

Waltham Forest Town Hall
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14 December 2020

Dear parents, carers, and guardians,

I am writing to inform you that the situation in Waltham Forest in relation to COVID-19 is escalating at a rate that shows signs that we have entered a period of significant growth in the virus.

We now have some of the highest rates of COVID-19 anywhere in the country. In the last seven days alone, 1,307 people have tested positive. The rate of infection is at 406 people per 100 000 in the population and continuing to rise at an alarming rate.

This is a critical time and we believe that we need decisive action to control the spread of the virus in Waltham Forest.

We have been speaking with Primary and Secondary School Headteachers, and teachers Unions across the borough. With their support we are recommending that all schools move to online learning and only remain open for key worker and vulnerable children. We think that this should be done as soon as possible.

Your own child's school will notify you of their decisions and arrangements.

This is not a decision that has been taken lightly, and we recognise the disruption this will cause your children and to you. This emergency action is needed because of the high level of infection rates alongside the time of the year where we know that people are planning to get together over Christmas.

We are committed to the education and welfare of all children. Our schools have looked closely at updating their risk management processes so that we are confident children are safe during this time.

I hope that you will recognise that this decision does not mean an immediate or extended Christmas holiday. You will be informed by your child's school of the online arrangements for continued learning.

Our teaching and school staff are committed to providing the best education for the children of Waltham Forest and have shown their drive and passion throughout this challenging year. They will continue to strive for the very best for our young people.



The Council has allocated food vouchers for every school and nursery pupil on Free School Meals and the Early Years Pupil Premium to use during the Christmas holiday. School will give parents and carers access to these vouchers, but if your child is eligible and you do not receive this before the end of term please contact freeschoolmealsparentscarers@edenred.com or call 0333 400 5932.

We must do what we can to help to stop the rapid spread of the virus. We have been working with the Government to increase the amount of testing in the borough and we are especially keen for children aged 11 to 18, and their parents, carers, and guardians, to get a test.

We know that children can develop COVID-19. Whilst many have no symptoms, they are capable of spreading the infection. Information on mobile testing centres in the borough can be found on the Council's website at www.walthamforest.gov.uk/testing. You can also phone 0208 496 3000 if you need a test.

It is vital that we all continue to follow the Hands Face Space guidance – wash your hands regularly with soap, cover your face indoors in public areas, and keep a two-metre distance from others where possible. In accordance with the Government's guidance, do not mix with anyone who is not part of your household or support bubble when you are indoors.

Please keep up to date with the Council's communications and news. You can get the latest advice about the local response to COVID-19 at www.walthamforest.gov.uk/Covid-19

You can order free reusable face-masks at www.walthamforest.gov.uk/face-masks

Yours faithfully



Councillor Grace Williams
Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families