**18/12/20**

**Update on recent announcements on mass-testing in schools: GMB advises members not to volunteer to carry out the testing on staff and pupils.**

On Friday 10th December, GMB met with officials about Covid mass testing in schools in England in the New Year. We welcomed the conversation as we all want to combat Covid 19 and protect not just pupils, but the whole schools’ workforce as well. However, at this initial meeting we highlighted concerns including a lack of qualified and trained medical professionals to carry out the tests, the high percentage of false negatives, potential risks and associated costs. We urged caution about quick announcements and sought agreement that further meetings would be required to iron out potential pitfalls and ensure a roll-out of testing procedures that are safe, effective and reliable.

**Sadly, ministers ignored this caution and made their announcement without any detail about how it would work.**

The Westminster government is delivering testing kits to secondary schools in England from January without the staff, the training or the medical supervision to carry them out effectively. Testing in primary settings is expected to follow in February.

GMB is generally supportive of a testing regime to identify asymptomatic staff and pupils with Covid-19. But this must be delivered with a rigorous programme of training and education for pupils, parents and staff. We have serious concerns about the rushed nature of these plans.

Testing kits are being delivered to schools without the medical oversight, staff or adequate training to conduct the tests effectively, accurately and safely.

We are greatly concerned that staff who are not medically trained will feel pressured into performing these tests on other staff and students, with inadequate training on how to do so.

Research into the use of Innova Lateral Flow tests by Public Health England and Oxford University determined that a false negative result was determined 21% of the time when testing was performed by a scientist; this increased to 27% when performed by a medical professional, and more than doubled to 42.5% when those tested administered the test themselves. These findings have been confirmed by the mass testing programme in Liverpool where less than 50% of results were accurate.

We therefore have severe concerns that lessons have not been learned from the Liverpool programme; that inadequate time is available for a full training and practical supervised experience that will result in competent testers; and that what the Government perceives as a ‘game changer’ will result in huge numbers of false negative results that create false confidence, rather than the hoped for ‘magic bullet’. We are also greatly concerned that a negative test will give people a false sense of security.

The fact is that it is highly unlikely that staff, pupils or parents will have confidence in barely trained non-professionals administering medical procedures.

GMB calls for the existing sensible control measures including isolation of bubbles to remain in place.  The mass testing, particularly given the high number of false negatives, cannot be a substitute for other control measures like bubbles, isolation, masks and ventilation which must stay in place, so that the testing is an **additional** measure in schools, not a replacement.

GMB says it is critical that we don’t throw away our hard-won gains at this late stage, when a well-considered and properly implemented programme delivered by fully-trained competent staff can deliver the assurance we all want.

GMB will be challenging the Secretary of State and employers to put safety first and continue isolation and other protocols whilst mass testing is introduced. A copy of our letter to Gavin Williamson can be found [here](https://www.gmb.org.uk/sites/default/files/181220WilliamsonLetter.pdf).

WE are fast losing confidence in government advice which directly impacts school staff members. Some employers were threatened with legal action for taking a sensible precaution of closing schools a few days early at the end of term, just days before government announced that secondary schools would start late in the new term. We cannot understand the logic behind this.

GMB is advising members not to volunteer to carry out the testing on staff and pupils, until we get satisfactory reassurances on a number of issues.  We have grave concerns about online training for what is a medical intervention, and also about protections from liability for our members. If your school tries to coerce you into training to conduct the tests, contact GMB immediately.

GMB reminds our members that testing is not compulsory, and whilst testing is to be welcomed, we have yet to be convinced that we can support this programme.

Until more information is forthcoming, if members have any concerns about taking the test they should contact their local GMB rep for advice.