



**Directorate for Adults & Health  
Public Health and Early Prevention**

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Dear Colleagues

**Re: Rising number of COVID-19 cases in care homes in Buckinghamshire**

I am writing to alert you to the rising numbers of care home outbreaks in Buckinghamshire. I know that you and your staff are working very hard on preventing infections within your care homes, staff and residents. We are seeing a dramatic rise in the number of cases in Buckinghamshire due to the new highly infectious variant and the majority of cases in Buckinghamshire (more than 75%) are now due to the new variant. This means we need to redouble our efforts to keep care homes safe.

The most recent data show that there was a three-fold increase in the number of cases in care homes in the first week of January compared with the previous week. Care home residents are currently accounting for approximately 1 in 5 of all COVID-19 cases in those aged 60 years or over across the county. Community infection rates in Buckinghamshire, London and the southeast are also very high. In Buckinghamshire the infection rate is now 5 times higher than it was at the beginning of December at 648 per 100,000 population. This high rate of infection and the very transmissible nature of the new variant increases the chances that staff could catch infections in the community and bring them into the home. I would therefore highlight the importance of minimising social contacts inside and outside work and following the lockdown rules.

I would also like to reiterate some of the key measures that you and your staff can take to help to stop infection entering and spreading within your care home and within the homes of staff:

- Please continue to enforce stringent infection prevention measures, including reminding your staff about the importance of frequent hand washing, consistent use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and appropriate social distancing between staff members in communal areas
- Please remind staff that they must self-isolate immediately if they develop any COVID-19 symptoms (however mild) and arrange a test
- Please continue to regularly test your asymptomatic staff and residents for COVID-19 according to the current protocols
- Please contact the local Health Protection Team (0344 225 3861) immediately if you have a suspected COVID-19 outbreak

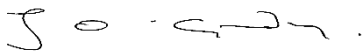
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Finally, as the NHS COVID-19 vaccination programme continues to roll out please do encourage your staff members to have the COVID-19 vaccination as soon as it is offered to them – this is absolutely vital to reduce the risk of them developing severe COVID-19 disease if they become infected with the virus.

Once vaccinated, your staff will need to continue to follow all infection prevention control measures and the national guidance to help continue to protect others. This also applies to any visitors. Even when residents, staff and, in time, visitors have been vaccinated, for now it will still be necessary for *everyone* to continue to strictly follow Covid-safer ways of working and living, as outlined above. This is because: (i) no vaccine is 100% effective, (ii) we do not yet know whether the current vaccines stops people from being infectious and passing the virus on, and (iii) we do not yet know how long the protection from the virus lasts for.

Thank you for everything you continue to do to keep residents and staff safe during these difficult times.

Best wishes



**Dr Jane O'Grady**  
Director of Public Health  
Buckinghamshire Council