

16th October 2020



Chief Executive

West Berkshire Council
Council Offices
Market Street Newbury
Berkshire RG14 5LD

Our Ref: nc/rab

Your Ref:

Please ask for: Nick Carter

Direct Line: 01635 519101

e-mail: nick.carter@westberks.gov.uk

Good afternoon,

A new three-tier arrangement setting out the Covid-19 escalation process was unveiled this week.

It comes at a time when the situation nationally is deteriorating, with autumn continuing to take hold and with it the second wave of the virus. Right now, here in West Berkshire we are in the medium category as is the case for much of the country. However, and the importance of this point cannot be overstated, being in the bottom rung of the ladder does not mean we can become complacent.

We've seen a significant increase in the past fortnight with more than 100 new cases and it is likely that rates will continue to rise over the coming weeks. Some of our neighbours are edging closer to the next level – high – and so we need to continue to do all we can to prevent the transmission of the virus. It is likely that the second wave of COVID-19 will last for longer and sadly result in more deaths. This will largely be dependent on the effectiveness of restrictions and whether any additional measures are put in place.

But what is it that we should be doing? One the main benefits of the new tiered approach is that we have clarity about the rules under each alert level. Put simply, under the current Medium level things will largely remain as they are but we continue to urge extra vigilance in complying with the existing measures which are:

- You should continue to wear a face covering in areas where it is required to so
- Social distancing rules must be followed – including the rule of six. This means you must not socialise in groups larger than six people, indoors or outdoors
- Work from home where you can effectively do so
- Schools and universities can remain open, as can places of worship (subject to the rule of six)
- Businesses and venues can continue to operate, in a COVID-secure manner, except for those that remain closed by law
- Certain businesses are required to ensure customers only consume food and drink while seated, and must close between 10pm and 5am
- Businesses and venues selling food for consumption off the premises can continue to do so after 10pm as long as this is through delivery service, click-and-collect or drive-through
- Weddings and funerals can go ahead with restrictions on numbers of attendees
- Exercise classes and organised sport can continue to take place outdoors, or indoors if the [rule of 6](#) is followed

It goes without saying that the next two levels, high and very high, further strengthen these measures. For example, in 'high' areas you cannot socialise outside of your household or support bubble indoors. By the time you get to 'very high' there is ban on socialising with anyone you don't live with or aren't in a bubble with, and pubs can only open as if they were a restaurant. Of course there is more to it than that but it gives you a flavour of these new arrangements.

Along with the tiered approach the Government has launched a new postcode checker which provides you with up-to-date advice for that area – whether here at home in West Berkshire or in any areas you may be travelling to. You can find it here:

<https://www.gov.uk/find-coronavirus-local-restrictions>

The point of this new three tier system is to standardise this activity and advice across the country, which this will do, and to provide some parameters about how areas move between the two settings. On this second point we await further details.

In seeking a consistent approach it should also help provide clarity as to where we can expect Central Government to step in and where we have the discretion to act on our own merits. To give one example, legislation sets out when pubs have to shut and we cannot influence that – but we do make decisions locally on whether events can go ahead. Where we act at a local level we are always mindful of any national guidance which is available and we work closely with our partners through the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum, as well as our own Local Outbreak Engagement Board. Now that we have the new three-tier response we are reviewing our own arrangements to make sure we remain ready to step up should a move to 'very high' become necessary.

As part of our local outbreak control plan we have good governance processes in place that regularly review the latest data and information on COVID-19 across the district. This involves working with partners such as Public Health England, the NHS and our neighbouring councils to monitor trends and respond to outbreaks.

As part of this collaborative work, Public Health for Berkshire has launched a website which provides a dashboard of data relating to coronavirus cases across the county. It allows you to break the information down so you can get information for West Berkshire, as well as the other five local authorities should you wish to see how we compare. It also provides the information in a number of languages and is an excellent resource which we highly recommend. You can find it here: <https://www.berkshirepublichealth.co.uk>

We will continue to share these regular updates each week to keep you informed about the work we are doing each week in an ever-changing situation. As part of our ongoing commitment to engaging with our local communities you can now sign up to receive these updates direct to your inbox each week. You can do so by visiting the website below and selecting Coronavirus Weeknotes:

<https://www.westberks.gov.uk/SignUp>

One final point today which we hope you will take away with you today, and which will help us all to reduce the transmission of coronavirus.

Wash your hands.

Cover your face.

Make space.

It's simple but effective, and something which is easy to do and which will help us all to reduce the transmission of coronavirus and to protect those we love.

Yours sincerely,



Lynne Doherty
Leader of the Council
lynne.doherty@westberks.gov.uk



Nick Carter
Chief Executive
nick.carter@westberks.gov.uk