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Hertfordshire

Hertfordshire County Council
Public Health Service
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Dear Parents

COVID-19 CASES IN YOUNG PEOPLE

We are writing to you about the recent rise in cases of COVID-19 in young people under 20, with several outbreaks linked to young people who have attended house parties where people from more than one household have mixed, and as a result have spread the virus. We are taking a number of measures to reduce the rise in infections. But we need your help with these. If the current spread continues, it is likely that we will need to close schools with high numbers of cases for a period of time, and this risks causing disruption at a time when we wish to avoid this. Schools and colleges continue their efforts to ensure we remain COVID-19 secure.

There are **five key actions** for you and your children to take if we are to avoid this situation getting worse, which may mean some schools may have to close, along with further disruption:

1. Do not allow your children to attend, host or organise parties or gatherings which bring together a) multiple households (more than 2) or b) more than thirty people (2 households only) unless the event has been formally sanctioned by the School or Local Authority or is exempt[1];

    a. You should **only**[2] meet people you do not live within 3 types of groups:

        i. you can continue to meet in any outdoor space in a group of up to 6 people from different households
        ii. single adult households – in other words adults who live alone or with dependent children only – can continue to form an exclusive 'support bubble' with one other household
        iii. you can also meet in a group of 2 households (anyone in your support bubble counts as one household), in any location – public or private, indoors or outdoors. This does not need to be the same household each time.

[1] For example, large sporting events which are still under Government review. For more guidance, please see https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do#social-contact-and-events
[2] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/meeting-people-from-outside-your-household-from-4-july

Private parties must follow the guidance set out above. Weddings or and similar type events are allowed to go ahead with up to 30 people with Covid-19 secure planning and measures in place. Gatherings which go beyond these guidelines remain illegal unless authorised or exempt. We can and will take enforcement action on events which contravene the current regulations.

2. Wash your hands regularly with soap or use sanitiser;

3. Wear face coverings when required **ESPECIALLY** on public transport, shopping centres and shops. Enforcement action including the use of fixed penalties where people refuse to comply with these measures will be taken;

4. Maintain social distancing at all times with people outside your household (2 metres as standard, ONLY 1 metre IF you are taking additional measures like wearing face coverings.)

5. If you develop symptoms ring 119 and self-isolate immediately. The self isolation guidance is here https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection;

6. Ensure you and your children get any vaccinations for which you are eligible, especially seasonal flu vaccination. This will prevent us having outbreaks of other diseases at the same time as outbreaks of COVID-19.

House Parties and gatherings

A number of cases have been linked to events where multiple households mix. Events of over 30 people which do not fall into the categories mentioned above WHETHER indoors or outdoors without proper risk assessment or approval, **remain illegal**. We will be taking enforcement action on illegal events and this can include fixed penalties of up to £10,000 on those organising them and penalties on **everyone** attending. We ask you to do everything you can to stop house parties or events. Enforcement action can also include the seizure of sound and other equipment.

Failure to comply any Directions or Notices issued regarding such an event is a criminal offence.

Self-Isolation

One of the ways we are seeking to curb the rise in infections is by asking people who (a) test positive, (b) are symptomatic, or (c) are defined "close contacts" of people who are infected,[3] to self-isolate. The period of time varies but advice on this is attached to this letter. The majority of people have self-isolated well.

If you have been asked to self-isolate, having a negative test does **NOT** mean you can cease self-isolation. You **must** continue to self-isolate until the end of the period you were advised

[3] A list of who can be "close contacts", and guidance on this, is here.

to take or until a public health official informs you that you can end self-isolation. There are no exceptions to this and enforcement action including directions and fixed penalties can be issued to people who refuse to self-isolate. The link to the Government's Self isolation guidance is above.

We want to avoid a situation where Hertfordshire has to take more restrictive measures. We can only do this if we work together and everyone takes the measures they need to take. We ask you to help us.

Yours sincerely

Jim McManus
Director of Public Health