

Principles for Managing SARS-CoV-2 Transmission Associated with Higher Education – endorsed by SAGE on 3/9/20

From September 2020 onwards, new Higher Education (HE) terms see the return of a large number of students and staff to these settings across the country. DfE and UUK have already provided guidance to HE, and Universities are well advanced in their plans to manage their campus and delivery of education, and many have safely resumed some research activities.

This SAGE endorsed paper is provided in the context of existing guidance and HE sector plans, and aims to supplement these by summarising the latest evidence relating to transmission associated with the resumption of HE activities from Autumn 2020, particularly the return of undergraduate and postgraduate taught students. It specifically considers how to manage transmission in the wider context of local and national interactions, and brings together up-to-date evidence and advice in a set of specific principles for SAGE to endorse, with the following question:

What principles can minimise the impact of the return of HE on local and national outbreaks, taking into account the wider impacts and complex interactions associated with HE settings?

SAGE endorsed guidance	LJMU reflection and action
<p>There is a significant risk that Higher Education (HE) could amplify local and national transmission, and this requires national oversight. It is highly likely that there will be significant outbreaks associated with HE, and asymptomatic transmission may make these harder to detect. Outbreak response requires both local plans and coordinated national oversight and decision-making.</p>	<p>LJMU have established its outbreak response which is detailed on the LJMU microsite. In addition the University has established its own test and trace system. This also has the facility to test 100 people per day. See: https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/microsites/moving-forward</p> <p>LJMU are working closely with Liverpool City Council's COVID-19 Community Outbreak Control Plan. This aims to prevent clusters, outbreaks and onward transmission by rapid identification, local testing and isolation of cases.</p> <p>Along with Liverpool's other Higher Education providers, LJMU are a member of CAMPUS Shield, working with public health experts on a co-ordinated approach to the safety of students and the communities they live in across the city.</p>
<p>It is essential to develop clear strategies for testing and tracing, with effective support to enable isolation. Universities are good locations to pilot approaches such as population case detection (PCD). Enhanced testing in response to suspected outbreaks is likely to be beneficial in detecting and preventing ongoing transmission.</p>	<p>LJMU have established its outbreak response which is detailed on the LJMU microsite. In addition the University has established its own test and trace system. This also has the facility to test 100 people per day.</p> <p>The University are in regular communication with Liverpool City Council, and the Director of Public Health regarding any local measures that may be necessary.</p>

<p>Safe provision of student education needs to be based on a hierarchy of risk. This includes reducing in-person interaction, segmentation of students and environmental controls, including mitigating aerosol transmission risk through ventilation and use of face coverings.</p>	<p>The LJMU microsite have a series of documents to manage risk. These include use of face coverings, building safety guidance, Code of Conduct, and Your Safety on campus. See:</p> <p>https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/microsites/moving-forward/information-for-students</p> <p>Estate and Facilities Management have reviewed ventilation services in all University spaces. The details are contained on a SharePoint site, and have been shared with members of ELT and the Directorate. Investment has also been made to mitigate ventilation where necessary.</p>
<p>Accommodation and social interactions are likely to be a high-risk environment for transmission to occur. Strategies to mitigate transmission risk include segmentation of students to co-locate courses or year groups, and good communication on behaviour and hygiene in household and social environments.</p>	<p>Providers have developed COVID19 safe rules for their particular accommodation. This includes safe move in procedures, safety measures within accommodation such as communal areas being closed; bookings for other spaces etc. Guidance has been developed regarding what we expect of students and links with the behavioural code.</p> <p>Students are being advised not to arrive at university if they have experienced any symptoms in the past 14 days, and are also advised not to travel if they develop symptoms once in Liverpool. Registering with a GP is also critical and referenced.</p> <p>A protocol has been developed to support this work that enforces the use of government guidelines in all areas of work. Students will self-isolate within their households and will not be moved to separate accommodation. Testing on campus will also allow for a swifter return to activity on the occasion of a negative result.</p> <p>Extensive guidance is available to students and support will be given where students have enhanced levels of vulnerability. Additional emergency accommodation has been secured to allow for some self-isolation away from households if required for health and/or wellbeing purposes. Increased provision is in place for students in partner halls focused on ensuring that students know how to access support and can achieve this in a timely manner.</p>
<p>There need to be specific strategies to consider the wider physical and mental health of students and staff, beyond COVID-19. This will include maximising the influenza vaccination programme to minimise co-infection risks and providing support to mental health programmes.</p>	<p>The LJMU microsite have details of wellbeing services for students and staff:</p> <p>Students: https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/microsites/moving-forward/information-for-students/health-and-wellbeing</p> <p>Staff: https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/microsites/moving-forward/information-for-staff/health-and-wellbeing-staff</p>

Communication strategies are a critical part of minimising transmission risks associated with HE. Guidance on how to behave is more likely to be adhered to if people understand the reasons they are asked to take certain actions, and if it is co-produced with the staff and students who will be affected by it.

LJMU are working with JMSU to develop communications to students. Student Advice and Wellbeing are the immediate point of contact to support students both in accommodation and on campus.

Accommodation providers have developed COVID19 safe rules. This includes safety measures within accommodation such as communal areas being closed, and bookings for other spaces. Guidance has been developed regarding expectations of students and links with the LJMU behavioural code. See:

<https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/microsites/moving-forward/information-for-students/accommodation>

<https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/~media/files/ljmu/microsites/moving-forward/code-of-conduct-poster.pdf>