



Monday 18th January 2021



Dear Parent/Guardian,

Participation in the Hampshire and Isle of Wight COVID-19 saliva testing programme

We are pleased to share the news that Saint George Catholic College has been invited to take part in an exciting new COVID-19 testing programme during this term.

We will be sharing more details with you soon about how this process will work. In anticipation, to ensure that you receive any communications about the programme **in a timely way, we require an up to date, email and phone number for both parents. If they have changed, please email them to our SiMS Manager Ms Marian Meider on mmeider@stgcc.co.uk or call her on 02380 670185 by Friday 5th February 2021. This is really important that we have your correct details or you will not receive the result when we start testing should you consent to your son/daughter being tested.**

The saliva testing programme has been carefully piloted by four schools in the city over the last term under the guidance of the local NHS Trust and the University of Southampton, and was already planned to be introduced into all secondary schools this term. In the meantime, yes, we will continue with the lateral flow tests but going forward, this will become the way we conduct weekly tests of both students and staff as it is more reliable, less invasive and easier to manage logistically. We will then only use the lateral flow test programme if we were to have a positive test result from someone in the school rather than have to ask all close contacts to self-isolate. We are allowed to use the lateral flow tests to test close contacts daily and keep pupils in school if they are negative.

What is the testing programme?

The HIOW testing programme is funded by Government and aims to benefit our local communities and help to reduce transmission of the virus. It follows a successful pilot programme in Southampton, where pupils and staff in four schools and at the University of Southampton were tested on a weekly basis. The pilot showed, along with other extensive studies, that saliva testing is effective in identifying people who are infectious and are most likely to transmit the disease. It is easy to do and is not invasive. In January and February, testing will be rolled out in a phased way to all secondary schools and further education colleges across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and offered to all pupils, students and staff.

Lessons run by the team from LifeLab at the University of Southampton will be taking place in school/college to explain this process to our children and young people in a fun and engaging way. There will also be a website with further information and a Frequently Asked Questions tab. The test is very simple and involves collecting a sample of saliva in a plastic pot. Free weekly tests will be offered to all pupils and all staff. You will receive a testing pack which contains pots and a leaflet that shows your child how to complete the test at home. Testing is not compulsory, but I strongly encourage you to take part, so please do look out for this.

Why is this important?

Knowing who has COVID-19 is vital to stopping its spread. We hope that you are as excited as we are about the potential for this test to help us manage the risk of COVID-19. Alongside all the other measures we are taking to control the virus, it will help us to keep our communities safe and well and keep our schools and colleges open. We will be in touch soon with further details of how your child can take part in this exciting programme.

Yours sincerely

Mr James Habberley
Headteacher