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Dear Parent/Carer

An important message from Vicky Head, Director of Public Health

I'm sure you are aware that the rate of COVID-19 infections in Bedford Borough is rising and is currently the third highest in England. The infection rate is highest among secondary school aged children, but rising in all age groups. The new COVID-19 variant of concern first identified in India (known as VOC-21APR-02 or B.1.617.2) is responsible for most of our infections and evidence suggests that this variant spreads more easily than previous strains. 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.

To tackle the rising cases we are working closely with Public Health England to undertake surge testing in our most affected areas, and we are working with the NHS to increase the availability of the COVID-19 vaccine.

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

There are **6 key things** you can do to help:

1. Please be cautious over the half-term week. If you are meeting with friends and family please do so outdoors where possible and avoid crowded places. If you do meet indoors then please continue to social distance, let fresh air in and wear face coverings when required to do so. Please encourage your children to do the same.
2. Please watch out for symptoms of COVID-19 in your family. If someone in your family is unwell, please keep them at home and book a PCR test at: <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test-or-by-calling-119>. Financial support to isolate is available for households with low income. Find out more at <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/covid19> or by calling 01234 718020.
3. People who have been in close contact with someone who tests positive should also self-isolate and book a PCR test as soon as possible. Please book a PCR test for all close contacts at: <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test-or-by-calling-119>. Financial support to isolate is available for households with low income. Find out more at <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/covid19> or by calling 01234 718020.

PLEASE NOTE THAT EVEN IF THE RESULT OF THAT PCR TEST IS NEGATIVE, ALL CLOSE CONTACTS WILL NEED TO CONTINUE TO ISOLATE FOR THEIR FULL 10 DAYS.

Vicky Head, Director of Public Health
Borough Hall, Cauldwell Street, Bedford MK42 9AP

4. If you live in **Kingsbrook, Cauldwell or Queens Park** wards, and have not had a positive PCR test in the previous 90 days please get a PCR test from one of our special surge testing sites. More information on surge testing locations and opening times is available at: <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/covid19>.
5. Secondary school-age students should continue with twice weekly LFD testing over the half-term week. This will help to minimise any further disruption to education once they return to school. Adults are also encouraged to take part in twice weekly LFD testing. LFD tests are available from a [range of locations](#) including local libraries, pharmacies and our testing site at the Faraday Community Centre in Cauldwell. You can also order home testing kits online at: <https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests>.
6. If you are eligible for vaccination, please book it as soon as you can. Appointments are now available for everyone aged 30 and over, and drop-in clinics are also available for over 40s getting their first doses. You can book via the [national book system](#) or by calling 119. Alternatively, Bedford Borough residents who you would like to be vaccinated at Kings House or the Guru Nanak Gurdwara can use the [local booking system](#) or call 01234 718077. More information on eligibility for the local clinics, drop-in clinics for the over 40s, and second doses is available [here](#).

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

Thank you for your ongoing support.

Yours sincerely



Vicky Head
Director of Public Health