



## **ECS - Covid Notes - Summer 2022**

### **Background**

Covid-19 restrictions have been removed in the UK but Covid-19 is still present in the population. The latest variant of Covid - Omicron - is less harmful than earlier variants but spreads more easily. A residential course consisting of pupils and staff flying in from different countries and mixing together provides an opportunity for Covid to spread. Against this, the Port Regis campus is large and spacious so we are well placed to mitigate the risk.

For normally healthy children Covid is not generally a serious threat to health. There have been a few reports of teenagers developing long Covid and there have been some other very rare more serious reactions among children. But these risks have to be balanced against the damage to mental and physical health that results from isolating and enclosing children in order to prevent the spread of the disease. Parents sending children to us are presumably aware that Covid remains a risk but think this is outweighed by the benefits of attending our course.

We need to bear in mind that children will be joining us from countries that are at different stages in their response to Covid. Some may be shocked at the absence of Covid safety measures in the UK right now. We need to show them and their parents that we are doing everything we reasonable can.

Covid is more of a risk to staff. Many will have had vaccinations though the effectiveness of these reduces over time. Others will have had Covid, perhaps more than once, which provides its own immunity. An adult contracting Covid and being off work will have consequences for the smooth running of the course.

The only way to guarantee a Covid-free course is not to run it. So in considering our response we are seeking a balance between doing what we can to reduce risk while at the same time providing a course that remains enjoyable and worthwhile for everyone.

### **General response**

Our general response is to identify 'pinch points' - areas and situations where pupils typically bunch together and which might provide an opportunity for the virus to spread - meal queues, common rooms, general assemblies, classrooms, coaches, etc. We will try to reduce the risk as follows:

**Ventilation:** We can discourage indoor groupings, prefer outdoor and well ventilated areas, ventilate rooms and other indoor space as much as possible. Be aware of security implications from leaving doors open - for example access to boarding houses. When you open doors in halls like Centenary make sure they are closed again at the end of the activity. Fire doors should not be propped open at night.

**Social spacing:** When students or staff must congregate indoors - for example in the dining room, in assembly halls and in classrooms - we should try to find ways for them to be well spaced, eg. by leaving an empty seat either side of them.

**Face masks:** We have no power to insist that anyone must wear a face mask. However as this is one of our strongest defences against the virus there are situations - such as on coaches - where we will request everyone to wear one. Face masks are doubly effective when worn by two people, so this is not a simple matter of personal choice. 'Disposable' face masks can be worn several times by resting them for 24 hours in a paper bag or by hanging them in a well-ventilated place; in this way three masks can be made to last for several days.

**Gels and handwashing:** Omicron is spread mainly through aerosols - tiny droplets in the air that people emit as they talk, laugh, cough, sneeze, etc. Hand gels and hand washing no longer offer much protection. However, many people have grown accustomed to using gels so we will provide these for those who wish. Handwashing is in any case good practice and we will continue to encourage this before meals and after the toilet.

**The main symptoms of Omicron are:**

Runny nose  
Headache  
Mild or severe fatigue  
Sneezing  
A sore throat for several days

We will enact our response in different situations as follows:

**Boarding Houses**

It will not be easy to prevent pupils from congregating in the boarding houses. When possible, hold meetings outdoors or in large, well ventilated areas. Nearly all pupils will have their own rooms, which will help reduce the spread of the virus. Advise pupils to keep their windows open to provide as much ventilation as possible. If pupils want to congregate in smaller areas such as games rooms, make sure the room is well ventilated and encourage the wearing of facemasks. Emphasise that this is not purely a matter of personal choice as when two people wear a facemask the protection for each person is doubled. Show pupils how to fit and wear a mask correctly and explain how they can 'rest' masks between use.

Be aware of security implications in your attempts to ventilate the building. Don't for example leave doors open that could be used to access the building at night. Fire doors should not be propped open at night. A well-ventilated building is more of a fire risk. Make sure pupils are well informed and practised in how to respond to the emergency alarm. A well-ventilated building in the UK is likely to be colder than the pupils are used to. Advise them to wear extra clothes and provide extra bedding if they are cold at night.

Pupils sometimes get a bit hysterical about illness. Don't assume that a number of pupils appearing to 'come down' with anything at the same time is necessarily Covid. Feeling ill can sometimes be used as an excuse by pupils who want to rest or who are feeling a bit homesick after a few days of cold or rainy weather.

However, remain alert to any pupil telling you they feel unwell. Ask them to describe their symptoms and check their temperature. Don't ask leading questions - eg. 'Have you got a sore throat?' - but instead ask open questions like 'Tell me how you are feeling.'

If you suspect that a pupil may have Covid, ask them to go and stay in their room. Make sure the room is well ventilated. Put a 'Do not disturb' sign on the door and inform the course manager. If a pupil subsequently tests positive for Covid we will move them to a part of the school where they can be cared for while they recover in quarantine. Please take the time to visit them and make sure they are otherwise OK, obviously observing your own safety in the process.

## **Excursions**

Try to avoid students bunching together while they collect pocket money and are organised into travel groups. Gather outside if possible, or in Farrington with spaced seating. On coaches, space people as separately as possible, ask everyone to wear a facemask and ask the driver to ventilate the coach.

## **Mealtimes**

The Port Regis dining room is large and we have relatively few pupils this summer, so we recommend that pupils sit zigzag (not opposite each other) with a space either side of them. We will be opening doors to provide ventilation. The meal queue is a pinch point. In good weather pupils can queue outside, collecting their food in well-regulated numbers that allow them to socially distance. In poor weather pupils can congregate under the covered areas of the courtyard, passing through the foyer to the dining room in small numbers. This will take a bit of coordination among staff. There is no staff rota for this, so when you arrive at the dining room please check with staff controlling the meal queue if they would like you to take over. If you don't have the time for this - for example if you need to get straight out to an academic meeting after breakfast - it's only polite to explain this.

## **Academic**

The same principles apply: good ventilation, using the outdoors at break times if possible, encouraging social distancing. Pupils should be free to wear facemasks during lessons if

they wish. We don't recommend that teachers wear facemasks when they are at the front of the class. You might like to when circulating, for example checking student work. Open the windows. Encourage pupils to wear extra clothing if they find the room cold. Seat pupils with a spare seat either side. This will make pair and group work more difficult. Try to find alternatives or take pupils outside the classroom into the large foyer or outside the building for pair and group work.

## **Sports**

Prefer the outdoors. If sports take place in the sports hall open all doors to provide ventilation and encourage students to socially distance - eg. while they are sitting around the side of the hall. There is no evidence that swimming pools are a Covid risk, in fact chlorine deactivates Covid in around 30 seconds. Pupils usually change in their boarding houses so there is no need to use changing rooms. Try to preserve social distancing if pupils are sitting at the side of the pool. Avoid floats that children might congregate on.

## **Social programme**

Prefer outdoor activities. Think creatively about how indoor activities might be held outside. If you must go indoor choose large rooms and provide as much ventilation as possible. Open doors to provide ventilation - but try to think about any security implications - and ensure they are closed again after everyone has left. Allow pupils to wear facemasks if they want to.

## **Travel**

We will be advising pupils to wear facemasks on the plane, at the airport and on the transfer coach. We have no power to insist on this.

## **Please help**

- By understanding the constraints under which we have to operate this summer, being flexible and keeping things in proportion. The last time we faced anything like this (swine flu) the majority of staff were brilliant and we managed fine. If you have suggestions for additional measures we can take that will not have a disproportionate impact on the course, please let us know.

With good wishes (and fingers crossed)  
Chris Etchells  
29 June 2022