

9th December 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

COVID-19 Update: Omicron Variant of Concern and the Festive Season

Thank you for everything you have done over the last year to help keep your family and community safe from COVID-19. I am writing again to ask for your continued help in keeping us all safe over the Winter and upcoming festive season.

This week the government has announced it is bringing in further restrictions to try to reduce the spread of the virus, especially in light of the new Omicron Variant of Concern which is spreading quickly. These new rules include the use of face coverings in most indoor settings from Friday 10 December 2021, and compulsory working from home for those who can from Monday 13 December.

The latest changes can be found on the government website at

www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do

Changes to self-isolation rules for contacts of Omicron cases are also planned, and the full details will be announced once these have been set out.

What is the Kingston situation?

Despite all of our efforts, the numbers of coronavirus cases in Kingston are very high. Since the Autumn half-term we have seen a steady increase in the number of school age children testing positive for COVID-19 in Kingston which has resulted in several school outbreaks.

Our local data shows us that COVID-19 spreads easily in households. Cases in children can lead to new infections in parents and grandparents in the home, and our data also shows that rates are particularly high in parents of school age children. At present around 1,000 people are testing positive for COVID-19 every week in Kingston.

There are simple things we can all do to help slow the spread of COVID-19, including the new Omicron variant, which you are likely by now to be very familiar with.

How can you help to keep Kingston safe?

Get your vaccination

It is vitally important that we all take care of ourselves this Winter. If, as a parent, you have not had your full primary course of COVID-19 vaccines yet, or your booster/flu jab if you are eligible, please don't delay. If your child has not yet taken up the vaccine offer we would encourage you to give it serious consideration, and access the information we've compiled to help you and your child make an informed choice for your child and your family. There are plenty of locations across the borough to book an appointment. For more information see our [Kingston Covid-19 vaccination web pages](#).

Keep testing

If you have symptoms of COVID-19, even if they are mild - take a PCR test and stay at home.

Getting a PCR test in Kingston is FREE and easy. You can get a test sent to your home or you can visit one of the sites in Kingston. See www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test or call 119. By getting tested and staying away from others if you have symptoms, you will help stop others also becoming ill.

Anyone who is a close contact or household contact of someone with COVID-19 is also strongly advised to take a PCR test. If booking your test online, you should select '*my council asked me to get a test*'.

Anyone who has tested **PCR positive in the last 90 days** does **not** need to repeat the test unless they develop new symptoms.

We ask that you take a Lateral Flow Test before you attend a gathering and keep up with regular testing.

We are strongly encouraging families to continue regular lateral flow testing over the Christmas holidays. Consider taking a test before attending performances at school and any gatherings with friends and families.

Lateral flow tests ('sometimes called 'rapid tests' or LFT tests) are FREE, easy to get and simple to use. You can order tests from www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests or by calling 119, or you can pick them up from the Market House, Market Square, Kingston town centre.

Anyone who tests positive on a lateral flow test should isolate immediately and take a PCR test to confirm they have the virus. By using the lateral flow tests before you attend a gathering, you can help reduce the risks of COVID-19 spreading amongst friends and family and others at these events.

See www.kingston.gov.uk/covid-testing for more details on testing.

Which Covid-19 test should you use?		
	Rapid Covid-19 test	PCR test
 Who it's for	People with no Covid-19 symptoms	People with Covid-19 symptoms
 Sent away for processing	X	✓
 Results received	in up to 30 minutes	in up to 72 hours
 Tells you if you have Covid-19	✓	✓

Wear a face covering

From Friday 10 December 2021 it is the law that you must wear a face covering in most indoor spaces, unless you are exempt. This includes on public transport, in shops and shopping centres, in hairdressers and beauticians, libraries, banks and post offices, takeaways and pharmacies.

In schools, face coverings are now temporarily recommended in communal areas in all settings for adults and for pupils from year 7 onwards.

Face coverings have been shown to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Fresh air (ventilation)

If you're meeting up with others, outdoors is always safer.

If meeting up indoors, let fresh air in by opening windows. This can help blow the virus particles away and help reduce the risk of catching COVID-19.

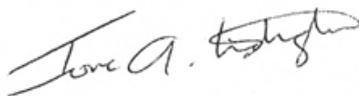
Hands

Regular hand washing is an effective way to reduce your risk of catching COVID-19. Wash your hands with soap and hot water or use hand sanitiser regularly throughout the day.

Help available in Kingston for anyone who must stay at home (self isolate)

Local support is available to anyone who tests positive for COVID-19, or has been told to self isolate. To get help with access to food and medicine deliveries, financial assistance if eligible, and support with health and wellbeing visit: www.kingston.gov.uk/Covid19-needhelp or call 020 8547 5000.

I would like to thank you again for helping to Keep Kingston Safe, and to wish you all a very Happy Festive Season and a Hopeful New Year,



Iona Lidington
Director of Public Health
Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames Council