

Director of Public Health

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Dear parent/carer,

You will be aware that on Monday 4 January the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown in order to reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). Full details of the latest lockdown restrictions can be found at: www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home.

We are writing to thank both you, and all our education settings, for adapting to the latest measures put in place by Government. Hertfordshire's schools, settings and colleges have done a fantastic job of following official public health guidance, helping to identify close contacts and contain infections quickly and making their premises COVID-19 secure for both students and staff. It has now, however, been decided that a national approach is needed to control transmissions, safeguard the roll out of the vaccination programme and protect both the vulnerable and our NHS. This means moving schools and colleges to remote learning for most pupils until February half-term.

We have set out below what this may mean for you. We would urge you to be understanding and sympathetic to the great challenges schools are facing in adapting at very short notice to the changes government has requested when they may have a number of staff not in school due to illness or self-isolation.

Vulnerable children, children with an education, health and care (EHC) plans or social worker

During the period of national lockdown, Government has advised schools and colleges to allow children and young people who are considered vulnerable, those with an education, health and care (EHC) plan or with a social worker to attend for face to face learning.

You can find official guidance on which children may attend at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

Children in these circumstances do not need to have a parent or carer who is a critical worker in order to access a school place

Children of critical workers who may attend school or college

In addition to vulnerable children, schools and colleges can also provide face to face learning to children of critical workers essential to the COVID-19 response and EU transition. We have seen a significant uptake of these places across Hertfordshire, with some schools unable to safely support the numbers hoping to attend. For the national lockdown to be effective, it's important that we keep the numbers attending schools and colleges as low as possible whilst allowing those who really need to be in school to have access to place.

We are reminding parents and carers that all of us, including children and young people, should stay at home unless absolutely necessary, and you should only send children into school or college if there is no way they can stay at home and learn remotely. Children with at least one parent or carer who is listed as a critical worker are eligible for a school place. It is not necessary for both parents to be critical workers. If there is an adult working at home or able to take leave from their non-critical job, this will be deemed as a safe alternative.

Please consider the needs of children who cannot safely stay at home because of their personal circumstances or additional needs and those working on the frontline in health and social care, education and in community protection that cannot work remotely when choosing whether you really need to send your child(ren) into school.

Your school or college may reasonably request simple evidence to verify the critical worker status of parents and carers, including seeing a work ID badge or pay slip or a letter from your employer. Some schools which are struggling to cope with demand may also operate a rota system and/or waiting list if they are unable to safely accommodate the number of children whose parents request places and they may ask you to consider sending your child(ren) for some days, but not every day for face to face learning.

You can find a full list of children who may attend school or college and those considered to be critical workers at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

Learning remotely

There are a wide range of approaches to remote learning that schools can adopt or mix and match. Just as we see in the classroom, learners respond better to some approaches than others. This is reflected in the Department of Education's (DfE) expectations for remote education, which requires access to high quality online and offline resources.

Schools across the county will adopt different approaches depending on their pupils and comparisons between different schools cannot easily be made. Even within schools, one year group will not necessarily receive the same offer as another.

Schools are not legally required to deliver 'live' lessons, nor is there evidence that live teaching delivers higher quality outcomes for learners. Remote learning does not need to be online or 'live' to be impactful and real-time or live teaching is not necessarily preferable to recorded lessons or work-sheets. What is vital is that it is pitched right for the learner, that the teacher feeds back on the learner's work.

What children and young people can and cannot do during the national lockdown

It's important that we remember that the rules of a national lockdown also apply to children and young people. Whilst your child(ren) might have been, up until very recently, in a large school bubble, the rules around meeting up and socialising outside of school have remained consistent in tiers 3 and 4 (rule of six, outdoors only).

The latest lockdown measures take these rules a step further, with no household mixing indoors and the opportunity for a household or individuals to meet just one other person (not household) outdoors for exercise whilst maintaining a distance.

We know it's difficult and children and young people especially get bored; however, it's vital that we all stick to these rules to protect ourselves, our family and friends and to reduce infections in our communities. The sooner we can do this, the sooner everyone can return to some sort of normality.

Vaccine roll out

The vaccine is currently being rolled out in Hertfordshire, with many of our residents aged 80 and over and our health and social care workers having already had their first vaccine.

This is welcome news, and we should be hopeful for what this means for the future, however there is a long road ahead of us and we must not drop our guard just yet, that would be counterproductive.

Sadly the longer we fail to adhere to the guidance the more the virus will circulate, the longer we will be in lockdown, the more NHS staff will be diverted from delivering the vaccination to care for the sick, and the more risk we all have of getting virus variants that will resist the vaccine.

Childcare and early years

As you will be aware, Government have decided that all early years' providers such as nurseries and childminders (including school based nurseries but not including reception years in primary schools) can remain open for face to face learning during this period of national lockdown. These settings will be facing the same challenges as schools and colleges and may ask you to consider sending in your child(ren) in for some days but not every day.

Thank you for playing your part

We would like to thank you once again for all you are doing to play your part in Hertfordshire's response to coronavirus and your support of our education settings and the wider community. Both we at the County Council, and our educators, appreciate the pressures and difficulties that a national lockdown places on you and on your children. We

know that this is a difficult time and that remote learning can be challenging, however ultimately your efforts will save many lives.

For latest updates, information and support for people affected by coronavirus visit:
www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/coronavirus

Yours sincerely



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