**Public Health Update**

**2nd December 2021**

**Reviewing Christmas events**

The Education Infection Prevention and Control (EIPC) team is receiving a large number of queries in relation to Christmas events and whether or not they can still go ahead (given the additional measures that have been introduced nationally in response to concerns over the Variant of Concern, Omicron).

In summary, our advice (and [national advice](https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2021/11/26/can-christmas-plays-nativities-and-other-festive-events-in-schools-and-nurseries-go-ahead-this-year/)) remains unchanged:

* Educational settings can plan and hold Christmas events such as nativities, carol services and trips. There is no need to cancel events at this time as a result of national Omicron guidance issued on the 29th and 30th of November. Please continue to ensure events are risk assessed and measures are put in place to minimise the spread of COVID-19. Further information can be found in the ‘[**Christmas events in educational settings (DOC 23KB)**](https://cumbria.gov.uk/elibrary/Content/Internet/537/38232/44518103848.docx)’ document on the County Council website.
* If there is a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 outbreak at your setting, please contact the EIPC team (email EducationIPC@cumbria.gov.uk), who will support you in risk assessing whether or not your event can still safely take place. If the risk assessment shows the event may cause further transmission, the public health team may advise that the event is cancelled.
* If the Public Health team identifies a local issue (e.g., spike in community cases, cases linked to Omicron) then we may advise that local events are cancelled. If this happens, we will contact any schools affected directly.
* Ultimately it is up to senior decision makers within each setting to decide whether or not events should continue, but if a public health opinion is required, please email EducationIPC@cumbria.gov.uk

**Frequently asked questions about the Omicron variant**

1. **How concerned should we be about the Omicron variant?**

In the last two weeks, a small number of cases of a new variant of COVID-19 (Omicron) have been identified both abroad and in the UK. This variant includes a large number of mutations. These are potentially biologically significant mutations, meaning that they may change the behaviour of the virus with regards to vaccines efficacy, treatments, and transmissibility. However, this is currently under investigation, and we will know more about Omicron in the coming weeks.

1. **What can we do to reduce the risk from Omicron?**

Vaccination against COVID-19 is critical to help us strengthen our defences against Omicron. Everyone who is eligible is encouraged to get their first, second or booster vaccination without delay.

Educational settings should continue to ensure that routine control measures are in place, including regular handwashing, cleaning, and ventilation.

Staff, visitors, and students in year 7 and above should wear face coverings in communal areas and on public and dedicated school transport, unless they are exempt.

All staff and secondary school aged children (who have not tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 90 days) should self-test twice-weekly with lateral flow devices. Outside of educational settings, all adults are also advised to take a lateral flow test before 'high risk' situations (such as mixing with people indoors or in crowded spaces), and before visiting someone who may be at a higher risk of developing severe illness.

Anyone who develops symptoms of COVID-19 should immediately isolate and get a PCR test.

1. **What will happen if someone is identified as a** **suspected or confirmed case of the Omicron variant of COVID-19?**

The public health advice for people with symptoms of, or a positive test result for COVID-19 remains the same. This can be found in the national [stay at home guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection#samehousehold).

People who are identified as a suspected or confirmed case of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 will be contacted to confirm their isolation period and to identify any close contacts. Anyone who is identified as a close contact must stay at home and complete a full 10-day isolation period even if they are fully vaccinated or aged under 18 years and 6 months. PCR testing will also be arranged. Further details can be found in the national [stay at home guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection#samehousehold).

1. **Are additional precautions required for visitors and peripatetic staff working in educational settings (in light of the Omicron variant)?**

All visitors and peripatetic staff should continue to take precautions against COVID-19, in line with the risk assessment in place at the educational setting and any additional measures that have been advised by the EIPC team.

This should include regular handwashing, cleaning and ensuring adequate ventilation. All staff and visitors should wear face coverings in communal areas unless they are exempt. They should also self-test twice-weekly with lateral flow devices (unless they have tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 90 days).

Everyone who is eligible is encouraged to get their first, second or booster COVID-19 vaccination without delay.

Anyone who develops symptoms of COVID-19 should immediately isolate and get a PCR test.

1. **What is the guidance for children/pupils and staff who return from overseas travel?**

The national [guidance on traveling to England from another country](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-to-england-from-another-country-during-coronavirus-covid-19) has been updated. This is a rapidly evolving situation, and the latest version of this guidance and list of red list countries should be checked regularly. The current version of this guidance is summarised below (see full guidance for exemptions).

**Staff (18 years and over) who are fully vaccinated, and children aged 5-17 (travelling from non-red list countries)**

On arrival in England, staff and children aged 5-17 must take a COVID-19 PCR test (which should have been booked prior to travel). The test can be taken any time after arrival and before the end of day 2 at the latest (the day of arrival is day 0).

Staff and pupils should isolate at home while they await their test results.

If the test result is negative, they can stop isolating. If the test result is positive or unclear, they should self-isolate for 10 full days from the date of the test. If the test result is unclear, they can choose to take another private test. If the result of that test is negative, they can stop self-isolating.

If the PCR test result is delayed, they must isolate until they receive a negative test result or until day 14 after arrival, whichever is sooner.

**Staff (18 years and over) who are not fully vaccinated (travelling from non-red list countries)**

On arrival in England, adults who are not fully vaccinated must isolate at home for 10 full days (see full guidance for exemptions). They should also take two COVID-19 PCR tests (which should have been booked prior to travel). The first test should be taken on or before day 2 and the second test on or after day 8 (the day of arrival is day 0). Further details about what to do in response to the results of these tests are set out in the [national guidance](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-to-england-from-another-country-during-coronavirus-covid-19).

**All staff (aged 18 years and over) and children aged 5-17 travelling from a red list country**

On arrival in England, all adults (even if fully vaccinated) and children aged 5 to 17 must quarantine in a managed hotel for 10 full days and take two COVID-19 tests (taken on day 2 and day 8).

**Children aged 4 and under**

Children aged 4 and under do not have to take any COVID-19 travel tests. However, they must quarantine in a managed hotel for 10 full days if travelling from a red list country.