

Age appropriate testing for Covid in children

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 25 Ebrill 2022
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Reference: SR22-2618-2

Petition Number: P-06-1266

Petition title: Age appropriate testing for Covid in children

Text of petition: I would like the government to consider adopting a different method to testing children, an age appropriate PCR test nicknamed the lollipop test. All the children need to do is to suck on a cotton swab for about 30 seconds which is a much less distressing experience for them.

I have found the testing of young children for COVID-19 a traumatic experience for both the child and the parent especially for younger children. This is only going to get worse with the flu and cold season upon us. Children who are prone to coughs end up regularly having to undergo the PCR swab test to be allowed back into school. The latter is a stressful experience, often distressing and as a parent the dilemma is whether to isolate your child even though they just have a cold merely to avoid testing. There is a better option which is used in Germany for children. It is an age appropriate PCR test nicknamed the 'lollipop' test and is highly reliable. I wonder why we do not offer this test in the UK and would ask the government to adopt it as a more humane way to test young children. We need to take the fear out of testing and now!



1. Background

Following advice from the Welsh Government's Technical Advisory Cell, the Education Minister Jeremy Miles announced in October 2021 that routine COVID-19 testing of children under five in Wales would stop (unless advised by a doctor). He said:

In considering the merits of testing, asymptomatic testing in particular, it is important to consider the potential harms. I have been concerned at the level of PCR testing being undertaken of children under 5 years of age which has increased fivefold since the beginning of August.

The Welsh Government therefore does not recommend COVID-19 tests for children under five unless directed to do so by a doctor, or if parents believe a test is absolutely necessary and in the best interests of the child.

From 1 April 2022 the guidance on testing for COVID-19 changed. People can no longer order lateral flow tests (LFTs) unless they have symptoms of COVID-19. All PCR testing sites for the general public have closed. The guidance from Welsh Government continues to be children under 5 do not need to get tested.

2. Welsh Government action

The Health Minister's letter to the Chair of the Petitions Committee acknowledges the petitioner's concern that swabbing is an unpleasant experience for children, and says she is "open to using new technology to improve COVID-19 testing services".

With regards to the lollipop swab, the Minister explains that **the test has not been approved by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)**. Manufacturers or distributors supplying COVID-19 tests must meet the Medical Devices (Coronavirus Test Device Approvals) Regulations 2021.

The Minister adds:

We are working with Public Health Wales and health boards to introduce a different type of swab for children known as a buccal swab.

A buccal swab is a way to collect a sample from the cells on the inside of the subject's cheek. Buccal swabs are a relatively non-invasive way to collect samples for testing. We expect buccal swabs to be available in the summer.

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