

# COVID-19 Policy

Updated September 2022

## Purpose

This policy is in place to ensure that the University has clear guidelines on managing outbreaks of COVID-19 now that free community testing is no longer available and vaccination programmes have substantially reduced the severity of infection and hospitalisation resulting from COVID-19. It should be noted that the emergence of a new variant of concern is possible and the long-term health effects of COVID-19 are unknown. The University is actively working with key stakeholders to regularly review this policy and its implementation. We will always be guided by national laws and guidance, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), and the Local Authority Public Health Teams, as well as our obligation to protect, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of our staff and students.

## Scope

This policy summarises the University of Reading's arrangements for identifying and managing potential outbreaks of COVID-19 amongst staff and students at the University that might impact the University of Reading's operations.

This policy applies to all UK based activity of the University of Reading and its UK based subsidiaries, including but not limited to Thames Valley Science Park Limited and Henley Business School Limited.

The University premises are occupied by a number of tenants and licensees. These are separate organisations and data controllers, which will also need to work directly with UKHSA should the need arise. This also applies to the Reading University Student's Union (RUSU).

All actions envisaged by this policy are subject to change due to advice and guidance being received from the UK Government and UKHSA.

All overseas campuses and subsidiaries are required to put in place their own policy, which shall reflect the principles set out herein, but shall comply with local laws, restrictions and official guidelines.

This policy covers the following procedures:

- Preventative action
- Action to be taken in the event of a suspected outbreak
- Evaluation of processes and policy after an outbreak has occurred

## Preventative action

Preventative action to limit COVID-19 infection should include the following:

- Encouragement for students to register with the University Medical Group or a local GP Practice as soon as possible after enrolment.
- Vaccination in line with public health recommendations, particularly for those who are clinically vulnerable.

- Familiarisation with the symptoms of COVID-19, which may be achieved through a variety of mechanisms, including through corporate and local induction of new staff and students.
- Staying at home and avoiding contact with other people following a positive test or suspected infection, which may be linked with any of the three main symptoms- a new continuous cough, a high temperature or a loss or change to your sense of taste or smell. Nature of symptoms to be kept under review given changing nature of the virus and government guidance [www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/main-symptoms/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/main-symptoms/).
- Good hand hygiene
- Encouragement to take advantage of available forms of ventilation, including opening windows and the ability to raise concerns about poorly ventilated spaces with line managers and/or local Health and Safety Coordinators.
- Restricting lifts to one person and prioritising based on need
- Incorporation of COVID-19 into wider periodic review of public health matters, such as mumps, measles, food allergens, eating disorders, self-harm etc.

### **Action in the event of a suspected outbreak**

In the event that a line manager or a hall warden observes a high rate of absence or illness in their area which might be related to COVID-19 infection, they should report this using the online [Health & Safety incident form](#). The Health & Safety Services team will investigate the matter and make a decision as to whether to instigate a Major Incident Team (MIT), depending on the circumstances.

A COVID-19 Outbreak Management MIT, with the terms of reference and membership set out at Appendix 1, will operate in accordance with the University MIP. The role of the Outbreak MIT is to ascertain the extent and nature of the outbreak, reduce viral transmission and manage immediate communication regarding actions individuals should take and any cancellations or cessations of service or operations.

Thresholds for standing up an MIT include, but are not limited to, one or more of the following:

- A high or rapidly increasing number of suspected cases, where intervention may slow the spread;
- Staff resources depleted and/or teams experiencing pressure on services resulting in delivery of critical activities at risk, or concerns about safe running as a result of staff absences;
- Warning from UKHSA (e.g. changes in epidemiology of virus, emergence of new variants of concern, increase in COVID-19 related deaths or hospitalisation, other factors requiring multi-agency coordination and decision-making);
- Where an MIT lead considers it appropriate to do so, taking into account all the circumstances and the Major Incident Plan.

The MIT will:

- Ascertain the wider picture in terms of symptomatic cases, numbers/locations of students or members of staff via anonymised records.
- Communicate with relevant parties, which may include Student Services, Hall Wardens, Support Centre Managers, RUSU, and Heads of Schools and Functions.

The MIT may also need to consider additional measures that it deems appropriate, which could include, but are not limited to:

- Facilitating targeted testing;

- Facilitating access to vaccination if appropriate;
- Recommending reintroduction of more stringent infection control measures, which may include temporary remote working for some individuals, for example those who are clinically vulnerable or have family members who are clinically vulnerable;
- Modifying or ceasing activities;
- Cancelling events or imposing restrictions on them (e.g. reduced attendance);
- Identifying additional support for cleaning, welfare in Halls, IT for resumed working-at-home or changes in locations etc;
- Escalating as necessary decision-making to the University Executive Board;
- Establishing a team (similar to the Major Recovery Team, which operated during the pandemic) to mitigate disruption and provide alternative delivery, with input from the Risk Management and Business Continuity Officer (RMBCO);

Heads of Schools and Functions will activate local Business Continuity Plans as necessary.

### **Evaluation of processes and policy after an outbreak has occurred**

Following a local outbreak or lessons learned from dealing with cases, the COVID-19 policy will be reviewed and revised as appropriate by the RMBCO.

<b>Version</b>	<b>Keeper</b>	<b>Reviewed</b>	<b>Approved by</b>	<b>Approval Date</b>
1.2	Parveen Yaqoob, Deputy Vice- Chancellor			



## Appendix 1 MIT Membership and Terms of Reference

The role of the MIT in the event of a suspected outbreak is to ascertain the extent of the outbreak, reduce viral transmission and manage immediate communication regarding actions individuals should take and any cancellations or cessations of service.

### Membership

Chair & Deputy Chair	Parveen Yaqoob	
MITSO	Caroline Redzikowska or Louise Sharman	
Health & Safety Services	Jenny Mcgrother or Nick Bathurst	
Campus Services	XXXXXX	
Student Services	Paddy Woodman	
HR	Claire Rolstone	
Campus Commerce/ACMO	Matt White	
Corporate Communications	Vicky Pearson	
Legal Services	Julie Rowe	
RUSU	Ryan Bird & RUSU President	
RMBCO	Brett Dyson	

As per the Major Incident Plan, the MIT can call upon Subject Matter Experts at any time. It does not need to add them to its membership.

### Terms of Reference

1. Ascertain whether it is possible to confirm suspected cases of COVID-19 by testing and determine the extent of the outbreak;
2. Put in place measures to reduce viral transmission, protect the health and wellbeing of the University community;
3. Maintain awareness of law and/or instructions and guidance from relevant authorities;
4. Provide analysis and advice to UEB on potential and actual impact arising from a suspected outbreak;
5. Provide guidance on policy and communications to support the overall aims of the University's response;
6. Provide guidance on exceptional expenditure required for response;
7. Manage communications to the University in accordance.

The MIT might wish to consider setting up tactical sub-groups, for example:

- Student Support, Welfare & Academic (to include Accommodation & Catering & International)
- Estates & Infrastructure – implications and management of local building/facility closures.
- Staff Support & Welfare