



16 June 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

As you may be aware, COVID-19 infection rates have been steadily rising across the borough in the last few weeks, in part due to the Delta variant (the variant of concern that was first identified in India) which is significantly more transmissible than earlier variants. In response, the Council will be running a COVID-19 surge testing operation from 16 June to 30 June. All schools and colleges in the borough are being invited to participate in the surge testing operation and your support in ensuring we get as many eligible people tested as possible is really important. You can find out more information about the borough's surge testing plans on our website – [Surge testing starts in Bracknell Forest | Bracknell Forest Council \(bracknell-forest.gov.uk\)](https://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk)

One of the factors that was considered in our decision to begin surge testing, in consultation with the Department for Health and Social Care and Public Health England, was the rise in COVID-19 cases amongst school and college aged children in the borough - and in the lead up to half term we saw a number of small outbreaks in some of our schools. The Public Health response to these outbreaks, regardless of the presence of the new variant, remains exactly the same as it has been throughout the pandemic. Our schools and colleges have worked tirelessly to ensure that schools have robust COVID-19 security in place and their response to managing cases and outbreaks within school and college settings, in partnership with the Council and Public Health England, has been exceptional.

Faced with the increasing COVID-19 rates within the borough, we have reviewed again all current guidance to ensure that we have done everything possible, in partnership with schools and colleges, to reduce the risk of transmission within the borough's educational settings. Following this review, we took a number of recommendations to the East Berkshire Health Protection Board meeting this week with a request that additional protective measures should be implemented in our schools and colleges, over and above the guidance that is in place nationally to support the government's roadmap. The recommendations were endorsed by the Board and so we are recommending to head teachers that the following additional measures are introduced in all the borough's schools and colleges with immediate effect.

- For any school experiencing an outbreak (i.e. with two or more linked cases) face coverings should be reintroduced. This will be for staff in primary schools and for staff and students in secondary schools and colleges.
- Movement between schools should be restricted as far as possible and no events that involve bringing students from multiple schools together should go ahead. Unfortunately, this includes all transition days (Reception, Year 6 and Year 11). Schools will, of course, put alternative virtual arrangements in place.

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- All meetings involving individuals who are not part of existing school bubbles (including parent/teacher meetings and parents' evenings) should only take place as virtual meetings.
- Indoor and outdoor events, such as school plays or sports days - and including day or residential trips, can go ahead. These will be subject to risk assessments being completed and must ensure that no additional people are introduced into existing bubble arrangements. This will ensure compliance with the current roadmap guidance. Unfortunately, whilst these events can go ahead, parents and carers will not be allowed on to school premises to spectate.

The Government is currently updating its guidance following the announcement this week that stage 3 of the roadmap is being extended until 19 July. Some of this updated guidance may differ from the recommendations above as it will apply to the whole country. Any changes to Government guidance or policy will not change the recommendations and Board decisions outlined above. These arrangements will remain in place until the end of term for all educational settings across Bracknell Forest and Slough (where surge testing is also beginning this week).

We will continue to work closely with school communities, Public Health England and the East Berkshire Health Protection Board over the coming weeks and will follow our agreed local outbreak plans and procedures to keep school pupils and staff as safe as possible. Meanwhile, thank you for all you have been doing to help reduce the risk of transmission locally and in educational settings. Please do continue to help us keep school and college communities protected by following all the health and hygiene rules as well as self-isolating when required.

Yours faithfully



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Bracknell Forest Council



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