

To: All students

Date: Thursday 28 January

Subject: COVID-19 update #18: Keeping safe on campus – regular testing and new face covering guidance

Dear students,

This message is being sent urgently to all students and relates specifically to activities on campus. Please ignore this message if you are not currently living in Reading or coming to campus, or if you have recently completed your studies. Following the government's update this week about the current education attendance restrictions, we will be writing to all students next week with further information so please check your University email accounts regularly.

In light of the [national lockdown](#) earlier this month, and the risk of increased transmissibility by the new strain of COVID-19, we have carried out an extensive review of our current health and safety control measures on campus.

One of the most significant measures we can take at the moment to minimise the risk is to keep the number of people on campus to a minimum. If you are currently in Reading, please study from your current residence where possible and only use the Library and other facilities on campus if it is necessary or if you do not have access to suitable study space.

It's important to remember that the existing advice to mitigate the risk of spreading the virus is still absolutely fundamental - regular hand-washing, maintaining a distance from other people and wearing face coverings have all proved key and effective in reducing transmission, and should be continued.

For those students on campus, we wanted to share some important updates and advice.

Regular Lateral Flow Testing for all students on campus

Public Health England (PHE) have issued new guidance **strongly advising students on campus to take [a Lateral Flow Test](#) twice a week** (ideally 3 days apart) at the University SportsPark.

All students living on campus, attending programmes with face-to-face teaching, attending local placements, or using other campus facilities such as the Library or study space, are strongly recommended to use this service.

It is possible for someone to be unknowingly carrying the virus but not displaying symptoms. Testing, although not mandatory, helps to identify those individuals. Our testing facility has added extra capacity up until 11 February, when we expect further guidance from the government.

If you test positive from a Lateral Flow Test, **you must self-isolate immediately for 10 days and let us know using [our online form](#)** so we can support you and your close contacts. PHE have temporarily removed the requirement to take a confirmatory PCR test after a positive LFT result given the prevalence of the virus in England at the moment.

For further information and to book a test, [please visit Essentials](#). You can also contact the COVID-19 Support Hotline on 0118 378 5445 from 9.15am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday if you have any queries.

Updated face covering guidance

We have [updated our face covering policy](#). There are three main elements, which apply to everyone (unless you are exempt from wearing a face covering):

1. **Face coverings must be worn** in all areas on campus where they are legally required (for example, in shops, takeaway food outlets, on public transport and in places of worship).
2. **You are expected to wear a face covering** in all shared indoor spaces (or 'common areas'), including classrooms, lecture theatres, the Library, study spaces and corridors.
3. **Face coverings are recommended** to be worn at all times on campus, including outdoors where others are using the same space, to mitigate the risk of transmission when passing other people.

Face coverings are now **expected to be worn at all times in the Library and other study spaces** (including RUSU's The Study and our PC study labs). This includes when sitting at a desk, even when two metres away from others, given the risks associated with different people moving around in the same space indoors. We understand some people may find this less comfortable but our ultimate responsibility is to put in place appropriate measures to protect the health of our whole community. We have concluded that this is an important additional precaution to take at this time.

Students living in our Halls of Residence do not need to wear a face covering inside their house or flat, however it is expected that they are worn in all communal indoor areas inside Halls.

We will, of course, keep our policy under review and adjust as necessary in the coming weeks and months, in line with the wider situation.

It is important to note that some people are [exempt from wearing face coverings](#). This can be for a wide range of reasons, including hidden disabilities. If you see someone wearing a sunflower lanyard, this indicates that they have a hidden disability. However, wearing one is a personal choice and not everyone affected by a hidden disability will choose to do so. There is no requirement for someone to carry an exemption card or badge if they do not wish to do so.

Student behaviour

We would like to thank all students currently in Reading who have been following the government guidance and University safety measures to protect us all. There have, however, been a small number of recent incidents that have placed members of our community at risk.

The following rules currently apply:

- You **must not** leave your accommodation unless you are going outside for one of the [permitted reasons](#), such as essential shopping, exercise, to attend face-to-face teaching, or to utilise other study spaces if needed for your programme.
- You **must not** have visitors to your household – for those in halls, this includes people living in other flats.
- You **must not** meet outside with anyone apart from those in your household, unless for the purpose of exercise (when you can meet one other person).
- You **must** wear a face covering as set out above, including in all areas inside our Halls of Residence outside of your household area, unless you are exempt.

- You **must** always carry your student ID (Campus Card) on campus and present it to a member of staff if asked. It is a disciplinary offence to fail to provide ID or to give false details and we will take action if you attempt this.

Breaches of these guidelines are being taken very seriously, and may result in fines and/or expulsion from Halls and/or the University, in accordance with our [University disciplinary procedures](#). The Police are also empowered to issue fines and the government has recently announced [plans to increase these penalties](#) for indoor gatherings (£800 per person for parties of more than 15 people).

Whether you are on campus or studying remotely, please remember that we are here to support you. Our [recent blog post](#) included a summary of the various support services available, and you can always contact your Support Centre (or Henley Helpdesk or ISLI Admin Office) for advice, as well as your Academic Tutor for studying queries.

Do also take advantage of the very wide range of virtual activities that are taking place every day and listed on [our 'Get Together, Apart' Diary](#), including our [Science, Health and Environment Week](#) (Week 4).

Best wishes,
Paddy

Dr Patricia 'Paddy' Woodman
Director of Student Services