

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

READING COVID-19 OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD

26 FEBRUARY 2021

QUESTION No. 1 in accordance with Standing Order No 36

Tony Cowling to ask the Chair of the Outbreak Engagement Board:

Ventilation

Good ventilation is of crucial importance in preventing the transmission of the virus; why haven't Reading ensured that this message was clearly presented to everyone in the borough? Please can we now ensure that this message is communicated to every business, corporation, educational establishment, shop, public indoor space, office and home? We have the opportunity to prevent a fourth wave which no one is going to want. Vaccines will not be able to prevent this from happening until late in the autumn so the message needs to be disseminated before the lockdown is eased.

Here are some links to papers re ventilation/air borne transmission

<https://academic.oup.com/cid/article/71/9/2311/5867798>

<https://first10em.com/covid-19-is-spread-by-aerosols-an-evidence-review/>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/07/why-arent-we-talking-more-about-airborne-transmission/614737/>

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/equipment-and-machinery/air-conditioning-and-ventilation.htm>

This paper is from before COVID but the same arguments apply

<https://bmcinfectdis.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12879-019-3707-y>

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Chair of the Outbreak Engagement Board):

Throughout the pandemic RBC has looked to communicate as clearly as possible to all residents in Reading the actions to take to reduce transmission of the virus. One of the three planks to our communication strategy has been to amplify national messaging for local people regarding COVID control.

I agree that good ventilation when indoors is one of the control measures that helps prevent transmission and of course no one control measure alone is sufficient to stop the spread. We have communicated about this in our COVID messaging. For example:

- We have included the importance of ventilation in messages across our channels eg multiple social media posts, on our website and in a paid digital advertising campaign
- All schools in Reading have received and acted upon this advice
- Our “High risk settings teams” talk to businesses about their COVID-19 plans and risk assessments when they phone them and visit them, and ventilation will be one of the risk mitigations they advise on.

Going forward - the role of ventilation is included in the Government's Roadmap released earlier this week and we will continue to communicate on this alongside other messaging.

From a personal perspective I can confirm that the message about ventilation was received loud and clear in at least one Reading secondary school as when they were in school before Christmas my kids moaned on a daily basis about how freezing cold they were in classes with all the windows open.

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QUESTION No. 2 in accordance with Standing Order No 36

Tony Cowling to ask the Chair of the Outbreak Engagement Board:

Super Spreading Events

What are we doing in Reading to prevent SuperSpreading events?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Chair of the Outbreak Engagement Board):

To prevent the spread of the virus in Reading we have been promoting a range of COVID control measures. This includes:

- the Hands, Face Space advice
- schools, shops and business operating in COVID secure ways
- and the various ways we have all had to limit our interaction with people we don't live with

Preventing events where one person inadvertently spreads the virus to several other people is not significantly different to this - there is no one action that stops this occurring in Reading. Rather, we all have to behave as if we are infectious and could spread the virus to others, and assume everyone we interact with could infect us.

You may be referring to unlawful gatherings where the police, working with partners including the council as well as our communities, have worked hard to prevent or stop these. There have been widely publicised very large fines that have been a result

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QUESTION No. 3 in accordance with Standing Order No 36

Tony Cowling to ask the Chair of the Outbreak Engagement Board:

Spread by Touch

How easy is it to pass COVID-19 by touching things?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Chair of the Outbreak Engagement Board):

COVID-19 is transmitted via 3 different routes:

- Respiratory droplets passing from an infected person to someone else
- Inhaling aerosols in the air generated by someone who is infectious
- Indirectly by touching contaminated objects and then one's face or mouth

Although we know that coronaviruses like COVID-19 transmit most commonly through respiratory droplets it is not possible to quantify exactly how much transmission occurs via each route. Therefore we have been focusing our COVID-19 control efforts on the measures that interrupt all 3 of these transmission routes and therefore keep residents of Reading as safe as possible.

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QUESTION No. 4 in accordance with Standing Order No 36

Tom Lake to ask the Chair of the Outbreak Engagement Board:

Isolation to Control Transmission

At the time of writing the King's College Covid Symptom Study estimates about 350 symptomatic cases of Covid-19 in Reading. Allowing for asymptomatic cases we might have 450 cases.

In countries which have successfully controlled transmission, such as Australia, South Korea, Thailand as many as 30 contacts per positive case are identified and isolated. At present that would give us around 13,500 people isolating in Reading alone.

Clearly we do not have the resources at present to support 13,500 people isolating and therefore we cannot effectively control transmission.

How many people could be effectively supported in Reading and what would be the expected number of cases in Reading such that transmission could be effectively controlled?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Chair of the Outbreak Engagement Board):

Contact tracing is an important part of the control of a range of diseases and this includes COVID-19. It is not possible to say with confidence what the exact number of cases is in Reading and the King's College researches acknowledge their figures are an estimate. Through our expansion of testing in Reading - both for those with symptoms and those without - we are picking up a greater number of our true cases now than at any stage of the pandemic so far.

You are right to focus on contact tracing because we know that as prevalence of the virus falls and as lockdown is released, the importance of contact tracing is all the greater to ensure we isolate off the virus where it still persists. That is why in Reading we have developed a local contact tracing service to pick up where the national test and trace system does not reach our residents. This service ensures we reach 90% of all cases who have tested positive and identifies their contacts that also need to isolate. This is well above the 80% target needed to ensure contact tracing is effective in reducing the spread of the virus.

And finally - in terms of supporting people to isolate - the council provides access to the isolation support payment for residents who face financial hardship if they isolate and also access to the One Reading Community Hub for those who need various forms of social support during that time. It is still the case, though, that many people will face a stark choice about whether to lose essential earnings or follow isolation and it is vitally important the government listen to calls for more resources to support isolation including more generous financial support to those who will lose out through loss of earnings that they cannot afford.

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QUESTION No. 5 in accordance with Standing Order No 36

Tom Lake to ask the Chair of the Outbreak Engagement Board:

Testing Contacts

Professor Gabriel Scally of the Independent SAGE panel convened by former Chief Scientific Adviser, Sir David King, has noted that the Covid control measures do not allow for testing the contacts of positively confirmed cases of Covid-19 for infection.

Does Reading have the resources to initiate such testing, either with the gold-standard PCR swab test or with rapid Lateral Flow tests?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Chair of the Outbreak Engagement Board):

Testing in Reading does utilise both the PCR test and the Lateral Flow Devices (LFDs). With any test, it is important to understand what the test can and cannot tell you. Whilst they both work in slightly different ways they essentially tell you if you are currently infected with the virus and therefore highly likely to be infectious to others. Neither test can tell you if you are incubating the virus after a recent exposure and are soon to become infected and contagious.

Therefore it is not possible at the moment to accurately deploy testing for contacts of cases to see if they have or haven't truly been exposed, are now incubating the virus, are about to become infectious and need to isolate. Nationally some trials are ongoing to see if testing technology can be developed to support this. Our approach in Reading is therefore to use our expanding testing resource in ways that are most effective, based on what we know at the moment about how the test works. This includes the implementation of our "key worker" testing programme which we will outline in more detail later on th