

To: All students

Date: 18 December

Subject: COVID update #13: Reading to enter Tier 3 restrictions from Saturday 19 December

This message is being sent urgently to all students and we recognise that this may include some who have recently completed their studies. Please ignore this message if you are not a current University of Reading student.

Dear students,

The government announced yesterday that the [‘very high’ level, or Tier 3](#), of the local COVID alert system will apply to Berkshire, where our Whiteknights and London Road campuses are located, from 00:01 on Saturday 19 December. Previously, Berkshire has been under ‘high’ or Tier 2 restrictions.

Under the government’s guidance, universities can remain open as long as safety measures are in place to minimise the spread of the virus. This email sets out some initial information about what that will mean for students and colleagues. Please also take a moment to read the full details of the [‘very high’ \(Tier 3\) alert restrictions](#) on the government website.

What is the impact on University activities in the spring term?

The move to Tier 3 will not significantly affect our activities, as set out below, although there are more major changes to rules about socialising. These changes are outlined towards the end of this email.

You will still be able to return to University after the Christmas break if you have been away, in line with [our phased return plans](#), and commuter students can still travel to and from University. However, you should try to keep your travel to a minimum and avoid public transport if you can.

All students are **strongly encouraged to book a Lateral Flow Test** when you come back to campus in January, unless you need to [self-isolate after travelling from overseas](#).

Subject to any further advice or clarification from government, we anticipate that from the start of the spring term on 11 January, we will be operating as follows:

- **Teaching**

We intend to continue with our blended approach of online and face-to-face teaching, with strict adherence to all the safety measures we already have in place. As previously announced, there will be a [phased start to face-to-face teaching in January](#).

Public Health England have expressed confidence in our approach and the transmission data available shows that teaching sessions do not present an identifiable risk for students or for colleagues.

As we have done all year, we will keep this position under review and respond if required following any new guidance from the government.

- **Library, museums and collections**

The Library will remain open for study space and click & collect.

In line with Tier 3 restrictions, our University Museums & Special Collections (UMACS) and the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) will move to a click & collect service only, with no access to collections.

- **Study Space**

Students will be able to access pre-bookable study space in the Library, as well as non-bookable space in the URS building, The Study and other locations around campus such as in Halls.

- **Student support**

Our student advice and support services will continue to be available remotely. Our reception desks will be open for drop-in queries and students can still make bookings for face-to-face appointments where needed.

- **Food, sport and recreation**

We will continue to offer take-away in our catering outlets, although there may be a reduction of some services, with some facilities moving to 'residents only' to prioritise resident students. Students on catering packages will still be able to access their catering needs.

We are planning to reopen the gym at the SportsPark in January, although group exercise classes will not continue in line with Tier 3 restrictions. Organised outdoor sport can continue, in line with guidance from sporting national governing bodies.

- **RUSU**

The Students' Union will move most of its services online, with only essential services being offered in person. Take-away service will continue in food outlets and The Study will remain open. Social activities will continue to be offered online only. The nursery will remain open.

- **Research**

Where possible, research should be conducted from home. Research students should contact their Supervisor(s) or the Graduate School with any queries about the impact of this change on their studies.

What do these new rules mean for socialising?

This announcement means that tighter restrictions will apply than previously, as follows:

- you must not meet socially indoors or in private gardens with people you do not live with, or are not in your support bubble;
- you can meet with friends or family you do not live with outdoors in [some public spaces](#), in groups of up to 6 (this includes our campus);
- restaurants, cafes, pubs, bars, and nightclubs must close with the exception of take-away and delivery services;
- other businesses, including retail shops and hairdressers, can operate in a COVID-secure way, but some may have to close early or there will be limits on numbers. Cinemas and other indoor entertainment venues will close;
- gyms and swimming pools can stay open, however group activities and classes cannot take place unless this is only with your household or support bubble;
- organised outdoor sport can take place in line with guidance from sporting national bodies;
- you can attend places of worship for services, but you cannot interact with anyone outside of your household or support bubble.

We all must stick to these rules, despite them being frustrating and difficult. In doing so, we can hope to get the case numbers down in Reading and Wokingham as quickly as possible, which will hopefully mean some of the restrictions will be eased.

The government has indicated that these tier levels will be reviewed regularly, so we will work quickly to let you know if the national or local arrangements change and adapt our guidance as needed. Please check your University email account regularly, even over the Christmas break.

Our COVID-19 support line (0118 214 7813) is open from 9am to 5pm on weekdays and 11am to 4pm on weekends, until the Christmas closure starts on Tuesday 22 December.

While the University is closed from 22 December to 4 January, the hotline will transition to an email service only. For urgent COVID-19 related questions that cannot wait until we return on 4 January (such as self-isolation support or access to testing if you have symptoms) students living in halls should contact the Halls Hotline on 0800 029 1984. Students in private accommodation should email covid-hotline@reading.ac.uk. We will check the inbox daily, apart from 24 – 26 December and 1 January, to respond to urgent queries only. The COVID-19 phone line will reopen on Monday 4 January.

I wish you all the best for the festive season.

Best wishes,
Paddy

Dr Patricia (Paddy) Woodman
Director of Student Services