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for Education



Public Health
England

HEI Outbreak planning: Best practice suggestions

Micro and small providers

September 2020

Context and purpose of this document

As higher education institutions reopen, we expect all providers to take all reasonable actions to minimise the risk of increased transmission of Covid-19.

The [latest guidance](#) is intended to provide a practical framework to think about what you need to do to continue, or restart, operations during the Covid-19 pandemic. A key part of this is outbreak planning, to ensure that you are prepared for a rise in cases.

The Minister of State for Universities, Michelle Donelan MP, wrote to all providers on 8 September, asking them to share existing Covid-19 outbreak plans with DfE.

Officials at the Department for Education and Public Health England have worked with Independent HE to put together this document. It is intended to help small providers with outbreak planning and contains five themes as a suggested structure for outbreak plans with practical suggestions for each theme. The suggestions have taken into account common queries providers have asked about outbreak planning.

Contents



Best practice



Illustrative examples



Example structure

Broadly, the best plans addressed five key areas



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Comms and behaviour

Clear plans to communicate with students and staff on the behaviours required to reduce transmission and respond to cases, including practical steps to keep students on campus unless directed otherwise



Decision-making

Clarity on who makes decisions, how those decisions are taken, and when they are expected to be required, e.g. trigger points combined with pre-prepared options



Managing cases

Clear and specific actions to take in the event of suspected and confirmed cases with a robust link into Test & Trace in line with guidance



Scenario planning and protocols

Differentiated plans and protocols to address each of the four scenarios laid out in the guidance, including outbreaks in the institution and the local area



Local coordination

Plans are developed in collaboration with local actors, including Directors of Public Health, local authorities, PHE local health protection teams and neighbouring institutions – and this is reflected in the plans and preparations



Guidance

Higher education: reopening buildings and campuses

Updated 10 September 2020

"All universities should have communications strategies for students and staff, which will include principles such as: do not assume that everyone understands the official guidelines, ensure the rationale for behaviours and protective measures is understood, make COVID-secure behaviours the norm, encourage an atmosphere within your institution that supports following COVID-secure behaviours, involve staff and students when creating communications, maintain consistent messaging and guidance, consider the range of cultural backgrounds when developing communications and plans"

"Providers are also responsible for ensuring that staff and students are aware of the measures and guidance in place, and take action to promote the importance of complying with these. This could include: regular communication to staff and students, signs and posters to reiterate the rules, a clear statement of expectations of student behaviour, for example a behaviour agreement, compliance with guidance. Providers should consider incentives for compliance, and disincentives for non-compliance including, in serious cases, the use of disciplinary measures."

"Unless told otherwise, in the event of additional restrictions being imposed locally during term, students should remain in their current accommodation and not return to the family home, which would increase the risk of transmitting the infection."

Best practices

- ✓ Comms strategy for staff and students cleared internally with materials drafted e.g. emails to send to students who report appropriate symptoms
 - Consider specific communications for vulnerable groups of students
- ✓ Student and staff code of conduct established to ensure the risks, symptoms, rules and reporting mechanisms are clear
 - Engage staff and students in creating the code of conduct
- ✓ Any students that move to attend your institution during term time are encouraged not to move back 'home' in the event of local restrictions. Plan communications, provide welfare, and ensure access to food and essential for these students.



Decision-making



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COVID-19 early outbreak management



Higher education

Institutions' decision-making structures and processes should be developed in light of the key actions to take in the event of a possible outbreak as outlined in the high education action card for early outbreak management published by Public Health England

Best practices

- ✓ Identify key decision makers and point(s) of contact for students, staff and external organisations. Inform PHE local health protection teams of your main Covid contact
- ✓ Identify decisions that must be escalated to external authorities. For example, in reporting to PHE local health protection teams when there is more than one confirmed case with symptoms within 14 days
- ✓ Identification of 'trigger events' tied to specific actions. For example, if a student notifies the institution of symptoms a standard e-mail is sent with advice



Managing cases



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Guidance

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"You should also ensure that you understand the NHS Test and Trace process, and how and when you should contact your local Public Health England health protection team"

"Providers should ensure that different elements of their premises, such as cafeterias, canteens or university libraries, should maintain records of those using those services in order to support NHS Test and Trace, and in line with government guidance on relevant types of provision."

"You should assist PHE health protection teams and local authorities in making risk assessments, based on your knowledge of layouts, student activities, groups, and COVID-secure measures in place, and in identifying individuals meeting the definitions of contacts, but where these contact details are not known"

Best practices

- ✓ Specific actions identified to encourage students and staff to report appropriate symptoms and how and where to get a test from if required (e.g. targeted communications)
- ✓ Actions to take in the event of student or staff symptoms clearly shown
- ✓ Data and processes to share information that may be needed by Test and Trace identified, with any data sharing concerns addressed (see example on next slide)
- ✓ Simple system for staff and students to report self isolation and positive cases to the institution and processes for this to be shared with PHE and local officials
- ✓ Offer support and wellness checks to encourage staff and students to self-isolate
- ✓ Easy to use sign-in system for building, classroom and other facilities with digital records kept for NHS Test and Trace



Managing cases: Illustrative examples



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Action tick lists



Action	Tick
Suspected case reported	
Advise the student to take a NHS approved COVID19 test (details how)	✓
Instruct the student to self-isolate until the test result is received	✓
Instruct the student to complete the on-line form which records their contact details and will activate the internal notification process	✓
If not already done so, instruct the student to advise their school(s), that they will not be attending classes in person until their self-isolation has ended	
In the event of additional guidance being required out of office hours, contact [...]	
Share additional guidance (guidance listed - e.g. anyone in household should also self isolate)	
If test is positive	
Self-isolation will continue for the student and the household bubble. Share current NHS advice (listed)	
Instruct the student to provide further details with their test result which records their contact details and will activate the internal notification process.	
For students living on campus, the student and their household will be contacted following update of the on-line form to ensure they have/are provided with food and essential items	
For students living off campus, a food and essential items support pack will be made available via the [team]	
Confirmation of the positive case will be made to Health & Safety, HR, Student Services [...] and the Incident Management Team by the Head of Incident Management or the Director of Governance & Assurance	
Notification made to Public Health England by the Head of Incident Management or the Director of Governance & Assurance	
Notification made to the Local Health Protection Team by the Head of Incident Management or the Director of Governance & Assurance	

Test and Trace



...data which may be requested in the event of a cluster

List of data held that may be shared with Test and Trace:

- Staff and student contact data
- Guest contact data
- Data held on door access systems
- Data held on attendance systems
- Data held on room / sports space booking systems
- Timetabling data
- Access to CCTV
- Data held on café cards
- Details of Covid 19 Risk Assessments for the building where the cluster of cases have been reported
- Details of employee risk assessments for the buildings where the cluster of cases have been reported.
- Details of the on line training provided to staff

This data is already held securely by [...] and would be obtained using the current information security permissions and protocols. PHE have the appropriate powers to legitimately request this data for the purposes of tracing."



Scenario planning and protocols



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Higher education: reopening buildings and campuses

Updated 10 September 2020

"Plans should cover a number of scenarios including:

- increased prevalence of infection locally that requires interventions on the whole community, including students and staff
- a large-scale outbreak that may result in substantial restrictions implemented at a local level that impact on the activities of the university
- a localised outbreak in student accommodation
- a localised outbreak involving a particular student or staff member, faculty or department"

Best practices

- ✓ Detailed plans for practical actions to be taken for each scenario applicable to you
- ✓ Plans for each of the Tiers of Restrictions relevant to the provider



Local coordination

Guidance

Higher education: reopening buildings and campuses

Updated 10 September 2020

"Providers should work with the Director of Public Health in their local authority in order to control or manage any outbreak in an integrated fashion. HE providers should agree outbreak plans with their Directors of Public Health and share the plan with DfE."

"Providers should also work alongside local authorities and other agencies to ensure that you have the right plans in place to control and manage any local outbreaks"

Best practices

- ✓ Plans which follow NHS Test and Trace and Higher Education Action Card should be sent to local Director of Public Health, and PHE local health protection teams. Highlight where your plan could not/does not follow the guidance set out in this document
- ✓ Ask your local Director of Public Health, and PHE local health protection teams to let you know if they want to have further discussion about your plan. Also ask any additional questions you have
- ✓ Register your main Covid contact with local Director of Public Health, and PHE local health protection teams to ensure you receive all local communications
- ✓ Plans to make clear what data the institution will collect and be able to provide

Illustrative plan structure

Example only, plan structures vary



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A) Context

Includes background, scope and decision-making processes

1. About this plan
2. About the University
3. Decision-making

B) Prevent

Collaborations with local institutions, mitigations, comms and behaviors

1. Collaboration
2. Safe return to campus
3. Communication plans
4. Students' Union
5. Vulnerable People

C) Contain

How cases will be managed and linking in with Test and Trace

1. Overview
2. Identification and reporting of cases
3. Role of Outbreak Response Group
4. Higher risk activities and groups

D) Manage

Scenarios, student and staff support, reviewing and updating the plan

1. Overview
2. Support and wellbeing
3. Reviewing operations following an outbreak
4. Potential scenarios
5. Development, monitoring and review of Outbreak Control Plan