

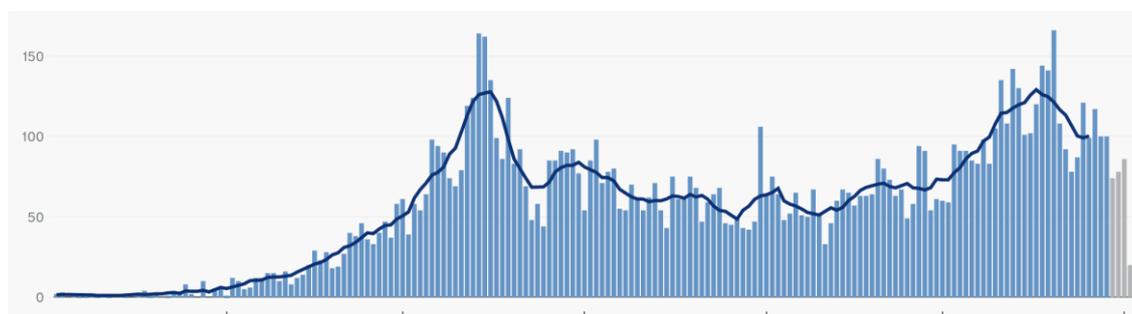
05 November 2021

Dear Parents / Carers

You may have picked up that face coverings are returning to some schools locally. We have had communication on this from Hertfordshire County Council who have made a recommendation on face masks. This advice is not currently in line with the Department for Education's advice which recommends face coverings only in outbreak situations.

We have looked at this in the context of Birchwood and reviewed the current Covid-19 data and have decided to keep the wearing of face masks as optional at the moment for the following reasons:

- The number of positive cases has been exceptionally low at Birchwood and we currently only have 7 cases out of 1430 students (0.5%)
- The vaccine uptake rate was high for students in older years – around 75% - and it is noticeable how low numbers are in these year groups now the vaccine has had time to work (only 3 students in Years 9-13)
- Year 7 and 8 students will be offered a vaccine on Wednesday 17 November and catch up of any other students can also be done at this time
- We have retained a number of Covid measures such as social and recreational bubbles, one-way systems and additional cleaning – many schools simply returned in September without these measures in place
- The data across East Herts is now falling (see graph below)
- The wearing of face masks for teachers can inhibit communication particularly when teaching from the front of the classroom



We will continue to review the data daily and if cases rise we will consult with Public Health England and revert to our published Covid Outbreak Management Plan - which includes wearing face masks.

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We are also really pleased to welcome Year 13 back to full time study from the week commencing Monday 15 November. This is such an important year for this group of students, and with infection rates as low as they are, now is the right time to get them fully prepared for their formal assessments in January. We feel this is the most effective way to support them through this process. Mr Torrance will host an assembly on Thursday 11 November, where he will explain fully how this will work.

As a student, the wearing of a face mask remains a personal decision and one which should be respected at all times.

Thank you also for persisting with those Monday and Thursday Lateral Flow Tests. We have just issued fresh supplies today and I am sure that your cooperation at home has been a significant factor in keeping our school safe and with such low infection rates.

Yours sincerely

Chris Ingate

Dr Chris Ingate
Principal