

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Dear parents and custodians of schoolchildren

In our letter of 22th October 2020 we informed you of our measures for dealing with the coronavirus in the schools in Offenbach. Since then the occurrence of infection in Offenbach and the whole of Germany has drastically increased. The City Health Authority has therefore once again restricted the teaching that has been taking place since the summer holidays. In addition, contact tracing in schools is not taking place to the extent that it previously was.

Introduction of limited daily operation

On 27th October the City Health Authority initiated stage 2 of the planning scenarios for educational establishments in the 2020/21 school year (Hygiene Plan 6.0 of the Ministry for Education and Culture in Hesse). Until further notice, teaching will be carried out only in fixed learning groups. For organisational reasons, lessons in religion and ethics, second and third foreign languages, and elective courses are excluded. In addition, mixed lessons will only take place to prepare years 9 and 10 for final examinations in German, Mathematics and English. Teaching in pupils' languages of origin and preparatory courses will be suspended if children from different schools or years are taught together.

It is now compulsory for children from the age of six years and upwards to wear masks in lessons and in all-day care in primary schools. This also applies to teaching staff and all people in charge. Physical education may only take place outdoors with no contact, but swimming lessons may continue. It is also permitted to blow dry hair on the hottest setting. Daily operation will initially be limited until the start of the Christmas holiday.

Introduction of alternative teaching models:

Due to the continuing high incidence of infections, the City Health Authority will announce the third stage of Hygiene Plan 6.0 on organisation of teaching for secondary level II and vocational schools on 16th November. Teaching of those years affected will be carried out either through face-to-face or distance learning. Distance learning generally refers to learning at home (for example over online media or teaching material for home). This will allow smaller teaching groups to be formed and distancing in classrooms to be increased. Schools may suspend additional activities (e.g. study groups) and organise breaks at different times.

Compulsory wearing of mouth and nose protection:

All pupils, teachers and people in charge at primary and secondary schools, as well as vocational schools, must wear everyday masks:
during lessons;
everywhere else in the school building;
in afternoon care.

Spending meal breaks in classrooms will only be permitted if a minimum distance of 1.5 metres is maintained following careful ventilation of the room. It is compulsory for children from the age of six years and upwards to wear mouth and nose covering (masks). If, in individual cases, pupils are unable to wear a mask, the school must organise individual arrangements for schooling, maintaining distancing and separation, or in other rooms. If this is not possible, these pupils may also switch to distance learning.

Please note that plastic visors are no longer recognised by the state of Hesse as an alternative to masks!

Schools are instructed to introduce outdoor “mask breaks”. Younger pupils should be given priority for these breaks. It is important that pupils maintain a distance of two metres from each other during these breaks.

In the case of classes of fewer than 10 pupils, when all of these are unable to wear everyday masks due to a disability, these pupils are exempt from the wearing of masks. In these cases – and only as an absolute exception – teachers may temporarily swap their masks for a face visor for the purpose of communication with the pupils concerned.

We know that the compulsory wearing of masks in lessons is an emotive issue, and that some parents object to it. But please consider the fact that an everyday mask is the most effective way to provide mutual protection against infection with the coronavirus.

Reasons for the compulsory wearing of masks

As a result of the very high rate of infection at the moment, the Health Authority is in many cases no longer able to guarantee the essential contact tracing. Infection chains must, therefore, now be broken, especially for people at risk.

Currently children are considered to be at low risk, according to the current state of scientific knowledge, because they generally only develop minor symptoms.

Children rarely infect each other: the practical experience of the Health Authority at the Offenbach schools confirms this scientific data.

The compulsory wearing of masks gives mutual protection to children. It helps to reduce the work of the Health Authority at schools, because children no longer need to be placed in quarantine unnecessarily.

Handling infections at schools

Up to now, the city has wanted, as far as possible, to avoid making the youngest pupils wear masks, not least because wearing a mask for many hours can be stressful for some children. If the child became a close contact person because family member(s) were infected, many other pupils or teachers, often the entire class, were sent home as a precaution although none of these people had any direct, close contact to an infected family member. These children were even tested, sometimes many times, although the risk of infection between children is very low. In Offenbach there have only been a few isolated cases of infection in schools to date.

Carrying out contact tracing in schools was extremely time-consuming for the City Health Authority. Added to this there have been bottlenecks in testing capacity. At a rate of more than 200 new infections a week, these tests can no longer be guaranteed in every case. The city has taken on a large number of extra employees for the Health Authority and created new positions. However, in light of the increasing number of cases, including in hospitals, the staff there have to concentrate on identifying the chains of infection in older people and risk groups that are much more vulnerable. Tests must also be made available first of all to these people. In order to protect people's lives the protection of risk groups must take priority, and schoolchildren are not generally speaking in these risk groups.

The new approach and the compulsory wearing of masks also have benefits for you and your child. The best way for the children and the teacher to protect each other is by every child wearing a mask during lessons. Because it is compulsory to wear a mask, children do not have to be put into precautionary quarantine. They can carry on attending lessons – this is important for your child's education and for all working parents. There is a further benefit to siblings of children in whose class there

is a case of corona: up to now, in accordance with the regulation passed by the state of Hesse, they have been forbidden to attend school. This prohibition no longer applies and they no longer have to stay at home.

When dealing with infections in schools, this means that if an infected pupil meets other pupils and they are all wearing masks, none of these persons will be classed as category 1 close contact persons (KP1), because they were all wearing masks. In accordance with the Robert Koch Institute's scientific criteria, the pupils are now category 2 contact persons (KP2), and a classification of KP2 does not require quarantine. As a result, the pupils may continue to attend school.

Important information: in these cases the Health Authority will no longer arrange for tests to be carried out! Nor are schools obliged to request them any longer. Only if your child exhibits typical symptoms of the coronavirus should you contact your GP or paediatrician by telephone and keep your child at home.

The following, however, has not changed: anyone who is infected or is a close contact person (KP1), perhaps because their father or mother has tested positive, must still immediately go into quarantine for 14 days and, if this has not already taken place, must be tested.

Information on quarantine and test results:

When the City Health Authority receives a positive test result from the laboratory, the person who has tested positive will be contacted and placed in quarantine for 14 days. Contact is usually first made by telephone so that the person is informed quickly and can in turn inform their contacts. The information used to make contact is drawn from the data stored on the health card, including the telephone number and email address. The message will usually arrive within two days. If the contact data are incomplete, the correct data must first be ascertained. If you are waiting for a reply by email, do not forget to check in your spam folder in case the Health Authority's message has been redirected there. The isolation order will be sent later by post. All close contact persons (KP1) must stay in quarantine for the same period as those people who have tested positive. The quarantine must still also be observed by every other person who lives in the same house as the person who has tested positive (flatmates, family members).

If a child or their mother or father tests positive, all the child's other contacts, both school and social contacts, will be identified. The Health Authority will then decide on an individual basis, according to the situation and a risk assessment, who needs to go into quarantine. However children can no longer be tested, since the test capacity is no longer sufficient and the available tests are needed for people who are particularly at risk and for risk groups.

- If a schoolchild tests positive, the child concerned must stay in quarantine for 14 days. The period starts with the day the test is carried out. The other children in the class do not have to go into quarantine, nor do they have to be tested unless they show symptoms.
- If the child is only a contact person to a member of their own family who has tested positive, the child must stay at home. The other children in their class may continue going to school.

Has your child been tested?

- If the test was positive, the City Health Authority will ring you up to inform you. Your child and everyone else in the household must stay at home in quarantine for 14 days. If your child was already in quarantine before the positive test, the quarantine period will be extended.
- If you do not receive a call within 2-4 days after the test, this usually means that it was negative!
- It is, however, important that **people who have been in contact with a person who has tested positive must stay in quarantine for 14 days even if they themselves have been tested with a negative result**, since it is still possible to become ill several days after the test.
- If your child also develops symptoms after a negative test, please contact the Health Authority by email (hit.gesundheitsamt@offenbach.de) as well as your GP or paediatrician if necessary.

Is your child a contact person?

- Your child must stay at home for 14 days. If no symptoms develop in this time, quarantine will end after 14 days. Then your child may return to kindergarten or school.
- If your child develops any typical symptoms during the quarantine period, please contact the Health Authority (hit.gesundheitsamt@offenbach.de) and your GP or paediatrician for treatment.

Please do not call or email the Health Authority, except in the cases listed above. They are unable to deal with the huge number of enquiries they receive. The Health Authority must concentrate on positive cases and the chains of infection associated with these. For data protection reasons (health-related data are treated as highly confidential) no information on test results may be given out on the Parents' Helpline (069 840004-567). The results are not available there. The Parents' Helpline can, however, provide you with general information such as where and how you can get tests, how quarantine is managed, and other basic information. All this information is also available online at: www.offenbach.de/corona-eltern.

In conclusion, I should like to ask for your understanding with regards to all the restrictions and difficulties to which the corona pandemic is subjecting all of us, and to wish you good health! Please keep a safe distance from other people and cut down your social contacts to the minimum so that we can get through the next few weeks and months comparatively well.

Best regards


Paul-Gerhard Weiß

Head of Schools Department

Offenbach am Main, 12 November 2020