



16 March 2022

Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
Department for Education  
London SW1P 3BT

Dear Secretary of State

We write to urge the government to extend the availability of free LFD tests across the community beyond the end of March. This is especially important to those attending and working in schools.

Covid case rates are still high and related hospital admissions are going up in all age groups. Now is not the right time to take away tools which enable people to make responsible decisions to limit further spread of the virus. This will have harmful consequences for the most vulnerable in society.

The rapid asymptomatic testing programme among education staff and young people helps detect cases that would not otherwise be found and helps reduce the spread of the virus in schools. Removing the facility for asymptomatic testing is likely to result in further illness and disruption to face-to-face education, with young people and staff unknowingly spreading the virus to others in school and beyond. Further, it will mean staff and pupils absent with Covid will not be able to determine when they are no longer infectious. This could lead to unnecessary prolonged absence from school.

We note that the latest [ONS report on the prevalence of ongoing symptoms](#) (3 March 2022) highlights teaching and education as a sector with the greatest proportion of people with Long Covid, along with health and social care. This represents another reason to ensure the risk of transmission is reduced as much as possible. Beyond the individual impact, the health of a workforce still with significant recruitment and retention difficulties has a direct effect on pupils' education.

More broadly, removing free access to LFD tests will widen inequalities, as those able to afford tests will continue to get them while people on low incomes will not. It will also have a disproportionate and adverse effect on the ability of clinically vulnerable people to safely engage with society.

We urge government to extend the availability of both PCR and LFD tests to the whole community, including all school and early years settings.

Yours sincerely,

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Joint General Secretaries | NEU

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