

Municipal Buildings
Church Road
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 1LD

25th January 2021.

Dear parents and carers

I am writing this letter to ask for your help and support.

Along with the rest of the country, the current picture of COVID-19 within Stockton-on-Tees is a serious one. Since May 2020 there have been over 11,000 cases of COVID-19 across the Borough, with 2,000 people admitted to hospital.

Unfortunately, since November 2020 we have seen a significant, sharp increase in the number of deaths from COVID-19, the number of admissions into hospital and the number of patients requiring ventilation while in hospital. I am writing this not to scare you, but to underline how serious our current situation is, and to ask for your help.

Every action you and your family take to reduce the number of social contacts you have makes a significant difference to breaking the transmission and spread of this terrible virus. The single most important action we can all take at this moment is to stay at home wherever possible and follow the national guidance to not leave or be outside of your home except when absolutely necessary including:

- To shop for basic necessities, for you or a vulnerable person
- Go to work if you cannot reasonably do so from home
- Exercise with your household (or support bubble) or one other person (in which case you should stay 2m apart). Exercise should be limited to once per day
- You should not travel outside your local area
- meet your support bubble or childcare bubble where necessary, but only if you are legally permitted to form one
- seek medical assistance or avoid injury, illness or risk of harm (including domestic abuse)
- attend education or childcare - for those eligible

Schools are currently limiting their attendance to vulnerable children and children of critical key workers as part of the national lockdown measures. This is an important measure to reduce as far as possible the contacts that are taking place in school settings and the spread of virus. For many vulnerable children school is a safe place for them and protects their wellbeing, and it is crucial that vulnerable children remain in school at this time. While children with at least one parent or carer who is critical worker can go to school or college, I am asking for your help to only send children in to school for critical key worker places if they absolutely cannot be kept at home, and for parents/carers to keep their children at home when they can. This will also help keep you and your family safe and reduce your chances of getting the virus.

I understand the continuing sacrifices that members our communities are all making by limiting contact with friends and family. While the roll out of the COVID-19 vaccine is an incredible step to moving the country out of the pandemic, now more than ever we all need to continue to follow the national lockdown rules to turn the tide of the virus,

Yours Sincerely



Sarah Bowman-Abouna
Director of Public Health
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Why are schools limiting attendance during the lockdown?

Limiting attendance in schools is about supporting the reduction of the overall number of social contacts in our communities. In the face of the rapidly rising numbers of cases across the country and intense pressure on the NHS, schools limiting attendance is a measure to reduce all social contacts wherever possible.

My child is struggling with lockdown, where can I go for help?

The **Young Minds** website has a range of resources to support parents and carers to talk to their children about their concerns: <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/supporting-your-child-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>.

Kooth is a free, online forum and counselling/mental health support for young people aged 11+. Visit www.kooth.com to find out more.

Minded for families is a free online educational resource on children and young people's mental health for all adults, which can support parents and carers through these exceptional circumstances. <https://mindedforfamilies.org.uk/>

I am struggling with lockdown, where can I go for help?

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council welfare support is available for those parents who may need additional support due to their circumstances during this period: <https://www.stockton.gov.uk/our-council/housing-services/welfare-assistance-for-vulnerable-customers/>.

Every Mind Matters offers advice and actions to take care of your mental health and wellbeing: www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters.

How can I reduce the chance of catching or spreading the virus in my home?

COVID-19 spreads from person to person through small droplets, tiny airborne particles and through direct contact. To reduce the chance of catching or passing on the virus to or from the people you live with, you should:

- wash your hands regularly and for at least 20 seconds
- regularly clean frequently touched surfaces
- make sure you let plenty of fresh air into your home without getting uncomfortably cold.

How can I reduce the chance of catching or spreading the virus outside of my home?

Follow the principles of 'Hands. Face. Space.'

- Hands – wash your hands regularly and for at least 20 seconds
- Face – wear a face covering in indoor settings where social distancing may be difficult e.g. supermarkets, and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet
- Space – stay 2 metres apart from people you do not live with where possible, or 1 metre with extra precautions in place (such as wearing face coverings).