



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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## **WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT**

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**TITLE**            **Omicron variant of concern – school operations**

**DATE**            **29 November 2021**

**BY**                **Jeremy Miles MS, Minister for Education and Welsh Language**

The emergence of this new variant is a serious development in the ongoing pandemic. We have already taken swift action on international travel, alongside the other UK governments.

We are now introducing an additional measure, while we learn more about this new strain. All staff and learners in our secondary schools, colleges and universities should now wear face coverings while indoors where physical distancing cannot be maintained. Many settings are already operating on this basis, guided by their local risk assessment, but this will now become a national approach. This is a temporary, precautionary measure that will be in place for the remaining weeks of term at which point the position will be reviewed. This should come into effect in all settings as soon as possible.

Alongside this national approach to face coverings, all education settings will continue to operate with the Local Infection Control Decision Framework and the toolkit which allows them to take measures that best suit their local circumstances.

Throughout the pandemic the Welsh Government's priority has been to maximise learning and to minimise disruption for our young people. With three weeks left of term, it is vital that we ensure that learning can continue for as many learners as possible.

There remains a lot we don't know about this new variant. With this high level of uncertainty, it is right that we remain cautious while prioritising the continuation of education. It reinforces the need for everyone in Wales to get their vaccine or booster when offered, wear face coverings when necessary, and book a test if they develop symptoms.

As is often the case during the pandemic, Ministerial decisions have been needed to be taken at pace. I will be writing to schools, colleges and universities tomorrow setting out this new guidance.

We will continue to monitor the situation and encourage anyone who is eligible to take up the offer of vaccination to do so. The JCVI today published their latest advice and, in line

with the other nations of the UK, we will begin operationalising this advice as quickly and as safely as possible. Staff and secondary learners should also make full use of the offer of LFT testing and follow the latest public health advice.