talk-to-kids-coronavirus/>

Should we be self-isolating and what if I I I say I should?

It is important that you take you advice from Public Health England. PHE say the following groups might need to self-isolate:

- People who have returned from an area where the Corona Virus is known to be present and have symptoms.
- People who are identified as being a close contact of someone with coronavirus
- People who have returned from specific areas – see the link below for further details.

<https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/02/20/what-is-self-isolation-and-why-is-it-important/>

Unfortunately I I I have been giving out some conflicting messages as have other groups in Tetbury. I have raised this with PHE who are working hard to address any inconsistency in advice given.

If you or a family member have a cough, shortness of breath or a fever you should contact I I I.

What if I decide to self-isolate anyway?

Please remember we need to have a proportionate and rational response at this time. PHE stress that there is no need for families to self-isolate. We are naturally all worried for our families, particularly those who are elderly or vulnerable. In the vast majority of cases symptoms are mild and people recover quickly. The advice from PHE is to keep washing your hands with soap and hot water or use a hand sanitizer to avoid infection. The advice at the moment from PHE is that there is no need to self-isolate if you don't fit into one of the categories above. However if you or a family member develops symptoms contact 111 and take their advice.

The school is currently closed until **Wednesday 4th March**. I understand that some parents may decide that they want to keep their children out of school for longer than two days. I would stress that this **is** not seen as necessary by PHE particularly if no-one in your family has symptoms. If you do decide to keep your children out of school for longer, I will be expecting them to be inside and not mixing with other children outside or in public areas including shops. I will also talk to staff about ensuring these children have work to complete at home during their absence. I will take further advice from the Local Authority with regards to prolonged absences from school.

The member of staff who has been diagnosed with this virus have had an extremely stressful and upsetting time and I know many of you will want to pass on your best wishes to them and their family. I am hopeful that our community will demonstrate compassion and kindness at this time.

I look forward to seeing you and your children back in school when I return.

Jo Woolley

Headteacher