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Dear Colleagues

Covid has not gone away, it is important that we all remain vigilant in the remaining weeks of this term.

The current rate of Covid cases in Waltham Forest is 76 per 100,000. This is equivalent to 210 cases reported in the last 7 days of complete data. This is six times higher than we were just a month ago, and now case rates are currently doubling approximately every 9 days. As a result, we can expect greater number of cases to be identified over the coming days and weeks.

The Delta variant now comprises over 95% of Covid-19 cases. It is more transmissible than the previous Alpha variant, and school communities face the additional challenge that large numbers of their wider communities are not vaccinated ie. pupils and the under 30s. In order to allow more people to be vaccinated over the next 4 weeks, the government has delayed the introduction of step 4 of the roadmap until 19th July.

As a reminder, all schools have the ability to, based on their risk assessment, maintain wearing of face coverings for staff and pupils in both communal areas and classrooms. Several schools in Waltham Forest are already doing this. If your school does not maintain the use of face coverings, we very strongly recommend an urgent reconsideration of your risk assessment, in light of the very rapidly rising case numbers in children aged 12-17. We, as the Local Authority, will fully support any school that goes down this route.

In addition, Waltham Forest schools are advised to;

- Review and maintain adherence to their risk assessments including the use of bubbles, regular enhanced cleaning, increasing ventilation and the expectations around social distancing
- Communicate the importance of continued twice weekly asymptomatic testing amongst staff (and pupils in secondary schools and colleges) given the increase in community transmission. Staff who have been vaccinated should still be encouraged to undertake regular testing.
- Promote and encourage regular asymptomatic testing to the families of children and staff attending your school at any opportunity via school newsletters and communications etc
- Remind pupils and staff that anyone with the [three main Covid symptoms](#) should self-isolate immediately (along with their households) and take a PCR test

- Ask pupils at secondary schools to stay away from school if they have the typical symptoms of a cold (eg. sore throat, runny nose) until they have taken a PCR test, that has come back as negative. This test is precautionary and whilst children should not attend school until a negative test result is received, they are not legally required to self-isolate. This is going above and beyond the legal requirement on everyone to isolate if they have the three traditional symptoms of COVID (temperature, continuous cough, loss of taste/smell), which remains in place.
- Ensure that staff are aware of the risks should they choose to socialise with other staff members outside of work and encourage them to do so within their bubbles
- Promote staff to have their Covid-19 vaccinations when they become eligible and where possible and necessary allow staff reasonable time off to facilitate speedy vaccination

In addition, in terms of school operations between now and the end of term you are advised that;

- Whilst the latest DfE guidance allows scope for Year 6/7 transition days it effectively counsels against these. The advice from the Council, given the current rate of Covid infection and the anticipated increase in positive cases is that these transition days should not proceed in person. These should be scheduled to take place virtually with other elements potentially covered at the start of the next academic year when it is hoped and anticipated that the Covid rate will be significantly lower. If any schools determine that they wish to proceed with a transition or open day this must be following a thorough risk assessment. Any such events, if schools decide to proceed, must maintain the integrity of existing school specific bubbles and have all appropriate control measures in place.
- CATs testing should be postponed until the start of the next academic year, progressed remotely, or arranged carefully following a full risk assessment to ensure there is no mixing of primary school pupils between school groups. If a secondary school is intending to progress CATs testing this term, they are advised to liaise with all feeder primary schools to offer reassurance that pupil bubbles are not breached
- End of term staff events should not proceed as normal, and certainly not before the 19 July, schools should start from the position of these representing an unnecessary additional risk. Where it is determined that a staff event will proceed there should be a full risk assessment. No more than 30 staff can gather in any event and this must take place outside with staff reminded to maintain effective social distancing
- End of term school style leavers events or “Proms” are allowed in DfE guidance with encouragement that these are held outdoors. They continue that where any outdoor event caters for more than one bubble these groups must be kept separate. They further allow for scope for parents to attend outdoor events where groups are kept to a maximum of 30. The advice from Waltham Forest is that such events should be managed with extreme caution and only considered on the school site. Where it is determined these should proceed there must be a thorough risk assessments including maintenance of social distancing and the wearing of face coverings. Attendees should be restricted exclusively to the in-school bubble. We do not believe it is prudent to encourage or allow parents and carers to attend outdoor events even if they are able to be managed in groups of up to 30. In planning for such an event, the starting point should be holding an event that represents no increased risk to transmission.
- The DfE have indicated that sports days can go ahead with guidance around maintaining consistent bubbles, regular cleaning of equipment and spectators adhering to social distancing and gathering in separate, possibly multiple, groups of up to 30.

The Waltham Forest advice is that whilst sports days can proceed these should only ever be considered where there is no possible scope for mixing between normal school bubbles. Full risk assessments must be in place and signed off by a competent person. Given Covid rates in Waltham Forest and London more generally we do not believe it is proportionate or appropriate for parents/carers to be invited onto the school site.

- Fetes and Fairs as a form of community event should not take place. Whilst these are allowed to be held outdoors in line with current guidance and with a thorough risk assessment, our local position is that we advise against these as there is the potential for bubble mixing and failure to maintain appropriate social distancing.
- Whilst the latest DfE guidance allows for school trips to take place in accordance with a thorough risk assessment we would advise caution when considering whether these should go ahead. The guidance is clear that bubbles should be strictly maintained and that parents cannot be asked to assist with such trips. Our local advice is informed by current Covid rates and practicalities around ensuring sufficient staff to support any trips.

Please continue to notify public.health@walthamforest.gov.uk of all confirmed cases in staff and pupils attending your setting so that we have an up to picture of the situation in local schools and can support and advise as necessary.

As a reminder, all close contacts of confirmed cases are now asked to take a PCR test (if they have not previously tested PCR positive within the last 90 days). All schools should have received or will shortly be receiving a supply of 35 PCR test kits. These are to be made available and distributed to the close contacts of a confirmed case, when a bubble is sent home from school so that the individuals can take a test as soon as possible. Pupils who are already at home when advised to self-isolate should be directed to the nearest PCR test site or to order a PCR test kit online.

As we only have a limited supply of these PCR kits in the local authority, further provision will only be likely at a school where there is an emerging outbreak situation.

Finally, thank you to all of the schools who have signed up to take part in next week's Children & Young People's Week events such as the Daily Mile, Tree of Life, Battle of the Bands and School Sing-a-long. Please rest assured that these activities have been thoroughly risk assessed in line with current guidelines and all events are due to place, and will be Covid-secure.

If there are any questions regarding this letter please contact Gerry Kemble, Assistant Director Schools, Gerry.kemble@walthamforest.gov.uk if they relate to Education or Public.Health@walthamforest.gov.uk if they relate to Public Health.

Yours sincerely



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