

Omicron variant FAQs - December 2021

From email from Corporate 16 December 2021

Please note [This link provides a comprehensive overview of Camden's procedure for managing staff COVID cases.docx \(sharepoint.com\)](#) Including what to do if a member of your team has tested positive

What are the symptoms of Omicron? The symptoms of Omicron vary from Delta. Omicron appears to be indicated by sneezing, a 'scratchy throat', runny nose, runny eyes, head ache and chills or fever, all very similar to a head cold. If you have any head cold type symptoms, please do an LFT.

Do LFTs pick up the Omicron variant? Yes, the data shows LFTs are really effective in picking up this new strain. Omicron data seems to show a really short period [24-28 hours] between becoming infected and infectious and symptomatic. LFTs will be really important in picking up infection rates going forward as they are so effective between detecting infection and being infectious. Regular testing is key.

What do I do if a member of my team develops Covid symptoms? Staff should notify you, their line manager, as soon as possible. They should stay at home / go home immediately and do a PCR test as soon as possible. Use this link for more information: [What to do if a member of your team develops covid symptoms](#)

What do I do if I test positive? You must self isolate for 10 days. You should record your positive result on Oracle, even if you are not ill and can work, <https://lbcamden.sharepoint.com/sites/Essentials-News/SitePages/Important-%E2%80%93-requirement-to-Record-COVID-Absence-in-Oracle.aspx>

How to report a Covid-19 related case or absence It's important that we know straight away if someone has a Covid-19 confirmation and or related absence: we get additional and earlier PH advice (i.e. earlier than Track and Trace), we arrange additional cleaning to minimise transmission risk, and we need to know the prevalence of transmission within our workforce. For more information please refer to the [procedure for managing staff Covid cases](#).

What should I do if I am a close contact of someone who tests positive for Covid?

- If you have had both doses of the vaccine with the second dose at least two weeks before your last contact with the positive case, then you do not need to self-isolate but should take daily LFTs for seven days.

- If you are not fully vaccinated then you will need to self-isolate for 10 days. If any LFT result is positive must follow it up with a PCR. These rules are changing rapidly. Check Government website regularly for up-to-date guidance.

Can we walk into a vaccination site for a booster? This will be different in different areas. Please check your local area for guidance but there are a range of walk-in centres including pharmacies and walk-in clinics; go to our website if in Camden and it will tell you the nearest place you can go. If you are not resident in Camden you can search via the Government website [here](#). We know that since the Government announcement there have been queues but over the next few weeks there will be a significant increase and booster capacity.

If I've had Covid and have been double jabbed, should I still get the booster? Yes. Evidence shows that the booster and the double primary dose is highly effective in our immune response. There is also increasing research to show that if you've had the primary vaccine and the booster you are less likely to develop long covid, it can also reduce covid symptoms.

Do staff need to tell us if they have been vaccinated or not? The only staff that have to tell us by law are those registered with CQC locations. This will be extended from April. We are asking individuals to tell us if they have been vaccinated as part of the 1:1 risk assessment process. Employees are not obliged to tell us, but we are asking so we can mitigate risk. We know unvaccinated people are at a much higher level of risk than vaccinated people.

We are told Omicron is more transmissible; as well as the vaccine programme what else can we do to reduce our risk of infection?: Aside from wearing face coverings, washing hands, and social distancing one of the main things you can do is avoid crowded places - especially where there is limited ventilation and where social distancing is difficult. We know that socialising in pubs, clubs, and in homes has been driving infection rates up recently. Workplaces including Camden have a lot of measures in place and we haven't seen a lot of workplace outbreaks.

I've heard that there is a shortage of LFTs, will there be sufficient supply at our buildings? Yes, but we ask that you only take one box to ensure we have enough for everyone.

If I have unvaccinated staff who now choose to get vaccinated can they just get the booster? Unvaccinated staff who want to get the vaccine should make sure they get the primary course of two doses before the booster. Vaccine sites are arranging for people who have not been vaccinated at all to be prioritised if they decide they now want to be vaccinated.

Are the daily LFT tests mandatory for staff? If you are coming into one of our buildings you should be taking an LFT; we cannot mandate this but it is a reasonable management request

and we want to make clear that we have a responsibility to keep ourselves, our teams, and our residents safe - LFT testing is one of the best ways we can do this.

Following the Government Briefing on the 12th December what is Camden's position?

Following the government announcement last week our position is that for services this will not result in many changes to how we are currently working. This is not a national lockdown (e.g. non-essential shops and entertainment venues remain open) so we do not envisage changing the levels of service we currently offer to our residents. If your staff can work from home they should do so if it doesn't disrupt business and service delivery. If staff must come in we are committed to maintaining highest safety levels. Working arrangements for teams and services will look different for each Directorate depending on need and service requirements.

What Business Continuity planning can we do? Business Continuity is key: we want to avoid whole teams testing positive and transmitting infection between each other. We need you to be mindful of this now, in the build up to Christmas, and in January moving into February; e.g. if the priority is face-to-face visits we need to ensure we can still do this - that whole teams don't go off at the same time. Evidence is showing that Omicron spreads more rapidly than other variants. There is a risk that we will see more staff absences so we are asking all managers to consider ways to minimise transmission. We need you to plan for this and make necessary arrangements. For example:

- Consider co-horting teams (i.e. group A and group B) so whole teams are not mixing.
- Reducing the number of face-to-face team meetings and holding these as hybrid or virtual meetings.
- Rotate those who come into the office
- Are Christmas get togethers necessary? Can they be smaller? Done differently? Can you plan for something face to face in the Spring instead?
- Think about what else could you do.

Is the Council advising that we cancel Christmas Parties? We have taken the decision not to send any communications out to suggest people can't have their Christmas parties however we are saying you need to think carefully about whether getting your whole team together in this climate is the right thing to do. You are advised to think about Business Continuity (we don't want whole teams being unwell at the same time), so think about having something outdoors, in a well-spaced environment, or consider having it next year when things hopefully will have settled down.

If you have Covid what is the length of time before you can get your booster? The current guidance is to wait 30 days from your positive Covid result

Can I still come into our buildings? Yes, if people want or need to come in, they can do. You can socially distance as there is lots of space, please ensure you are taking all of the precautions asked of you e.g. LFT before you come in, hand washing when you arrive, use of face coverings, socially distance, think about coming in off peak, etc.

Over and above our core covid safe measures what else are we recommending to keep staff safe in our buildings? If you need to be in our buildings over coming weeks we advise the following:

- If you need to hold a face-to-face meeting, please hold it in our larger break out spaces, or a larger room so that you can socially distance. If this isn't possible, please wear face coverings during the meeting.
- We are advising staff not to gather in large groups and will be reviewing external meetings carefully to see whether they need to continue to take place. These will be subject to approval from Covid Secure Group (contact Darren Williams, Yvonne Browne or Karly Henne for more info) and Risk Assessment sign off.
- If teams must meet in our buildings aim for these to be hybrid meetings where some of the team are face-to-face and some are working from home. Rotate this so different people come in on different days
- Public health advice still says that the best way to protect yourself and those around you is to get vaccinated and have your booster dose.

Are we going back to Priority groups and fixed desk arrangements? No, not at this time. There is plenty of space to socially distance and sit where you want / need to.

Are we reducing essential services to residents? No. We are not in a lockdown situation as we were last year. We need to ensure we are keeping staff safe if they are in frontline services not reduce our services to residents. We are not in the same situation as last year: we have the vaccination programme, we know what we are dealing with now in terms of the virus and we also know so much more about the impact of loneliness, of isolation, and the impact on lockdown, so we want to take a much more balanced approach.

What is the current position on Risk assessments? All teams and services should have an up-to-date risk assessment. We want you to keep having conversations with those members in our teams who are at greater risk and unvaccinated staff so that we can take the appropriate measures and precautions. Our current position is:

- All services must do a risk assessment if they are planning to return to our buildings and if they are planning to hold events or large meetings. Note: the service level risk assessment will be fairly standard for most office-based services but there may be particular details for services which need to go out and about (e.g. legal attending court etc.) that should be thought through. *Here is the link to [the service risk assessment](#)*
- Whenever any services return to our buildings they are asked to refer to [Health and Safety Guidance](#) which sets out what you need to do, how and when.
- Individual risk assessments are for those staff who are considered vulnerable to Covid, note the assessment has changed from what it was at the beginning of the pandemic and now mainly focuses on whether people have been fully vaccinated or not and how to take mitigating actions if needed. *This is the link to [the individual risk assessment](#)*