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Dear all

We do understand there is a lot of anxiety around the South African Variant. As you are aware one person in the PR9 area has been found to have tested positive for the South African variant of covid. There has been a great deal of publicity around this and we wanted to provide an update, so you are aware of what is happening within Sefton.

Additional testing for the new South African variant of Covid-19 will now be starting in specific areas of Southport. We will be setting up two dedicated test sites for the new variant and once they are in place, we would encourage everyone aged over 16 in the area targeted to get tested as soon as possible, even though they don't have symptoms. This will help us find any cases of the new variant and help stamp it out.

Anyone who lives or works in the affected area will be offered a test. However, it does not mean that the whole of Southport will be tested, only a specific area where the case has been detected. This is mainly the Norwood Ward.

Details of where a Mobile Testing Unit, due to be open from Wednesday 3rd February, can be sited are being finalised and a team of people to knock on doors to provide and collect home testing kits for local residents is being mobilised. The supplies of test kits have been delivered today, 2nd February and we aim to start delivering them to people's homes tomorrow, 3rd February.

Sefton Council is also working with the DHSC on a range of targeted local publicity and information including posters, local radio and social media. This will include details of exactly what they can expect when someone calls with a test as well as information and advice on self-isolation.

At the moment, we have no evidence to suggest that this variant is any more severe than others. But in order to suppress any onward spread of the virus, we are going to be conducting extra testing for anyone living in the PR9 postcode area.

For schools and settings, including those in Southport, this means they will continue doing all the things they have been doing as identified in their risk assessments. Schools are still expected to remain open for vulnerable children and critical worker children and nursery setting for all children. Schools and settings should not close due to this new variant or expect parents to provide negative test results before coming to school. A letter has been sent to schools and settings to share with parents and carers.

We would expect that staff would still attend school and nursery as they are currently doing and travelling from PR9 to another part of the borough or from a PR9 area to another part of the Borough is acceptable.

There is an expectation that we continue following the current guidance. This means staying at home except for essential purposes such as shopping for essential supplies, going to work if we can't do so from home and providing care. It also means maintaining at least 2-metres' distancing, wearing a mask or face covering while out and about and washing our hands frequently. If you test positive by any method, you must isolate to stop the spread of the virus.

People outside of the area identified for the South African variant testing who develop coronavirus symptoms of a high temperature, persistent new cough or loss of their sense of taste or smell, should book a test by calling 119 or visiting www.nhs.uk/coronavirus .

Staff in schools should continue to follow the guidance and use the lateral flow tests in the usual way. For staff working in PVI's there are three test centres open from 8am to 8pm at Bootle Leisure Centre, Splash World in Southport and Aintree Racecourse, as well as one at Bootle Town Hall for key workers. No appointments are needed. The interactive map details when the test centres are quiet.
<https://sefton.maps.test-and-trace.nhs.uk/findatestcenter.html>

It seems this new variant can still be combated through vaccination, although it could be more transmissible, which means it could spread more quickly. That's why it is important we carry out this additional testing to try and identify it and to limit the number of us who might be exposed to it.

We are asking as many people as possible in the target postcodes to get tested even though they don't have symptoms, so we can find any cases of the new variant and to help suppress it. The more cases of the variant we find, the better chance we have at suppressing it. Please help to keep your community safe by getting tested so we can find the variant and protect you and your loved ones.

We will be working with our partners to provide advice and support online, and on the ground, so that we can work together and continue to make progress towards a return to a more normal life for all of us.

Support and advice, including information on financial support, is available at www.sefton.gov.uk/self-isolation for anyone who is required to isolate because they have tested positive for COVID-19.

Further information, and a range of FAQs can be found at <https://www.sefton.gov.uk/covid-19-in-sefton/>

Please do help us in supporting our school communities to follow the government guidance and remain safe.

Regards



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