



MOSA Council have been able to have further discussions with contacts at Public Health England since we released our last Q+A on 29th May. There is much which remains unknown, but here are some of the points we have learnt. It has always been difficult for MOSA to give definitive advice on this subject in many areas as our Schools vary so much (Day v Boarding, Independent and State, single gender and mixed gender for example) so instead we aim here to give some thoughts for you to think about and to discuss with your schools

Coronavirus is currently endemic in the UK, not pandemic, now less than 1:1000 of the population is infected on sampling. Infection rates, hospital admissions and death rates have all fallen.

But it's not going away (see the ongoing infection rates in Germany, which has a high level of test and trace, and new outbreaks in Melbourne) and will remain a problem in the forthcoming academic year.

Bubbles: The Department for Education advice has been around 'Bubbles' of pupils usually across a year group for lessons. This model works less well in boarding schools where pupils share lessons, accommodation, catering and cleaning facilities across wider groups. If your school is boarding, do your pupils board (in year groups) or vertically (across year groups eg third through to sixth form in one house)? Horizontal and vertical contact between pupils increases infection rates. Should your school board by year groups? Do your pupils have single rooms or shared dormitories? Current advice suggests beds should be at least 2m apart.

Shielding: Shielding for vulnerable adults and children is planned to finish at the end of July. Shielding pupils (and staff) should therefore in theory be able to return to school in September, but how many parents will remain anxious about their return? Will schools allow these pupils back and accept the risk? If they were to be excluded what happens about school fees?

In August pupils in Scotland will return to school, so there should be more information available on the effect of the return when schools in England return in September (our apologies for not knowing the plans for Wales and NI). PHE hope to be able to give better advice and plans in August.

Second Wave: A second wave of infections and illness is still being planned (anticipated) for later this year though timing seems difficult to predict, maybe once the weather turns colder and we all remain indoors more. If Seasonal Flu overlaps with Coronavirus infections then there will be a major challenge for the Health Service. One positive piece of news is that in the Southern Hemisphere, due to social distancing, handwashing and other measures, rates of Seasonal Flu seem to be lower than usual. Our best defence against Coronavirus remains hygiene and distancing.

Sensitivity of testing: Testing sensitivity remains around 75% so negative tests still cannot be relied upon to confirm anyone is not infected (so there is little value in testing pupils or staff before a school return). Intermittent shedding of the virus by infected individuals may be one reason why an

infected individual returns a negative test but remains unwell. Testing capacity remains high nationally and most results are now back in 24 hours. Could you consider talking to your local PHE and seeing if testing kits in schools would help with their workload, and give you quicker results? Some schools have already taken this approach.

Antibody testing: Antibody testing is being rolled out across the UK and although this test has 99% sensitivity, there is some suggestion that antibody levels fall with time. So, a positive antibody test does not mean no risk of a further infection. Positive antibody rates vary across the UK from high levels in London (10-20%) to just 3-5% in other areas. Again, this would suggest there is no benefit in testing pupils or staff before a return to school.

Quarantine: The issue of Quarantine for overseas travellers has changed in recent weeks and may change again before September. Do you know where your overseas pupils live, or when they will be coming to the UK? Will they travel alone or with relatives? Will they arrive in the UK early enough to Quarantine before returning to school?

Vaccination: Despite press stories about imminent vaccines, there remains much scepticism in the Science world as to whether an effective vaccine will be produced or not. If it is so, then probably not until 2021 at the earliest, and like the Seasonal Flu vaccine it may need to be given annually.

Management of unwell pupils: So, what will you do with unwell pupils? The answer will vary from school to school depending upon your local situation and MOSA cannot give an answer that covers each of our members. Do you have isolation facilities in a boarding house, or in the medical centre? Is it staffed 24 hrs? Where will you isolate pupils with a fever? We had an interesting exchange with PHE about whether pupils should remain in school whilst awaiting swab results (24 hours?) or sent home to protect the school? But does this just spread the infection to their home and siblings, who may then return to a different school (remember there was some evidence that Swine Flu was transmitted from pupils whose schools had been closed to pupils whose schools were at that time open). If you opt to send pupils away from school if unwell or awaiting testing/results, how far away do they live? Will their Guardians accept them? How will they be transported?

Our discussions with PHE continue and we hope to update you in early August.

In the meantime, the forum continues to be an active and useful resource and we would encourage anyone to share further thoughts and advice.