

***From Oxfordshire County Council Press Release 30th
December 2020***

Keep to Tier 4 disciplines in 2021 as cases continue to rise

Steep rises in COVID-19 cases in Oxfordshire have continued with people being strongly urged enter the New Year strictly abiding by the new tier 4 level of restrictions that came in to force on Boxing Day.

Tier 4 is the highest alert level in the national four-tier system, and it means that Oxfordshire residents must stay at home, except for a limited number of purposes. These include essential work that cannot be done from home, buying food, taking exercise, or getting medical treatment. In tier 4, you cannot meet other people socially indoors, unless you live with them or are part of a support bubble.

Ansaf Azhar, Oxfordshire County Council's Director for Public Health, said: "We have had some good news with the new Oxford vaccine being approved and we know that a number of people in Oxfordshire have now begun the process of being vaccinated. However we cannot allow this to tempt us in to relaxing – we still have tough Winter weeks ahead of us before the vaccines will start to have an impact.

"We know that the new variant of COVID-19 spreads extremely quickly and these rules were applied for our own safety and protection. The numbers of cases across the county have risen very steeply and we have also seen sharp rises in hospital admissions.

"Viruses always thrive in Winter and we can clearly see how aggressively COVID-19 can spread if we let our guard down even marginally. We have seen during 2020 the damage that this virus can do when people are in close contact with each other. The new variant is significantly more transmissible and is becoming the dominant strain across the country – more places have now joined Oxfordshire and

our neighbouring areas in Tier 4.

“Unless we all take personal responsibility as individuals and families in the early weeks of 2021, we will create a deeply deteriorating situation in January. This means putting even more pressure on our NHS at its busiest time of year.

“I continue to urge everyone to adhere to the new tier 4 rules and to take every single precaution. We need to protect ourselves, our communities our families and our work colleagues in the coming weeks before the vaccine is widely enough in circulation to begin to have an effect. Please do not let your guard slip.”

Current cases

The latest data shows that the virus is continuing to spread rapidly in the county. In the past 7 days, cases across the county have increased by 27 per cent to 2,126, with rises seen across all districts. The weekly rate currently stands at 338.2 per 100,000. The rise is particularly concerning among the over 60s, where cases are continuing to rise in all parts of the county. Hospital admissions are increasing rapidly as a result.

The highest rate in Oxfordshire is in Cherwell which stands at 475.7 cases per 100,000.

What are the tier 4 rules?

- Stay at home, except for permitted reasons. This includes shopping for food and other essentials, exercise, education, childcare, collecting prescriptions, medical appointments, essential work, and to attend a place of worship.
- Everyone who can work from home should do so.
- You cannot meet other people indoors or in a private

- garden, unless you live with them or they are part of your support bubble.
- You can exercise or meet in a public outdoor place with people you live with or your support bubble (or as part of a childcare bubble), or with one other person at a safe social distance.
 - You must not travel to other areas, other than for legally permitted reasons, to help slow the spread of COVID-19.
 - Shops selling non-essential goods and market stalls not selling food must close.
 - Cafes, restaurants, bars and pubs must close but they can serve takeaways, click and collect and delivery orders.
 - Personal care, hair and beauty salons must close, as should tattoo, massage and spa venues.
 - Entertainment venues, indoor attractions and leisure facilities must close.
 - Clinically extremely vulnerable people are advised to stay at home as much as possible, except to go outdoors for exercise or to attend health appointments. If they cannot work from home, they are advised not to go to work and claim any support where eligible.

Further information can be found at www.gov.uk/guidance/tier-4-stay-at-home

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Libraries and cultural services

The Oxfordshire Museum and Oxfordshire History Centre have closed. The county's libraries will also close but some will provide a limited number of services, including IT access, which must be booked, online services, home library visits and click and collect.

Registration Services

In line with national guidance the county council's Registration Service is only conducting wedding or civil partnership ceremonies in exceptional circumstances such as the illness of a couple or member of family due to attend ceremony. This includes a military deployment at short notice, life threatening surgery or debilitating illness as well as for couples where one of them is seriously ill and not expected to recover.