

Ask for: Public Health SPOC
Email: Public.Health@walthamforest.gov.uk
Ref: SchoolCovidAdviceJul2022
Date: 8/7/2022

Dear Headteacher,

Re: Increase in Covid-19 cases in schools and the community

I am writing with regards to the increase we are seeing in cases of Covid-19 in schools and in the local community. In line with the predictions set out at the headteacher's meetings last month, the BA5 variant has led to a rise in cases, mainly reinfections, back up to levels seen in January-March earlier this year. This rise is expected to continue through to the end of term.

Due to this rise, and questions we've received from schools, I wanted to take the opportunity to remind you of actions you can take to reduce risk to pupils and staff.

Key actions your school can take:

- Ventilation – with the warmer weather here, it will be much easier to have windows and doors open for longer, to help increase ventilation in the school; or to hold events outside where possible. In the event there is bad weather, we recommend windows are opened for short periods of time, to enable fresh air to get into rooms. If you do not have windows which open, or doors which lead directly outside, you could consider the use of HEPA filter air purifiers in these rooms to reduce the presence of Covid in the air. Please also use the CO monitors you should have been provided to help understand if the rooms are getting adequate ventilation.
- Awareness of signs and symptoms – Please ensure staff and pupils are aware of the signs and symptoms of Covid-19, and that you have continued to give clear expectations they must not come to school if they are unwell with symptoms or have tested positive.

Signs and symptoms of the current variant include: cough, fever, runny nose, sore throat, fatigue, headache, muscle pain, sneezing, and pain. Parents have expressed concerns about receiving mixed messages regarding school absences: it is important that parents are aware that they will not be penalised for keeping their children off school if they have a suspected/confirmed Covid-19 infection, even if this triggers absence thresholds.

- Vaccination – The single best protection against harm from COVID is to be fully up to date with available vaccines, and any support your school can continue to provide in promoting vaccinations to pupils, staff and parents/carers will be of help. Vaccinations reduce risk even in those who have already had COVID previously.

This guidance has not changed since our last communication in April. For your reference, we have attached the previous letter dated 20th April, which can be used as a reminder for other actions you can take to help prevent the spread of Covid in your school.

The Public Health team are here to support your school if you have any concerns about Covid-19. If you have any queries, or need to report a specific outbreak, please contact our team through Public.Health@walthamforest.gov.uk

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe McDonell'.

Joe McDonell
Director of Public Health
London Borough of Waltham Forest