

COMMUNITY AND HOUSING DEPARTMENT

Director: John Morgan



**Public Health
London Borough of Merton
Merton Civic Centre
London Road
Morden SM4 5DX**

Direct Line: 0208 545 4834

Date: 15th 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 to ask for your continued help in keeping us all safe over the winter and upcoming festive season.

This week the government announced 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 now include the use of face coverings in most indoor settings, compulsory working from home for those who can and certain venues and events will require you to be fully vaccinated or have proof of a negative COVID test if you are over 18 years (unless you are exempt).

Further details on the latest changes can be found on the government website [here](#).

What is the Merton situation?

Despite all of our efforts, the numbers of coronavirus cases in Merton 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 Merton which has resulted in 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. 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 Merton safe?

Get your vaccination - it is vitally important that we all take care of ourselves this winter. If, as a parent or carer, you have not had your first or second dose of COVID-19 vaccines yet, or your booster/flu jab, please don't delay. If your child has not yet taken up the vaccine offer we would encourage you to give it serious consideration. Information for young people is available at the [everythingcovid](https://www.everythingcovid.co.uk/) website.

From today people aged 18 or over can pre-book a booster dose appointment 2 months after their second and can have the booster dose 3 months after the second dose. For more information about how to book a vaccination see NHS link [here](#).

Keep testing and self-isolate if required - if you have symptoms of COVID-19, even if they are mild, take a PCR test and stay at home. If in doubt take a test. Getting a PCR test is FREE and easy. You can get a test sent to your home 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.

Close contact testing - anyone who has been identified as a close contact of someone with COVID-19 and is not legally required to self-isolate (e.g. they are fully vaccinated or aged between 5 and 18 years and 6 months), is now strongly advised to take a Lateral Flow Device test (sometimes called 'rapid tests' or LFD test) daily for 7 days or until 10 days since you last had contact with the person who tested positive.

Regular testing - We ask that you take an LFD test before you attend a gathering and keep up with regular testing. We are strongly encouraging families to continue regular LFD testing over the Christmas holidays.

LFD 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 get an assisted test or pick up home test kits from our asymptomatic testing centres at Centre Court Shopping Centre or at the Wilson Hospital in Mitcham. You can also pick them up from your local pharmacy or a Library in Merton.

If your child is in Secondary School please can you encourage them to take an LFD test in school in January at the start of the new term.

Anyone who tests positive on a lateral flow test should isolate immediately and take a PCR test to confirm they have the virus. Information on support available in Merton if you have to self-isolate is available [here](#).

By using the LFD tests everyone can help reduce the risks of COVID-19 spreading amongst friends and family and others.

Wear a face covering - it is now 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. 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. Continue to wash your hands with soap and hot water or use hand sanitiser regularly throughout the day.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dagmar Zeuner', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr Dagmar Zeuner
Director of Public Health
Dagmar.Zeuner@merton.gov.uk