

Don't bring Covid home for Christmas!

It has been an extremely tough term for teachers, pupils and parents and it's not over yet. We want to help you through the last few weeks before the Christmas break by providing guidance on the best steps to stay protected and prevent transmission and to help everyone have the Christmas break they deserve. It's not easy, it's not fun but it is the right thing to do, especially as the virus appears to be a super-spreader and our rates in Berkshire are high.

Events

There has been no change to the recommendations made by the East Berkshire Health Protection Board (EBHPB) in October. However, we have had several enquiries about school Christmas performances so we would like to clarify our previous advice.

Under current guidance and the existing EBHPB recommendations, events and gatherings in schools **are permitted**. Open evenings, concerts and other performances, like nativity plays, will inevitably result in significant mixing between staff, parents and pupils which in turn increases the risk of transmitting and catching Covid. Performances need to be risk assessed and contingency plans made for managing or cancelling events using the thresholds for additional action set out in the DfE contingency framework as a guide. It's important to check Government guidelines regularly and consider other formats such as outdoor or remote (broadcast online) performances.

Encourage everyone to follow some basic principles:

- Use the largest space possible to allow for social distancing and keep seating distanced
- Ventilate by opening windows and doors to allow fresh air in and potentially infected air out
- If feasible, consider a booking system to minimise the risk of too many people turning up all at the same time
- Consider putting on extra performances so that fewer people attend each one
- Set up clear and effective entry and exit (in / out) arrangements to minimise clustering

Before the event, remind attendees of the following:

- COVID symptoms in the 10 days prior to the event?
 - don't attend unless proof of negative PCR test result
- Over 11 years of age?
 - take a lateral flow test on the day of the event, isolate and book a PCR test if result is positive
- Government guidance is that people over the age of 11 should wear face coverings in crowded and enclosed spaces – encourage this.

If case rates increase significantly or national guidance changes, this advice may change.

Here's a handy Covid risk reduction checklist to consider before and during any event:

- ✓ Create a risk assessment to identify appropriate mitigation measures
- ✓ Review the decision to proceed 7-10 days before the event, taking into account staff/pupil Covid-19 cases, adequate staffing capacity to run the event safely
- ✓ Avoid mixing school class/year groups
- ✓ Remind invitees that they should not attend if they have any symptoms, mild or not
- ✓ All attendees to LFD test 48 hours or closer to the event and self-isolate and follow government guidance if positive
- ✓ Create plenty of space between chairs/rows to help to reduce risk of transmission; alternatively reduce usual occupancy of the space by putting Keep Free signs on seats

- ✓ Recommend just one parent/guardian per child attends
- ✓ Maximise ventilation - open windows and doors; send advance notice to dress appropriately
- ✓ Include breaks between performances to allow for cleaning and ventilation
- ✓ Discourage audience participation such as singing or shouting
- ✓ Over 11s to wear face coverings within communal spaces and when seated unless exempt – have a stack of face coverings available for those who need them
- ✓ Consider an NHS QR code and encourage use of the NHS App.
- ✓ Regularly clean/disinfect touch points eg handrails, door handles and toilet areas
- ✓ Discourage people congregating in specific areas such as entrances and exits
- ✓ Provide hand washing facilities and / or hand sanitiser
- ✓ Encourage COVID-19 vaccination in eligible attendees

Changes to self-isolation guidance

To self-isolate or not to self-isolate

Anyone experiencing any the symptoms below, even mildly, or who has a positive LFD test and waiting for PCR test, should stay at home and arrange to have a test. Goes without saying that positive PCR test means stay home and isolate.

- new continuous cough
- high temperature
- loss of, or change in, normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)

Close-contact of a COVID-19 case (household or non-household)

Children and fully vaccinated adults identified as a close-contact of a confirmed case don't have to self-isolate but are encouraged to get a PCR test as soon as possible. But you can ask a close-contact of a household case to conduct daily LFD tests whilst waiting for their PCR result; other things to consider when exempt from self-isolation as a close-contact can be found here.

Omicron - new variant of concern (VOC) (B.1.1.529)

In a change to current guidance, the government has announced that anyone who is identified as a close contact of a suspected case of the Omicron VOC will be required to self-isolate for 10 days. This new requirement is regardless of age and vaccination status.

We wish you well during this challenging last few weeks and hope you enjoy some rest over the festive period.