



Antigen Testing of asymptomatic children in pods in Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) Services where a confirmed case of COVID-19 is identified

14 December 2021

Dear Service Manager,

This is to inform you of plans to provide for the use of antigen testing in certain circumstances for children who are asymptomatic and part of a pod in early learning and care (ELC) and school age childcare (SAC) services, where there is a confirmed case of COVID-19. These measures will be in place from 15 December 2021.

Parents of children who are aged 4 years and older who are in a pod where there is a confirmed case of COVID 19 can request antigen tests for their children. The clinical advice is that this antigen testing initiative is not recommended for children under the age of 4 at this time.

Parents should monitor those children for symptoms of COVID 19. If they develop symptoms, their parents should ensure that they do not attend their childcare facility and they should get a COVID-19 PCR test for them at a HSE COVID-19 test centre. Even if their PCR test is negative, the child (or staff member) should not attend the facility until they are 48 hours recovered from their acute symptoms, to protect onward spread of other harmful viral infections e.g. RSV.

Asymptomatic (well) children are low risk for transmission of COVID-19. Due to the measures you and your staff have implemented over the course of this pandemic, together with the support of parents and children, ELC and SAC services have remained relatively low risk environments and have not been a driver of transmission of COVID-19 in children.

Offering antigen tests to children who are identified as part of a pod in which there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 is an additional measure to support parents and ELC and SAC services. Children who are well and have no COVID-19 or respiratory symptoms can remain in their ELC and/or SAC services while they are completing their antigen tests. The HSE, supported by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) has asked parents and guardians to ensure that they **do not send** their child to their ELC and/or SAC service if they have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or if their child has a positive PCR or antigen test.

Parents and guardians are requested to inform their child's service manager immediately if their child has a positive (detected) COVID-19 PCR test result. The service manager should then contact the parents or guardians of the other children in the relevant pod



and advise parents of children aged 4 and over how they can request antigen tests for their child should they wish to do so.

Service managers should not share any identifying details of the confirmed case.

As the antigen testing programme is voluntary, service managers are not required to gather details of the number of children who do antigen testing and should not keep any records relating to individual children's results on whether or not they have been part of the antigen testing process.

We know that, depending on the room size and the infrastructure, pod size can vary, however we are reminding service managers and all staff to ensure that pod sizes are kept as small as is feasible. This is to protect against onward spread of infection. If two or more positive COVID-19 cases arise in a room, within a seven-day period, outside of a single pod, antigen testing as above can be offered to the full room.

We ask service managers to inform parents or guardians of children in the relevant pod by text message (followed by letter/email), that they can request antigen tests for their child. Service managers need to provide the service's Tusla registration number for parents to be able to access the antigen tests. (Your Tusla registration number is available on your Tulsa certificate or can be found on the Tulsa website ([Early Years Register](#); [School Age Services Register](#)) Staff in the pod can also request an antigen test.

Service managers should include the Tusla registration number in the letter/email below that is sent to parents or guardians, along with the phone number for the antigen call centre. Parents will be asked for the Tusla registration number when they call the distribution centre to request antigen tests.

When a service manager is notified that a child has a positive (detected) COVID-19 PCR test result, they are asked to text the other parents in the pod and send the letter below to parents of children aged 4 and over, on how to access the free antigen tests for children in the identified pod. If there are children younger than four in the pod you should inform their parents that there is a positive COVID-19 case in their child's pod and that children who are under four will not be eligible for antigen tests, as they are not recommended for children in this age group.

Parents and staff will need to provide their name and home address together with the service's Tusla registration number when they call to organise delivery of the antigen tests. A box of 5 antigen tests will then be delivered to the address provided by the parents/staff member with instructions on how and when to do the tests. A video has been developed for parents to assist with administering the test which is available on the HSE website. Parents should carry out one antigen test on the day that they receive the box of tests, a second test 2 days later, and a third test 2 days after that.

A QR code will be provided to afford parents and staff the opportunity to upload their test result, to inform the HSE, if they wish.



All children in the pod can continue to attend their ELC/SAC service as long as they remain asymptomatic, and they do not have a positive COVID-19 antigen or PCR test result. It is important to note that participation in this programme of antigen testing is not mandatory. Children and staff with no symptoms in the pod of the confirmed COVID-19 case can continue to attend their ELC/SAC service, regardless of whether or not they have participated in this antigen-testing programme.

Parents or guardians and staff are not being requested to inform the ELC/SAC service of the results of their child's antigen tests. Children's normal experience in the service should not be impacted in any way by the antigen testing programme.

It is very important to remind everyone that if they have any respiratory symptoms they should stay at home and get a COVID-19 PCR test. Even if a child or staff member's COVID-19 test is negative, if they continue to have respiratory symptoms, they should not go to their ELC/SAC service as they may spread other serious viral infections.

The National Public Health Emergency team (NPHE) has different advice for unvaccinated people of all ages, including children who are identified as close contacts in a household setting. If a case is within a household, all unvaccinated children less than 13 years of age must restrict their movements and get a COVID-19 PCR test on day zero and day 10. This is because the household remains the highest risk for transmission of COVID-19.

Where there is an additional case in a second pod in the same room as a pod with a positive case within seven days, then all staff members working in the room may request the antigen tests through the Freephone number (1800 110055) or on the HSE website (www.hse.ie/schooltest). This is an entirely voluntary measure and staff should continue to attend the workplace unless they develop symptoms or receive a detected result on the antigen test.

Thank you for your support in implementing this measure.

Yours faithfully,

Anne-Marie Brooks

Assistant Secretary

Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare Division

An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais, Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Bloc 1 - Urlár 2, Plaza Miesian, 50-58 Sráid Bhagóid Íochtarach, Baile Átha Cliath 2, D02 XW14.

Block 1 - Floor 2, Miesian Plaza, 50-58 Baggot Street Lower, Dublin 2, D02 XW14.



Parent Communication:

For Service Manager's use if a parent informs you that their child has received a positive PCR test for COVID-19

1. Text message to send to parents of children in a pod where a case of COVID19 has been confirmed:

Dear Parent/guardian: I have been informed that a child in [insert child's name]'s pod has tested positive for COVID-19. If you would like to avail of antigen testing for your child, please call this Freephone number 1800 110055 or order online here www.hse.ie/schooltest. You will need to give them this services Tulsa number, which is in a letter I am sending you by email. Your child should continue to attend [insert service name] as long as they do not display any symptoms of COVID-19 or receive a positive antigen test. If your child has any symptoms of COVID-19 please book a PCR test. Please see my letter sent to you by email

2. Text for a letter to send to parents of children in a pod where a case of COVID19 has been confirmed:

Dear Parent/Guardian

I am writing to inform you that a child in [insert child's name]'s pod has tested positive for COVID-19 and their parent/guardian has advised me of this.

Under the programme for antigen testing in early learning and care (ELC) and school aged childcare (SAC) services, you are eligible to apply for free antigen tests for your child.

The antigen testing programme is available for children aged 4 years and above. The clinical advice is that this antigen testing initiative is not recommended for children under the age of 4 at this time.

If you wish to apply for antigen tests for your child, please telephone this Freephone number 1800 110055 or visit www.hse.ie/schooltest to request antigen tests for your child in the identified pod.

You will need to provide your child's name and home address together with the service's Tulsa registration Number [insert Tulsa registration number] in order to receive the test.

A box of 5 antigen tests will be delivered to the address provided with instructions on how and when to do the tests.

There is a video on the HSE website showing how a parent can carry out an antigen test on a child. <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/testing/antigen-tests-for-primary-school-children/>

A QR code will be provided to afford parents the opportunity to inform the HSE of a test result, if they wish. **All children in the pod can continue to attend their ELC or SAC**



service as long as they remain asymptomatic, and they do not have a positive COVID-19 antigen or PCR test result.

Participation in this programme of antigen testing is not mandatory and children with no symptoms in the pod of the confirmed COVID-19 case can continue to attend their ELC/SAC service regardless of whether or not they have participated in this antigen-testing programme.

Parents or guardians are not requested to inform the ELC/SAC service of the results of their child's antigen tests. Children's normal ELC/SAC experience should not be impacted in any way by the antigen testing programme.

If your child has any respiratory symptoms they should isolate at home and get a COVID-19 PCR test. Even if a child's COVID-19 test is negative, if they continue to have respiratory symptoms they should not go to their ELC/SAC service as they may spread other serious viral infections.

There is different advice for unvaccinated people of all ages, including children who are identified as close contacts, in a household setting. If a case is within a household, all unvaccinated children less than 13 years of age must restrict their movements and get a COVID-19 PCR test on day Zero and day 10. This is because the household remains the highest risk for transmission of COVID 19.

Yours faithfully

[Signature of service manager]

Staff communication:

For Service Manager's use if a parent informs you that their child has received a positive PCR test for COVID-19, to inform staff in the child's pod

1. Text message to send to staff in a pod where a case of COVID19 has been confirmed:

Dear[staff member] : I have been informed that a child in your pod has tested positive for COVID-19. If you would like to avail of antigen testing please call this Freephone number 1800 110055 or order online at www.hse.ie/schooltest. You will need to give them this services Tulsa registration number, which is in a letter I am sending you by email. You can continue to attend [insert service name] as long as you do not display any symptoms of COVID-19 or receive a positive antigen test. If you have any symptoms of COVID-19 please book a PCR test. Please see my letter sent to you by email

3. Text for a letter to send to staff in a pod where a case of COVID19 has been confirmed:



Dear [staff member]

I am writing to inform you that a child in your pod has tested positive for COVID-19 and their parent/guardian has advised me of this.

Under the programme for antigen testing in early learning and childcare and school aged childcare services, you are eligible to apply for free antigen tests.

If you wish to apply for antigen tests, please telephone this Freephone number 1800 110055 or order online at www.hse.ie/schooltest to request antigen tests as an ELC/SAC staff member working in a pod with a positive COVID-19 case.

You will need to provide your name and home address together with the service's Tusla registration Number [insert Tusla registration number] in order to receive the test.

A box of 5 antigen tests will be delivered to the address provided with instructions on how and when to do the tests.

A QR code will be provided to enable you to inform the HSE of a test result, if they wish. **All staff and children in the pod can continue to attend the service** as long as they remain asymptomatic, and they do not have a positive COVID-19 antigen or PCR test result.

Participation in this programme of antigen testing is not mandatory and staff with no symptoms in the pod of the confirmed COVID-19 case can continue to attend their service regardless of whether or not they have participated in this antigen-testing programme.

Staff are not required to inform the ELC/SAC service of the results of their antigen tests.

Yours faithfully

[Signature of service manager]