

21 October 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

COVID-19 infection rates have been steadily rising in school aged children since the start of the new academic year and current rates amongst the school aged populations are the highest the borough has seen throughout the pandemic. As a result of this rise in infection rates, we have an increasing number of schools meeting the Government's Education Contingency Framework threshold for additional monitoring and support.

It is important to emphasise that the immediate health risks of COVID-19 infection to children and young people are low. However, the harms to children and young people from missing or disrupted education are significant. Sadly, the current level of cases and number of outbreaks in our education settings is impacting on attendance, causing disruption to learning and in turn, impacting the roll out of the school-based COVID-19 vaccination programme in secondary schools.

In response, the East Berkshire Health Protection Board (senior representatives of Bracknell Forest, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and Slough Councils, UK Health Security Agency (formerly Public Health England), East Berkshire Clinical Commissioning Group and Frimley Integrated Care System) have reviewed the current guidance to ensure that we are doing everything possible, in partnership with our schools and colleges, to reduce the risk of transmission within educational settings. As a result, several additional measures are recommended with the aim of reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission within our schools and colleges. These recommendations were sent to Head Teachers in all schools and colleges within Bracknell Forest on Monday.

In making the recommendations, we have considered three key principles:

1. The recommendations must be proportionate to the current public health risk and disruption to education.
2. The recommendations focus on measures that will cause minimal disruption to the effective operation of schools and colleges.
3. The recommendations will be implemented for a defined period, with a regular review based on the data and will seek to sufficiently control transmission to avoid having to introduce even more restrictive measures in future.

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The enhanced measures that we have advised Head Teachers to implement are over and above the current Government guidance and we hope will be implemented as soon as they are practically able to do so. They are:

- Use of face coverings in communal areas (unless exempt) for staff, children and visitors in secondary schools.
- Use of face coverings in communal areas (unless exempt) for staff and visitors in primary schools.
- Reduce contact between and within year groups in school where possible by:
 - Avoid mixing between groups (either class or year group)
 - Separate break and lunch areas/times where possible
 - No whole school (primary) or whole year group (secondary) assemblies

(The extent to which this can be achieved will be different between primary and secondary schools, and between individual schools. Measures will be carefully considered and specific and proportionate to the school itself, as they are highly dependent on the set up, space available, number of pupils etc).

- In both primary and secondary schools and colleges, any child or member of staff who has a household member test positive for COVID-19 should be advised to take a **daily LFD test for 7 days**, *in addition to taking a one-off PCR test*. Anyone who is exempt from self-isolation (those aged under 18 or adults who are fully vaccinated) *and* who tests negative **can continue to attend school during this period of daily LFD testing**.
- In both primary and secondary schools and colleges, any child or member of staff who is identified as a close contact of a positive case via NHS Test and Trace should be advised to take a **daily LFD test for 7 days**, *in addition to taking a one-off PCR test*. Anyone who is exempt from self-isolation (those aged under 18 or adults who are fully vaccinated) *and* who tests negative **can continue to attend school during this period of daily LFD testing**.

The approach to testing is based upon evidence from the national daily contact testing trial conducted in 201 schools between April and June 2021 which demonstrated that daily testing of exposed students and staff for COVID-19 was equivalent to self-isolation of whole year groups. It is therefore thought to be a safe less disruptive alternative to home isolation following school-based exposure.

The enhanced measures recommended in this letter will remain in place until Christmas 2021. They will be kept under review regularly by the East Berkshire Health Protection Board.

May we take this opportunity to remind you of the importance of arranging for a PCR test without delay should your child experience any of the recognised COVID-19 symptoms or where they have been advised that they are a close or household contact of a positive case.

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Finally, we would once again thank you for the exceptional efforts you have made in helping to reduce the risk of transmission within our educational settings, keeping children, families and staff safe.

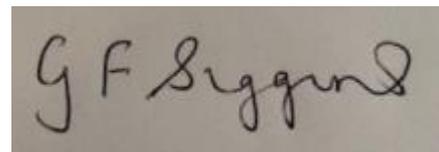
Yours sincerely



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