

Dear Parents/Carers,

Thank you for all you have done so far this year to bring down the rate of COVID-19 infection in Central Bedfordshire.

As pupils return this week, I wanted to write to remind you of the guidance and procedures that are in place to help ensure that the return of all children, young people and staff to schools, colleges and nurseries is as safe as possible.

Measures being taken within education settings

Please remember to social distance and wear face coverings, if at all possible, at the school gates to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The rate of infection is falling but it still remains too high, and we are asking everyone to continue to play their part so that it continues to fall.

We know that the predominant new variant of coronavirus (COVID-19) is more transmissible, and Public Health England (PHE) advice remains that the way to control this virus is with a range of measures to create a safer environment for staff, pupils and students. The use of face coverings in recommended circumstances is one element of the system of measures, but they are not a replacement for social distancing, regular hand washing and of course good ventilation.

The best available scientific evidence is that, when used correctly, wearing a face covering reduces the spread of COVID-19 droplets, helping to protect others. Evidence also shows that mask wearing is most effective at reducing spread of the virus when compliance is high. So I would urge all students and staff to wear face coverings where advised, as one of the measures to help to keep everyone safe.

Measures outside education settings

All of our schools, colleges and nurseries are working very hard to ensure children, young people and staff are as safe as possible whilst they are onsite, but we need the support of parents, families and carers when it comes to what happens before and after the school day.

In the past, there have been reports from concerned residents and parents of gatherings of parents, carers and young people near school gates and sometimes outside of people's homes, particularly before and after the school day. Please remember that under the current national restrictions no-one is able to meet outside in a public place, unless they are from the same household or support bubble. or exercising with one other person.

The current measures do not allow households to mix indoors (apart from support or childcare bubbles) which means that play dates and meeting up indoors are also prohibited at this current time. Gatherings like these increase the risk that the virus will spread.

Central Bedfordshire Council

Priory House, Monks Walk
Chicksands, Shefford
Bedfordshire, SG17 5TQ

Telephone 0300 300 8000

Email customers@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Lateral flow testing for households and support bubbles

The government has confirmed that twice-weekly rapid (Lateral Flow) tests will be available to all households with primary, secondary and college aged children and young people, including their childcare and support bubbles. These are for adults without symptoms and we know that up to 1 in 3 COVID-19 cases have no symptoms but can still pass on the virus, so regular testing will help to find more cases, break chains of transmission and help keep educational settings as safe as possible. Primary aged children are not being asked to test. Tests for secondary aged young people will be issued directly by educational settings.

It is important to remember that a negative rapid flow test does not completely rule out infection, and social distancing and infection prevention measures (e.g. Hands – Face – Space & ventilation) should continue. If you are already isolating due to contact with a positive COVID- 19 case, a negative lateral flow test does not mean you can stop isolating.

If you do test positive following a home lateral flow test, you and your household must follow self-isolation guidelines and arrange for a standard PCR test.

Rapid flow test kits for home use can be collected from some local testing sites. You can find out where by using this search tool:

<https://find-covid-19-rapid-test-sites.maps.test-and-trace.nhs.uk/>

For those who are unable to collect the rapid test kits, a limited number are available to order online: <https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests>

The full guidance for households and support bubbles of school pupils and staff, now eligible for twice-weekly rapid testing is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rapid-lateral-flow-testing-for-households-and-bubbles-of-school-pupils-and-staff>

Remember, anyone who has COVID-19 symptoms – high temperature, a new, continuous cough, or a loss or change to sense of smell or taste – should self-isolate immediately along with their household and arrange a PCR test. These can be booked via the Government website or by calling 119.

Thank you for all your help in driving down infections

Yours Sincerely,



Vicky Head

Director of Public Health

Central Bedfordshire Council

Priory House, Monks Walk
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