**Message from Sheffield Director of Public Health – Greg Fell:**

There is an exceptionally difficult winter ahead. We are now starting to see the impact of other winter illnesses, the flu season is approaching and we continue to have high cases of COVID-19. GPs, ambulances and A&E departments are seeing record numbers of patients. That matters as routine care may be delayed or put off and even emergency care services will become more pressured with longer waiting.

This means that we have to continue to do all that we can to reduce risk and limit the pressures on our health care services. Unfortunately some things are not completely back to ‘normal’ and I realise that many of you will be disappointed as we approach Christmas that settings may not always be able to put in place some of the things that you are familiar with happening around this time of year. Settings are having to consider risks to staff, pupils and parents/carers. No one wants to be unwell with COVID, especially over Christmas or risk transmission to older adults and relatives. We know that the DELTA variant likes warm, crowded places where there is close contact. We have to balance things carefully. The pandemic is far from over and we need to remain cautious. Nobody wants to see a return of restrictions so it’s important we do all we can to prevent this. Face to face teaching and learning for our children and young people is a priority so headteachers are having to carefully consider any additional risk that could impact on this.

I have asked settings to continue to reduce the numbers of events and meetings involving large numbers of pupils, parents/carers and staff. I understand that this will be disappointing for some, however it is important to help reduce transmission of COVID-19 by some events not going ahead or events being undertaken in a different way.

There are also some simple things we can all do to help take care of our family and friends this winter:

* **Get vaccinated against Covid**

This is the single most effective thing you can do to protect yourself and others. It’s especially important for pregnant women to have the vaccinations. If you haven’t yet had dose one and two it is never too late and please reconsider.

Many clinics across Sheffield <http://www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination> are offering the vaccination and there is no need to book and no need to be registered with a GP.

* **Get your booster jab**

Protection from the vaccine may decrease over time so if you are invited for a booster, please make sure you go. Boosters are being offered to the same high priority groups as previously, if you are over 40 or work in health or care homes.

You will be sent an invite to have a booster six months after your second dose but you can also book your booster at [Book or manage a booster dose of the coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine - NHS (www.nhs.uk)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/book-or-manage-a-booster-dose-of-the-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccine/)

* **Get a flu jab**

We are trying to avoid co-infection with flu and Covid as there are much worse outcomes if people become acutely unwell with both. So please have a flu jab.

* **Remember the basic advice**

Face Coverings really help and have the added benefit of reducing transmission of other respiratory viruses. Keep your distance and focus on better ventilation in indoor spaces. Work from home if you can and reduce your contacts. If going to high risk settings or visiting elderly relatives take an LFD beforehand. If you have symptoms and you suspect Covid, arrange a PCR test at [Get tested for coronavirus (COVID-19) - NHS (www.nhs.uk)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing/get-tested-for-coronavirus/) or by calling 119.

* **Be patient with the NHS**

If you are finding it difficult to access care, the NHS are working under incredible pressure. Help medical staff prioritise patients with the most urgent needs by first seeking advice from a local pharmacy or 111. Only call 999 or attend A&E in an emergency.