

Office of the Medical Officer of Health

19-21 Broad Street | St Helier  
Jersey | JE2 3RR

Wednesday, 17 June 2020

Dear school staff and parents,

### Health Advice On The Reopening Of Schools

I am writing to you today to set out the public health advice my colleagues and I have given to inform the decisions that the Education Minister has announced for the return to schools and colleges of all children and young people.

The Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell (STAC), which I chair and is the definitive source of health advice to the Government of Jersey, has advised the Education Minister and her officials in the Department for Children, Young People, Education and Skills that schools should re-open as soon as possible for all ages.

This letter provides a summary of the key advice and recommendations that STAC has made regarding the second phase of re-opening schools from 22 June.

These are the messages from that advice that have been shared with the Minister:

- The evidence continues to grow that the harm in not returning to school outweighs the evidence of any risk to harm of Covid-19 by returning to school.
- Physical schooling should, therefore, resume as soon as possible and practicable for all ages.
- The STAC supports the reduction to 1m of physical distancing in schools among secondary school pupils.
- The STAC also supports a change to primary school 'bubbles' and has advised that a single class group can now equate to one bubble. Children do not need to physically distance within their bubble.
- The risk to teachers from children with reduced (secondary) or no (primary) physical distancing is not increased.
- Physical distancing of 1m between adults from a different household in schools is recommended.
- Physical distancing between adults (e.g. teaching staff) and children should be 1m where possible but, if not possible, close contact is recommended to be kept to under 15 minutes.
- Pick up and drop off at schools should be coordinated to reduce number of adults congregating at any one time. This is consistent with the present 2m outdoors physical distancing requirement.
- Teaching staff should continue to adhere to guidance from public health as to their own risk assessment for personal shielding, where applicable.
- Schools need clear and consistent communications to support the importance of good basic hygiene (e.g. regular hand washing, frequent cleaning regimes, etc) as the ongoing and underpinning requirement that supports the move to 1m or zero physical distancing.

There has been continued extensive discussion at STAC on the growing evidence of:

- The limited effectiveness of school closures on decreasing the infection rate at this stage of the curve;
- The low likelihood of children contracting the virus;
- The low likelihood of children spreading the virus to others;
- The low health impacts of Covid-19 infections in children;
- The **increasing** wider health impacts of school closures on children and parents/carers.

It is because of this evidence that, on behalf of the STAC, I can recommend reducing the physical distance in schools while it is still 2 metres in the community. Furthermore, schools are a controlled environment where public health measures can be systematically and rigorously applied and any occurrence of symptomatic children or adults addressed by the isolate, track and trace system that is in place. Outside in the community it is an uncontrolled environment where it is much harder to enforce public health measures because the interactions are largely unpredictable. Hence, this is why physical distancing remains at 2 metres at this time of writing.

This advice has been shared with head teachers, teaching unions, officials and the Education Minister. There will be continuous monitoring of these arrangements and the option to deploy additional public health mitigation measures in individual or all schools will be available if required.

To summarise, our advice remains that all children should be given access to physical schooling as soon as possible. To enable this, whole class bubbles are now appropriate in primary settings; and 1m physical distancing in secondary.

I hope that the above provides you with the information and reassurance that you need to feel confident in returning your child/ren to school according the re-opening programme that your school/s will be in contact with you about very soon.

Yours sincerely,

(Insert digital signature)

Patrick Armstrong  
Medical Director