

Office of the Medical Officer of Health

19-21 Broad Street | St Helier  
Jersey | JE2 3RR

Friday, 8 January 2021

Dear parents, carers and students,

### **Health Advice on the Reopening of Schools January 2021**

The Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell (STAC) has advised the Education Minister and Department of Children Young People Education and Skills that students should go back to school on Monday, 11 January 2021.

It remains the view of STAC that the safest place for children is at school and the longer children are out of school, the more detrimental it is to their physical and mental well-being, educational outcome and, as a consequence, to their life chances.

We are, however, conscious that children and young people, as well as parents, need to feel safe and have confidence when attending educational facilities and that currently on the island there is significant concern for both children and teachers.

We are also aware that there is concern, which is shared by STAC, as to the potential difference that the new variant (501Y/01) of the COVID-19 virus may have on transmission of the virus both in schools and indeed on the island as a whole.

We would also stress that there is no evidence that the new variant is any more virulent. In other words, the level of illness it causes is no worse and, therefore, it continues to pose very low levels of threat to children and young people and, indeed, to the majority of people of working age.

Furthermore, the review of school cases to date suggests that transmission in students is much more likely to have occurred in social situations, outside of school, where there are no controls for infection risk.

Investigations of the presence of the new variant has begun. So far a small number of tests have been undertaken and all these are negative for the variant.

Cases show a high likelihood that parties or household transmission where infection is passed between young people or from the parent to the child/young person are the main causes of infection.

The risk of transmission in schools is controlled through strict measures that are known to prevent the virus from spreading.

Children and young people remain at a very low risk of more severe COVID-19 disease and the safety of children, staff and their families remain the absolute priority.

Therefore, we would urge parents and carers to please follow the current gatherings and public health guidance as soon as your child leaves the school gates. We would also encourage parents and carers to continue to discuss health advice with their children.

Everyone is strongly advised to continue to follow the gatherings guidance and to avoid indoor mixing between households.

This means you should not go into other people's homes or gardens, which includes any after-school play arrangements or parties with school friends.

This is because private homes are not controlled environments unlike schools, nurseries and colleges where safety plans and risk assessments have been put in place to protect children and adults.

It is now an offence to take part in a gathering of more than 10 people outside of your home.

So, if you're meeting people outside of your home including children meeting school friends, please remember that all gatherings in outdoor public places must not exceed 10 people.

We would also remind parents and carers to keep a distance of 2 metres or more, especially when outside the school gates when dropping off or picking up children.

We still face some challenging times ahead. Of course, many students will feel excited about going back to school, but it is also normal for children to feel worried. Whatever the mix of emotions please encourage children to talk to someone that they can trust: a parent or carer; or a teacher or support worker.

We would like to thank you all for being so understanding and patient and we hope that this information helps to give you and your children the reassurance and confidence that school is a safe environment for students to study.

If you do have any concerns, please do speak directly to your school's headteacher.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ivan Muscat', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Ivan Muscat MBE

Acting Medical Officer of Health