

6th October 2020

Dear Parents and students,

I want to provide you with an update regarding COVID and the college's response to the general increase in rates of community transmission.

In line with the local and national increase in cases of COVID, the last few days has witnessed an increase in confirmed cases among students who attend TRC. That total now stands at seven. **None of these cases are as a result of transmission within college.** We know this because of the extensive investigative work we undertake alongside our partner services in local health, through speaking to the individuals affected and tracking the course of the infection. We are confident that Thomas Rotherham College remains a safe environment.

What does College do in response to each incident?

- Students who have been in contact with the confirmed case receive an individual letter and are asked to self-isolate at home for 14 days. They are contacted regularly by teachers and tutors. Work is set and they are kept up to date with learning.
- As an additional precaution, the classes which the affected student attended during the period immediately prior to their testing/ becoming symptomatic are suspended for two weeks. These classes are delivered remotely.

These steps are additional to all the preparatory work we undertook in advance of September's re-opening. Y13 students will testify how different college is as a result of the many steps we have taken to make it COVID-secure. We will continue to review all provisions - as we did recently in changing our approach to the wearing of masks on site - and rule nothing out in pursuing maximising protections for our community.

A reminder and a plea

It seems inevitable that COVID will be the cause of significant disruption throughout the winter and possibly into next Spring. In terms of students' studies, research suggests that the impact of suspended classes, remote learning and self-isolation on students' final grades – while unknown – is likely to be measurable. It is critical that we do all that we can to protect students' learning from the potential impact of the virus and I would like to make this plea to the whole community as a result of an understanding of that potential impact.

Yesterday, one case resulted in 23 students being asked to self-isolate for two weeks as a precautionary measure. That is an unusually high number, but it is worth further consideration. That constitutes 46 weeks of face-to-face learning having been lost as a result of a single case. That is, in itself, a reminder of the potential impact of COVID and the need for vigilance both within and outside college.

TRC is no exception. As has become clear from an analysis of cases nationally, the causes of transmission in the cases we have seen each fall into two categories: transmission in the home through contact within the extended family group and transmission through close contact with peers from outside college in a social setting. Obviously, we understand the need for families to meet and recognise in our own lives the critical role that support from loved ones can help during challenging times like these. We also know from first-hand experience that young people – most of whom do experience COVID as a mild infection – are perhaps less guarded in their interactions with other young people. But as we face a winter that is likely to stretch our collective resources in truly unprecedented ways, we would welcome your support and the support of our whole community in doing all we can to restrict the rate of spread of the infection. Our best defence as a community is to understand the behaviours that constitute the greatest risk and, where possible, to eradicate or manage that risk. Rules on social distancing, hand hygiene, face coverings, meeting people indoors, etc. are all effective means of managing that risk and we would urge everyone to play their part as members of this community to better protect our collective health and broader well-being.

We understand that TRC has a role to play beyond the classroom in managing social transmission. Some parents and members of the community have rightly contacted the college to express concerns about large groups of students gathering outside Tescos on Moorgate Road. We have begun working with Tescos and public health agencies to address this matter. The college has communicated with students on numerous occasions to dissuade them from such public gatherings. As parents and students, you can play your part here. College provides value-for-money catering in a safe environment and we would urge all students to eat on-site, irrespective of where that food is purchased.

Additional Information

What to do if your child develops symptoms of COVID 19

If your child develops symptoms of COVID-19, they must not come to College and should remain at home for at least **10 days** from the date when their symptoms appeared. Anyone with symptoms will be eligible for testing and this can be arranged via <https://www.nhs.uk/ask-for-a-coronavirus-test> or by calling 119.

All other household members who remain well, must stay at home and not leave the house for 14 days. This includes anyone in your 'Support Bubble'.

Further information is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>

The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill.

Household members should not go to work, College or public areas and exercise should be taken within the home.

If you require help with buying groceries, other shopping or picking up medication, or walking a dog, you should ask friends or family. Alternatively, you can order your shopping online and medication by phone or online.

Household members staying at home for 14 days will greatly reduce the overall amount of infection the household could pass on to others in the community

If you are able, move any vulnerable individuals (such as the elderly and those with underlying health conditions) out of your home, to stay with friends or family for the duration of the home isolation period.

Symptoms

The most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are recent onset of:

- a new continuous cough
- a high temperature
- a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)

For most people, coronavirus (COVID-19) will be a mild illness.

If your child or anyone in the household does develop symptoms, you can seek advice from NHS 111 at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/check-if-you-have-coronavirus-symptoms/> or by phoning 111.

How to stop COVID-19 spreading

There are things you can do to help reduce the risk of you and anyone you live with getting ill with COVID-19

Do

- wash your hands with soap and water often – do this for at least 20 seconds
- use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- wash your hands as soon as you get home
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- put used tissues in the bin immediately and wash your hands afterwards

Further Information

Further information is available at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

We understand that the challenges posed by COVID are of concern to all members of our community. Please rest assured that we are continuing to monitor the situation and are working closely with Public Health England and the local authority to support you and your family in managing this situation.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Wirth', written in a cursive style.

Joel Wirth
Vice Principal