

# UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX

## COVID-19 Outbreak Plan V3 January 2022

### Introduction

1. This document specifies the immediate action to take in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak at any of the University of Essex campuses.
2. A *COVID-19 Alert Procedure*<sup>1</sup> is in place should staff or students display COVID-19 symptoms.
3. Details of the measures that the University has taken to minimise the risk from COVID-19 are available in the *University of Essex COVID-19 Policy Statement*.<sup>2</sup>
4. The University has developed five operational levels with increasing levels of restriction for its activities, functions, and services. These are described in the *University's Business Continuity Plan*.<sup>3</sup>

### Definition of an outbreak (exceeding the threshold)

5. The Contingency Framework for Education and Childcare Settings<sup>4</sup> (updated August 2021) defines the threshold for considering an outbreak as 5 students or staff (or 10%), who are likely to have mixed closely and tested positive for COVID-19 within a 10-day period. The following scenarios would constitute 'mixing closely': a) students or staff in direct close contact; b) students in the same cohort; c) students living in the same accommodation block; or d) staff working in a shared office or educational group.
6. The University will liaise with Essex County Council Public Health team if they are concerned and if the thresholds above are met.
7. A case would be defined as follows:
  - Confirmed case: positive COVID-19 test result from an NHS PCR test (where COVID-19 symptoms are present) or positive COVID-19 LFT test result (where an individual is asymptomatic).
8. A close contact of a case would be defined as follows:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/directories/health-and-safety/covid19-returning-to-campus/covid-alert-procedure.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/directories/health-and-safety/covid19/policy-statement.pdf?la=en>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/directories/health-and-safety/covid19/business-continuity-plan.pdf?la=en>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-local-restrictions-in-education-and-childcare-settings>

- anyone who lives in the same household as another person who has tested positive for COVID-19
- anyone who has had face-to-face contact, including being coughed on, or who has had a face-to-face conversation within one metre with a confirmed case
- anyone who has been within 2 metres of someone for more than 15 minutes (either as a one-off contact, or added up together over one day)
- anyone who has been made aware that they have travelled in the same vehicle or plane within two metres to a person who has a positive PCR for COVID-19

## Responsibilities

9. Should the threshold for further actions be exceeded and public health advice sought, the Registrar and Secretary, as Chair of the University's COVID-19 Business Continuity Group (BCG), will recommend actions to the Vice-Chancellor, acting on behalf of the University Steering Group (USG). Timely consultation with Workplace and Union Health and Safety representatives will be undertaken.
10. The final decisions on appropriate actions will be taken by the Vice-Chancellor, following consultation with the Chair of Council. Decisions will be reported to Council. All decisions will be taken, where at all possible, in consultation with local public health colleagues.

## Actions

11. **Important note:** The University will inform Essex Contact Trace Service of **any** positive COVID-19 student or staff cases at the University. A Data Protection Impact Assessment has been undertaken with reference to this activity. Positive test notifications are managed internally via a dedicated email inbox ([covid19@essex.ac.uk](mailto:covid19@essex.ac.uk)). This is coordinated by Occupational Health. All positive test results will be reported to the Essex Contact Tracing Service ([provide.escontacttracing@nhs.net](mailto:provide.escontacttracing@nhs.net)).
12. In the event of a potential outbreak, the following actions will be taken, under the direction of BCG:
  - i. Information will be gathered as soon as possible by the University Contact Tracing Service on the positive cases, including:
    - Location(s) of cases.
    - Number of confirmed and suspected cases.
    - Onset dates of symptoms.
    - Potential number of direct close contacts.

- Potential vulnerable members of students/staff affected.

More information is available in the University's contact tracing procedures for staff and students.<sup>5</sup> These procedures are updated in line with changes in government guidance or regulatory requirements and the University guidance. They have been shared with local public health colleagues.

- ii. Public health advice will be obtained via the Department for Education by calling their helpline 0800 046 8687, option 1.
- iii. The local Test and Trace Service for Education will be contacted on 01245 904033.
- iv. The *Strategic Risk Assessment*<sup>6</sup> and local risk assessments for the affected area(s) will be reviewed to determine further control measures required, including timescales and responsibilities for implementation. Examples of further control measures to be considered by BCG with advice from PHE include:
  - Movement between levels of protection as described in the University's Business Continuity Plan (e.g., from Sustained to Enhanced or Advanced, Targeted) which may result in lockdown of areas affected by the outbreak. This could be applied to individual buildings, departments, accommodation blocks or an entire campus.
  - Application of dedicated control measures in specified areas of the University (under Targeted Protection).
  - Strengthening of communications to staff and students regarding testing, reporting, and reducing transmission risk.
  - Increasing frequency and number of locations of testing sites.
  - Consideration of mandatory face coverings masks, pending review.
  - Consideration of temporary suspension of classes that cannot take place remotely for a defined period (circuit breaker).
  - Identification of vulnerable staff and students.
  - Suspending travel between campuses.
  - Suspending field trips.
  - Limiting opening of retail and food outlets.
  - Enhanced cleaning.
  - On-line teaching.
  - Remote working.
  - Quarantining of students (including food supply, laundry, medicines and wellbeing support).
  - Identification of activities that could take place outdoors instead.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.essex.ac.uk/student/covid-19/self-isolation-support>

<sup>6</sup> [University of Essex Strategic Risk Assessment for COVID-19](#)

- v. Local public health colleagues will be assisted with contact tracing and testing within the affected area(s).
- vi. The University would seek public health advice if a student or staff member was admitted to hospital with COVID-19.
- vii. In the event of the threshold being met, it is likely that the regional Director of Public Health will request a representative from the University to attend a Public Health Incident Management team (IMT) meeting. The University will promptly support this request and work with PH colleagues to ensure that the safety of the University community is maintained.<sup>7</sup>
- viii. The University will communicate with staff and students on the actions being taken, as well as with third parties where appropriate. This will be managed by Communications and External Relations as part of usual operations.

## **Workplace Health, Safety and Wellbeing University of Essex**

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<sup>7</sup> The IMT will ensure a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the circumstances of the incident and agree, document, and ensure implementation of the control measures required to minimise the spread of infection.  
The IMT will provide support and collaboration for the setting whilst ensuring appropriate challenge and scrutiny of the evidence.  
The IMT will keep the safety of residents and staff at the centre of the meeting and provide a safe space for sharing of information and concerns.