

## Important update on coronavirus (COVID-19)

I am writing to update you with the latest information and advice relating to the current outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19). Please see below for detailed guidance on:

- Will exams or assessments be affected?
- With Easter holidays approaching, what should I do if I have plans to travel overseas?
- Will travel disruptions or self-isolation be considered as extenuating circumstances?
- Can I complete the rest of my studies or PhD programme remotely if I choose to return home?
- Should I wear a face mask?
- What is the university doing to minimise risk?

Our [Essentials webpages](#) are being updated regularly, so please check for latest information and guidance there. Please note in particular that the UK government has expanded its warning against all non-essential travel to the whole of Italy and now requires anyone returning from anywhere in Italy to self-isolate even if they are not displaying symptoms. We will be in direct contact with our students currently on placement in Italy to provide them with advice and support.

Although a small number of cases have been diagnosed in Berkshire, I want to reassure you that Public Health England have not advised us of any wider health implications for students at the University arising from these cases. The number of cases in the UK is low globally by comparison with the worst affected areas, and the UK government has confirmed that it is using the best available scientific evidence to inform decision-making.

We understand this may be a worrying time for you, but the UK National Health Service guidance is that it remains safe for most people to continue to go to work, school and other public places. There is currently no government advice against attending public events or gatherings. People are only advised to stay away from public places if they have to self-isolate under Public Health England direction or under instruction from a medical professional.

On the basis of this expert advice, we are continuing with all our teaching and assessment activities and other events as normal. Our major incident team, led by Deputy Vice-Chancellor Parveen Yaqoob, is continuing to monitor government advice and plan for the future eventualities. Many staff in the University are working hard behind the scenes to ensure that the University is able to react quickly to changing circumstances. Below I have outlined some of the measures we are taking. We will update you quickly if there are any significant changes in the current situation.

The best advice for all of us is to wash your hands regularly with soap and water and avoid touching your face. You can protect others by sneezing or coughing into a tissue, and disposing of the tissue responsibly. If you are worried about anything arising from the government's health advice, you should contact the [NHS helpline on 111](#) or your doctor. Please remember our [Student Welfare Team](#) is also here to offer support, including by phone and email.

Below is some specific information in response to questions we have received. Please take time to read it so that you are fully informed. This information is also on Essentials. If you have any further queries that are not covered in this email or on our [webpage](#), please contact us at [coronavirus-students@reading.ac.uk](mailto:coronavirus-students@reading.ac.uk).

Best wishes,  
Patricia

Dr Patricia Woodman  
Director of Student Services

### **When should students self-isolate?**

Public Health England (PHE) advises that anyone returning from areas classified as [Category 1](#) should take the following steps immediately, whether or not you are displaying symptoms:

- stay indoors and avoid contact with other people
- use the NHS [111 online coronavirus service to find out what to do next](#).

They also advise that those who have travelled to [Category 2 areas](#) should follow the same steps if you develop symptoms such as cough, fever or shortness of breath.

There is no need to self-isolate unless you meet these criteria or you are specifically advised to do so by a medical professional. If you think there is another reason why you should self-isolate, please contact [NHS 111](#) for advice.

It is very important that you let the University know if you are self-isolating by contacting [coronavirus-students@reading.ac.uk](mailto:coronavirus-students@reading.ac.uk). We can then provide you with the right support.

### **Will exams or assessments be affected?**

Based on the current health advice, it is our intention for all examinations and assessments to continue as planned. Our Major Incident Group is keeping the situation under review and, if we need to change the current arrangements, we will notify you as soon as possible. If you have any specific queries please contact [coronavirus-students@reading.ac.uk](mailto:coronavirus-students@reading.ac.uk).

For doctoral researchers, this includes confirmation of registration, vivas and monitoring of progress. You can also contact your School Director of Postgraduate Research Studies or the Graduate School.

### **With Easter holidays approaching, what should I do if I have personal plans to travel overseas?**

Before deciding to travel, you should carefully consider the potential impact on your return to the UK. You should be aware that there are travel disruptions in and out of COVID-19 affected regions and if the situation changes further other areas may face similar disruption. You may also face difficulties re-entering the UK.

If your travel is delayed or you are required to self-isolate on your return to the UK, this may impact on your studies, particularly if you miss teaching, assessments or exams. Make sure you read the extenuating circumstances information below. It is also possible that you may also not be able to access some University facilities, for example return to your usual room in Halls.

It is important to follow the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) advice for the country or countries you intend to visit. The UK [FCO](#) advises against **all travel** to Hubei Province, China, and defined areas of the Republic of Korea, and **all non-essential travel** to the rest of mainland China (not including Hong Kong and Macao) and the whole of Italy. You should take time to read the FCO advice and consider whether your travel is essential.

It is also important that you are familiar with the [list of areas](#) to which government self-isolation requirements apply, which is more extensive than the FCO coronavirus travel advice. This is important for the health, safety and wellbeing of everyone, including our University community, and it is the University's expectation that you will observe these requirements if they apply to you.

### **What should I do if I feel my academic performance has been impacted?**

We recognise that events around the COVID-19 virus may impact on our students in a number of ways. If you feel your academic performance has been impacted, for example due to illness or bereavement affecting someone close to you, you should complete an [Extenuating Circumstances](#) form, as well as speaking to your Academic Tutor.

You will be asked to provide evidence to support your extenuating circumstances claim, but we realise that this may be difficult. Please contact your [Support Centre, the Henley Helpdesk or the ISL Admin Office](#) for guidance on what types of evidence would be accepted for your specific situation.

Doctoral researchers should speak to your supervisor, School Director of Postgraduate Research Studies and the Doctoral Office ([dro@reading.ac.uk](mailto:dro@reading.ac.uk)).

### **Will travel disruptions or self-isolation be considered as extenuating circumstances?**

If you choose to travel to an area that is subject to an [FCO non-essential travel warning](#) OR is classified as a [Category 1](#) area by PHE at the time of your trip, and subsequently miss teaching, assessments or exams due to travel disruption or self-isolation, this will **not** be considered an extenuating circumstance unless some other factor applies (e.g. bereavement affecting someone close to you). If you feel you must travel, please contact [coronavirus-students@reading.ac.uk](mailto:coronavirus-students@reading.ac.uk) for advice on extenuating circumstances. Please check travel and health advice for the country or countries you are visiting before you travel.

We are required to monitor the attendance and engagement of students holding Tier 4 student visas. Any absence will be recorded as unauthorised and will be marked on your student record.

If travel or health advice changes during or after your travel, and you face disruption or a requirement to self-isolate, please complete an [Extenuating Circumstances](#) form, which will be considered in the usual way. You will be asked to provide evidence to support your claim.

Please contact us at [coronavirus-students@reading.ac.uk](mailto:coronavirus-students@reading.ac.uk) if you have any further queries or need any advice.

### **Can I complete the rest of my studies or PhD programme remotely if I choose to return home?**

The University is currently open and operating as normal. This means that it is our intention for all teaching, examinations and assessments to continue as planned.

There is no advice from health organisations or the UK government for students to leave the UK and travel home. Therefore, no absences will be authorised for students to miss term-time activities scheduled as part of their programme. If you choose to do this, you would not be able to claim extenuating circumstances for any teaching or assessments missed as a result of your absence unless some other extenuating circumstance applies (e.g. illness or bereavement affecting someone close to you).

We are required to monitor the attendance and engagement of students holding Tier 4 student visas. Such an absence will be recorded as unauthorised and will be marked on your student record.

Please contact us at [coronavirus-students@reading.ac.uk](mailto:coronavirus-students@reading.ac.uk) if you have any further queries or need any advice.

### **Should I wear a face mask?**

Health organisations in the UK are not currently recommending face masks for the general population to protect individuals from contracting the coronavirus. The best advice is to take standard NHS-recommended precautions to prevent the spread of colds and flu:

- wash your hands often with soap;
- avoid touching your face;
- cough or sneeze into a tissue and bin the tissue responsibly as quickly as possible.

It is important to note that in many other parts of the world it is more common to wear face masks. Some of our community may choose to wear them for a variety of reasons. This does not mean that those wearing masks are infectious or pose a risk. It is a personal choice that we should all respect. If you do choose to wear a mask, please ensure you dispose of it responsibly in a bin and wash your hands afterwards.

### **What is the university doing to minimise risk?**

The university has undertaken a wide range of measures in response to the COVID-19 global outbreak, these include:

- Contacting new students, staff and visitors before they arrive to ensure they understand the restrictions if they have travelled from a category 1 or category 2 area
- Liaising with and supporting students who are currently abroad on study/work placements
- Updating students and staff about the evolving situation and providing advice about what to do in different circumstances
- Ensuring that anyone who needs to self-isolate is supported to do this, so they do not need to have contact with other staff and students
- Following up concerns raised by students and staff about whether people should be self-isolating
- Ensuring that our cleaning regimes across campus and in halls of residence are appropriate for this situation, including ensuring we have enough cleaning materials
- Preparing facilities to allow teaching staff to deliver their teaching online should they need to self-isolate, but are well.
- Preparing contingency arrangements to minimise the chances of disruption to examinations and graduation
- Preparing contingency arrangements for other crucial services around the University (e.g. IT, Library, cafes etc).