

Dear Parent/Carer,

Cases of the new COVID-19 variant first identified in India (known as VOC-21APR-02 or B1.617.2) have recently been identified in Central Bedfordshire. These cases are not related to travel and include cases in children and adults in all education settings.

We are working closely with Public Health England to investigate the cases and will undertake additional testing where this is appropriate.

Evidence suggests that this variant spreads more easily than previous strains. In nearby Bedford, cases of this variant are increasing, and there has been a rapid rise in cases overall, particularly amongst children and young people.

The emergence of this new strain locally, and the speed with which it has spread in Bedford, is a reminder that we must all continue to be cautious and do what we can to control the spread of the virus.

Latest guidance from the Director of Public Health for Central Bedfordshire is that schools should continue to use all preventative measures, including face coverings, to help to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 cases in Central Bedfordshire. This change has been approved Nationally.

Around 1 in 3 people do not have symptoms of COVID-19; increased testing will help to find other cases, and to limit the spread of this disease.

To access testing please visit <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test> using the option:

'My local council or health protection team has asked me to get a test, even though I do not have symptoms' OR 'I've been in contact with someone who's tested positive for coronavirus - I found out in another way that I'm a contact (England, Wales and Scotland only)'

You can also call 119 to book a test if you do not have access to the internet.

Alternatively, local testing centres for PCR tests are available at:

- **Brewer's Hill, Dunstable** – open from 8am to 1:30pm, 7 days a week
- **Steppingley Road (old Flitwick Leisure Centre site)**, open from 8am to 1:30pm, 7 days a week
- **Girtford Bridge House, Sandy** (the former Days Inn Site). The test centre will operate on Tuesdays and Saturdays from 8am to 7pm. Parking is available at the centre
- **Astral Park, Leighton Buzzard** – open from 9am to 3pm Mondays and Thursdays only

PLEASE NOTE: EVEN IF A PCR TEST RESULT COMES BACK NEGATIVE, ALL CLOSE CONTACTS OF A POSITIVE CASE MUST CONTINUE TO SELF-ISOLATE FOR THE FULL 10-DAY PERIOD.

If anyone has had a positive PCR test for COVID-19 **within the previous 90 days**, they are likely to have developed some immunity. **Individuals are, therefore, exempt from testing by both PCR and LFD within 90 days of a positive PCR test unless they develop new symptoms.**

There are **4 key things** that you can do to help:

- 1. All identified close contacts of positive cases should self-isolate and book a PCR test as soon as possible.**

Please book at: <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test> or by calling **119**.

- 2. Continue to be vigilant for symptoms of Covid-19.**

Please be vigilant for symptoms of COVID-19 and keep your child at home if unwell. If this happens, then please self-isolate and book a PCR test as above.

- 3. Continue to participate in regular LFD testing.**

Everyone over the age of 11 in Central Bedfordshire, is encouraged to take up the offer of twice weekly testing. We have [test centres](#) across Central Bedfordshire for people to get tested, which can provide results usually within 30 minutes. You can also collect tests from [test centres](#), from [local pharmacies](#) or order tests for home delivery at: <https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests>

- 4. If you (as a parent/carer) are eligible for vaccination, please book this promptly.**

You can book your vaccination at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/> or visit the Clinical Commissioning Group website for details of drop-in sessions: <https://www.blmkccg.nhs.uk/>

We will continue to work with our education settings to ensure that they remain as safe as possible for our children, young people, and staff.

Whilst we are concerned about this new variant, there is little evidence at present to suggest it causes more severe illness or makes the vaccines less effective.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

Yours sincerely,

Central Bedfordshire Public Health

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