

12th June 2021

East Berkshire Director of Public Health
Time Square
Market Street
Bracknell

Dear Parent,

Covid-19 Variants of Concern (VoCs)

As you may know from recent reports, we are experiencing a rise in COVID cases in the Slough area mainly due to the Delta Variant (formerly known as the Indian Variant). Current evidence indicates that this variant is more transmissible than the original one; in other words it passes more easily from person to person, hence the concern about the rise in cases.

We have been asked to take part in additional testing (known as “surge testing”), using a 'PCR test' which is processed in a laboratory. These tests allow Public Health England to see if there are any cases of the variant in schools, nurseries, colleges, in a business or in the community. There is currently no evidence that this variant causes more severe illness or that it makes vaccines less effective.

All schools across Slough will be taking part in the surge testing programme, but delivery will be staggered over a period of 3 weeks. Some schools will be given a higher priority due to a recent outbreak. This letter is to make you aware of the plans. In Secondary Schools and Colleges, staff and pupils will receive a test, take it home, perform the test and bring it back the next day for it to be picked up. In Primary Schools and Nurseries we will be testing staff only. Please await further communication from your child's school or College as to when this will be.

appreciate this has been an exceptionally difficult time for parents and children and we really do appreciate all the hard work that has been done in keeping the spread of this virus down. The plan is that high numbers of tests done during surge testing will mean we should start to see case rates going back down again.

Yours sincerely,



Stuart Lines
Director Public Health East Berkshire

Please see below for further information and frequently asked questions

Further information:

Information on Surge Testing: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/surge-testing-for-new-coronavirus-covid-19-variants> - GOV.UK

Information on self-isolation: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>

Frequently Asked Questions

Question	Answer
What is a PCR test and how is it performed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is self-test. A sample is collected by inserting a long swab into the back of your throat and nose.
Why aren't you using community test sites/lateral flow "rapid" tests in surge areas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Genomic sequencing, which tells us whether a positive case is a variant or not, can only be conducted using a PCR test. We will also be deploying a new technology - known as 'genotype assay testing' – to rapidly detect new COVID mutations indicating whether positive test samples contain known variants. Genotype assay testing is compatible only with PCR tests.
Many of our staff, students and parents already use rapid LFDs to test regularly. Should they continue?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes, absolutely. This continues to be a very important measure to help stop transmissions of Covid-19.
What does it mean if I get a positive test result?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A positive test means that you have COVID-19. Therefore, you will need to isolate and follow the stay at home guidance and follow the school protocols
What does it mean if I get a negative result?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A negative test result means that the virus that causes COVID-19 was not found in your sample. You can carry on as normal and do not need to isolate unless you develop symptoms.

Question	Answer
Who decides to offer surge testing in a school / college?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surge testing in a school / college will be offered if the school / college is in an area identified as having a case or cases of a Covid-19 Variant Of Concern (VOC). These areas are identified by Public Health England through their genomic sequencing of positive test results. The Local Authority Director of Public Health is responsible for deciding the exact operational response.
Will you be coming to schools/colleges to do surge testing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Packs will be sent to schools / colleges who are being asked to surge test, with clear instructions on what to do. Add more operational details here.
Our school/college is in a surge testing area. What should we do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You will be contacted [by your local authority] if your school / college is being asked to surge test.
Our school/college is close to a surge area. What should we do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If your school / college is not inside the surge test area then you will not be asked to participate directly in surge testing. However, your pupils may live in the surge testing area and / or their parents / guardians may work in the surge testing area and you may therefore wish to mention it to your pupils, via your usual communications channels with them (assemblies etc). It's important to continue to follow government guidelines for your area and to keep implementing the other measures designed to stop the spread of Covid-19, including hand washing and social distancing – as well as encouraging staff and secondary school / college pupils to continue using rapid LFD tests twice a week.
Will schools in surge testing areas close?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The same national restrictions continue to apply in areas where new variants have been identified and there are no instructions for education settings to close. This situation is being closely monitored in case more restrictions are needed. Please check with your local authority for the latest advice.