

Wednesday 20 October 2021

Dear colleagues,

Managing Covid-19 transmission in schools

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

Although the immediate health risks of COVID-19 infection to children and young people are low, the potential harms from missing or disrupted education are significant. As such the Government's objective is to maximise time spent in face-to-face education. However, current rates and number of outbreaks in our educational settings is impacting on attendance, educational disruption, and in turn the roll out of the school-based COVID-19 vaccination programme in secondary schools.

In response, members of the East Berkshire Health Protection Board have reviewed the current guidance to ensure that we are doing everything possible, in partnership with schools and colleges, to reduce the risk of transmission within the borough's educational settings. The Board comprises senior leaders from Bracknell Forest Council, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council and Slough Council, as well as senior representatives from the UK Health Security Agency (formerly Public Health England), and the NHS in East Berkshire.

Following an extraordinary meeting of the Board on 14 October 2021, several additional measures have been identified with the aim of reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission within schools and colleges across East Berkshire.

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

1. The recommendations should 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.

We strongly advise that head teachers implement these enhanced measures, over and above current government guidance, as soon as is practicable:

- 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. The extent to which this can be achieved will be different between primary and secondary schools, and between individual schools. The priority remains minimising disruption to education, however where possible we advise the following:
 - 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
- In both primary and secondary schools/colleges:
 - any child or member of staff who has a household member test positive for COVID-19
 - 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**.

There is evidence from the daily contact testing trial conducted in 201 schools between April and June 2021 that daily LFD testing of exposed students and staff was equivalent to self-isolation of whole year groups. It is therefore indicated to be a safe alternative to home isolation following school-based exposure.

The enhanced measures recommended in this letter should remain in place until the end of the Autumn term 2021. However, they will be kept under regular review, including in the light of any change to Government guidance. Any decision to amend or remove the measures will consider the following factors:

- the case rate per 100,000 for school aged children
- the rate of increase (or decrease) in case rates
- vaccination rates in school aged children
- the emergence of any new variants of concern
- any adverse outcomes for those with COVID-19 and
- the impact of other viruses in circulation in educational settings over winter.

We will, of course, let you know if our advice changes.

We strongly advise that all the above measures are implemented as part of your baseline Covid-19 security measures.

These measures **do not replace** current guidance for responding to an **outbreak** within your school. If you meet the outbreak threshold contained within the Education Contingency Framework, you should continue to follow your outbreak management plan and contact the DfE helpline on 0800 046 8687 to discuss which additional measures should be implemented for a short-term period in response to the outbreak. Such measures may include, but are not limited to:

- increased frequency of LFD testing for staff and students (including daily testing)
- reduced mixing of staff (e.g. holding meetings remotely)
- reintroducing face coverings in the classroom
- limiting events (such as residential visits and day trips, open days / open evenings, transition or taster days, parental attendance on site, live performances, sporting events (within or between schools).


We hope that you will find this advice helpful and reassuring that we are working to support you in helping control the spread of the virus over the coming winter. Appendix 1 contains some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to support and guide you through these

recommendations. 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 both children and staff safe.

Yours sincerely



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Appendix 1: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Theme	Query Raised	Response
Trends	What are reasons behind the rise in case rates in Slough?	Case rates in school-aged children are increasing nationally. The East Berks Health Protection Board is making recommendations to minimise the likelihood of onward transmission. It is currently spreading amongst children who are not vaccinated and who may take the virus back to vulnerable relatives. The recommendations should be taken in the context of what is reasonable, proportionate and practicable.
National restrictions	How likely is it some of these restrictions will be rolled out nationally or regionally?	Nationally these may not be introduced, but other Local Authorities and regions are pro-actively introducing local restrictions.
Local advice	If we introduce extra controls within our schools will the LA back us on this?	Yes, the LA will support your efforts to reduce the risk of spread. Please keep in mind that measures need to be practical for you to implement.
Media	Media attention is likely. Who will support/manage media comms around this for schools? e.g. do schools refer somewhere if contacted directly?	LA Comms Teams are co-ordinating; further contact information will be supplied for media queries.
Support	Will there be any additional support for Slough as the schools liaison officer has left? Who do schools contact?	Erin Yau will be supporting the schools until the replacement Officer can commence. Erin.Yau@slough.gov.uk
Vaccination	Can second vaccine opportunities be arranged where take up was low?	There is no current plan for Immunisation Teams to return to schools to deliver the first dose. We expect the supplementary offer for 12-15s to be available via local vaccination centres from around 23rd October, with parents being able to book on the national booking service https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/
	Will booster jabs for staff be increased?	Third dose / booster jabs will be available according to the NHS schedule https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-booster-vaccine/
Nursery schools	Does this guidance also apply to nursery schools	No, these recommendations are not currently for nursery schools.
Testing	Should LFD tests be used for primary age pupils?	Yes, primary school age children are now eligible to take Lateral Flow Device (LFD) tests.
	Are testing centres being provided back in school?	Only in exceptional circumstances and will need to be discussed with the HPT first.
	Should schools do tests on return after half term?	We are recommending that LFD Testing is encouraged as a tool to help minimise the risk of spreading the infection.
Letter to Schools	Is this letter mandatory or advisory?	These are recommendations. You may wish to use this letter when informing schools of the measures you intend to introduce.

	How long are these recommendations in place for?	These recommendations will be in place until the end of Autumn term unless the local situation changes.
	How regularly will they be reviewed?	The advice will be reviewed weekly and updated as necessary.
	When should the recommendations be implemented from?	It was agreed at the meeting between Headteachers and the Director of Public Health on 18 th October that these recommendations would be implemented from 1 st November 2021, after half-term. Half-term may act as a 'firebreak' and help control the rate of infection.
	Why is there a slight difference in guidance between primary and secondary e.g. assemblies?	This is due to their size and that they operate differently.
Implemented measures and scenarios	<p>1. Can specific activities continue...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • off-site trips and visits? • sporting fixtures? • after school clubs? • breakfast clubs? • Parent/Teacher meetings? • mock exams before Christmas? • Sixth Form open evenings? • open mornings for infant/junior school applications? • use of conference suite and swimming pool by external groups? <p>2. Application of restrictions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • will we need to reintroduce staggered entry and exit times and a one-way system? • would an exam hall be treated like a classroom in terms of face coverings? <p>3. Is there any special advice for more vulnerable staff e.g. if pregnant?</p>	<p>1. The EBHPB is recommending that if it is reasonable, proportionate and practicable to do so, then measures to reduce the likelihood of transmission should be introduced.</p> <p>It is not possible to be prescriptive for every eventuality and situation. Measures may include, but are not limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased frequency of LFD testing for staff and students (including daily testing) • Reduced mixing of staff (e.g. holding meetings remotely) • Reintroducing face coverings in the classroom • Limitation of events where large-scale mixing can occur <p>2. The school's management plan should be used to identify higher risk activities and the appropriate controls put in place. The HPT and local public health team will be able to offer further advice but the decision on appropriateness will lie with the school.</p> <p>3. All staff should be encouraged to have their vaccination and reference should be made to your risk assessment in line with the Outbreak Management Guidance (PHESE Educational Settings Outbreak Pack V07.00) for these queries.</p>