COVID-19

Going home safely at the end of term

A guide for students
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However, COVID 19 is highly infectious and unfortunately, it can spread very quickly especially to the people you live with. We also know that some people can get very unwell, especially those who are older or who have underlying health conditions. As a student, you have a crucial role to play in preventing the spread of coronavirus, protecting family members, friends and those at much greater risk.

As a student, if you have been living with and socialising with other students, you are more likely to be exposed to and contract COVID 19. However, this may vary depending on where you go to university. Fortunately, the majority of students will have mild symptoms and recover quickly. This is because most students are young, fit and healthy.

We don’t want people to be worried unnecessarily and we know that some universities in Wales have very low numbers of students who are positive with COVID 19. However, we also know that some people, and more frequently young people, will have COVID 19 and have no symptoms at all. This is known as an asymptomatic case and is particularly worrying as if you don’t know you have the virus you’re unable to take steps to prevent passing it on to other people that you live with and come into contact with.

So it will be really important that as part of deciding if and when to go home for the winter break you make sure you understand both the risks that you might pose to others, the vulnerability of the household you will go to and the risks involved with your travel options. The good news is in each of these areas you have both the time and opportunity to understand the risks and take steps to reduce them.

We don’t want you to get caught out if you test positive, or one of your close contact does, as this will mean you will have to remain in isolation in your term time accommodation. We want to help you make sure that this doesn’t mean that you would not be able to go home for the Christmas holiday.

So it will be important that before you think about returning home you plan ahead and think about risk.
The most important person in the process for getting you home and keeping the people back home safe is you. How you choose to behave will determine the risks you pose to others and how you may impact the people around you.

We have all made huge changes to the way we live our lives and we know that since the first lockdown in March, it’s been a particularly difficult time for students. However, we also know that students have played their part and self-isolated when they have been asked to do so and on the whole followed the range of other COVID 19 rules. Your collective efforts have brought the number of infections in the student population down and to get you home for the winter break we need to keep it that way.

We know your university experience this year has been very different from your expectations and you’ve missed out on many of the social aspects of university life. But in doing so you have helped to keep the virus under control, reduced the risk of catching and spreading the virus and this will certainly have saved lives.

Most importantly, **avoid large gatherings or house parties** - these types of events are against the law and significantly increase your risk of catching COVID 19 and increase the risk of COVID 19 spreading quickly between you and your friends.

Remember these things are about keeping the people you love and care for safe from the risk of COVID 19. This is one Christmas and let’s hope we’ll all stay safe and well and have many more ‘normal’ holidays to look forward to in the future. We have produced a useful tool that will help you to decide on your own personal risk.

We know you have a strong desire to socialise but it is this activity which gives rise to the risks and whilst we know it’s a big ask we need everyone to continue in their efforts to live their lives as safely as possible. To reduce risk you should reduce your contact with others as much as possible. Reduce the number of people you meet and keep to the same small group if you can.

We know it is safer to meet up outdoors as the virus doesn’t last as long and air flow and ventilation reduce the risk of coming into contact with Coronavirus droplets in the air.

We also know that people follow the rules in public better than in their private homes. That is why you should only meet people you do not live with outside your home and outdoors if possible. If you meet indoors, arrange to meet in a public space as you are not allowed to meet in **private homes or gardens**, avoid busy places and check for good ventilation. Remember only arrange to meet a maximum of 3 other people if you don’t live with them. See the guidance on **meeting others**.

If you remember to think carefully you will be reducing your risk of catching or spreading COVID 19 whilst still having some time with friends before the end of term.
VOLUNTARY PERIOD OF TAKING EXTRA CARE

We know that reducing all contact may not be possible for everyone, but if you are worried about someone back home who is at increased risk of serious implications if they catch COVID-19, you may want to think about a voluntary period of reduced contact similar to a period of self-isolation.

Universities in Wales have agreed to move the majority of in-person teaching to online by 8th December.

This means you will be able to undertake a period of laying low and reducing contacts for 14 days before Christmas without missing out on your education.

Laying low means taking extra care; so being super vigilant and COVID-19 compliant by voluntarily reducing social contact, going out only for essential reasons and exercise.

This is different from the requirement to self-isolate for a period of 10 days if you test positive or for 14 days if you are a close contact, which are required by law.

We recommend if you know your behaviour has been risky, because you’ve been to a party or got together with lots of different people in your accommodation, and you’re worried about the vulnerability of those who are at home then, you should lay low at your term time address before travelling.

If however you know you are low risk, because you have been responsible, not had a lot of contact with other people, you’ve taken extra care and you have had a negative asymptomatic test result, it may be better for you to travel home and continue taking care once you are at home.

If you can do this for 14 days then that is what you should do. If you think this will be too hard, give it a go and set a target of 10 days to start with.
Lay low at home

If you choose to travel home and undertake a period of laying low or taking extra care to reduce contacts, then you can. If you decide to go home and lay low, you should try to travel before the 9th December.

Remember you will need to be responsible before you go home to reduce the risk of unknowingly taking COVID 19 home with you.

To minimise the risk of passing COVID 19 to family members at home a period of laying low at home could mean:

- stopping contact with others – don’t meet up with anyone outside of your household;
- stay home and avoid going out other than for essential reasons and exercise;
- stay away from busy places and try to avoid going to places like shops if you can;
- keep social distance in your household (no hugs or kisses for now);
- wear a face covering if you are in a room with someone else in your household;
- if you can, limit the time you spend in the same room with others in your household [and keep periods of close contact (within 2 meters) to below 15 minutes];
- try and spend time outdoors with others in your household – go for a socially distanced walk;
- keep windows open for good ventilation;
- keep social distance in your household;
- wear a face covering if you use shared areas in your household and ask others to do the same;
- try and use a different bathroom if possible or make sure you clean the bathroom before and after you use it;
- don’t share towels, cutlery, cups, glasses etc;
- wipe down high touch surfaces (door handles, light switches) regularly.

Lay low at your term time address

If you are worried about passing COVID 19 to someone at home, especially if they are in a high risk category, you may decide to stay in your term time address to undertake a period of laying low. This may mean you will be travelling home after 9th December.

This is what laying low at your term time address could mean:

- stop contact with others;
- speak to the people you live with, tell them you are taking extra care and ask them to be responsible too;
- stay home and avoid going out other than for essential reasons and exercise;
- stay away from busy places and try to avoid going to places like shops if you can;
- avoid shared areas in your household, spend as little time as possible in the shared kitchen and avoid using any shared recreational areas;
- keep windows open for good ventilation especially when using shared areas of the household;
- keep social distance in shared areas in your household;
- wear a face mask if you use shared areas in your household and ask others to do the same;
- try and use a different bathroom if possible or make sure you clean the bathroom before and after you use it;
- don’t share towels, cutlery, cups, glasses etc.;
- let someone know you are laying low and try and schedule a regular virtual chat with someone you trust. If you have trouble with finding someone, speak to your student services team as they will be able to help.

If you decide to lay low at your term time address you should arrange to travel home directly from your term time address after your period of laying low. Don’t be tempted to meet a few friends just before you travel as this will put all your efforts at risk.

You can also opt to get an asymptomatic test before you travel. You should get an asymptomatic test more than once in the period while you remain at university as this will give you a good indication of whether you are infected with COVID 19.
A person who is a close contact of a person who tests positive, must self-isolate for 14 days from the date of the test. Even if you have a test and it is negative you must still self-isolate for 14 days. This is because you are close contact of someone who has COVID 19 and the virus can take time to show in your system.

A close contact could be the people you live with, someone you have physical contact with, someone you are physically close to indoors [someone you spend more than 15 minutes with indoors,] or someone you travel in a vehicle with (including sitting by a stranger on a bus or train).

That’s fine, remember this is about making responsible choices that support you to think about what works for you to keep you, your family and friends safe.

**What is the risk of not going home by 9th December?**

The more people you see after 9th December the more risk there is of you not being able to travel home for Christmas.

If you or a close contact develop symptoms of COVID 19 you will be required by law to complete a period of self-isolation. This may be at your term time address, if you haven’t already gone home, before returning home for Christmas. Unless you have very specific medical or care needs that mean it would not be safe for you to do so.

However, if you already travelled home before you developed symptoms or were contacted by Test, Trace Protect and asked to self-isolate as a close contact, you will need to complete your period of self-isolation at home; we would not want you to travel back to your term time address. If you have symptoms or a positive test you will need to self-isolate at your term time address for 10 days.
Being super vigilant means:
- only leave home for essential purposes (including education or work) or to exercise;
- don’t meet up with anyone including those in your household – unless you are 100% certain they are also being super vigilant;
- avoid shared areas in your household, spend as little time as possible in the shared kitchen and avoid using any shared recreational areas;
- keep windows open for good ventilation especially when using shared areas of the household;
- keep 2 metre social distance in shared areas in your household;
- wear a face mask if you use shared areas in your household and ask others to do the same;
- try and use a different bathroom if possible or make sure you clean the bathroom before and after you use it;
- don’t share towels, cutlery, cups, glasses etc.; and
- wash your hands regularly.

You can also opt to get an asymptomatic test before you travel. You should get an asymptomatic test more than once in the period while you remain at university as this will give you a good indication of whether you are infected with COVID 19. Students who are essential workers will already have access to priority testing.

If you are concerned about your course needing to go beyond 9th December, you should speak to your university to consider options available to support you. If you are particularly concerned about the risk of living with other students in shared accommodation, you could ask your university if they have any alternative accommodation available.

We also recognise that it’s not appropriate for every programme to move fully online in early December and that the exceptions may include programmes with clinical placements, those with face to face teaching requirements and some Post Graduate programmes that commenced in November. The teaching and learning environment continues to be COVID secure.

Where universities advise their students that continued in-person activity is necessary students should attend, ensuring they are super vigilant in complying with their university safety measures. Many students on placements are considered essential workers. This will mean that you will be asked to remain in your placements until the end of term.

The risk that students will not be able to go home for Christmas is a real one if you are on placement, where your course goes on or you choose to stay after 9th December.

To reduce this risk you will need to be super vigilant to reduce your risk of coming into contact with someone with COVID 19 so that you have the best possible chances of being able to travel home for Christmas.
ASSETS

Regular testing will help to break the chain of transmission on campus and will give students and staff confidence to continue in-person education. The data will help us use these tests in other settings in the future.

If you decide to have an asymptomatic test, you should try and get a test by the 9 December. If you test positive, this will allow you to complete self-isolation at university before returning home for Christmas. A positive test will mean that you will need to self-isolate at your term time address for 10 days. You will also need to get an NHS COVID test to confirm the result of the asymptomatic test. The reason we’re asking you to do this is to help us monitor how accurate the asymptomatic test is. We are confident that the asymptomatic test is accurate but as this is a trial, we need the follow-up test to support the pilot. The NHS COVID PCR test detects the presence of the virus in your body by detecting COVID 19 genetic material in your nose or throat. It is really important that you get a follow-up NHS COVID PCR test if your asymptomatic test is positive not just to support the outcomes of the pilot, but because the genetic material analysis is also really important to help us understand the virus.

A person who is a close contact of a person who tests positive, must self-isolate for 14 days from the date of the test. This means a close contact would need to self-isolate at their term time address for 14 days. A test will tell you if you are infectious with the virus at that single point in time, so you should plan to travel as close to the test result as possible. IMPORTANT – your test result is only accurate on the day of the test.

Plan ahead and try not to go anywhere other than to the place you need to travel from (bus stop, train station, airport) after taking the test and avoid contact with other people. The longer you leave in between the test result and travelling the bigger the risk of coming into contact with the virus and taking it home.

ASYMPTOMATIC TESTING

We have worked with our universities to arrange for a new type of test which can be used for people who aren’t showing symptoms to be available to students and staff as part of a mass testing pilot.

These tests are done using a lateral flow device which is different to the tests used for people showing symptoms. The NHS COVID 19 tests for people showing symptoms are called RT-PCR (polymerase chain reaction) tests. Most universities are part of the mass testing pilot. However, some tests are being provided by the university and are not part of the mass testing pilot. Testing is totally voluntary and you should get a test if you want to, based on your personal circumstances and your assessment of risk. Any student is welcome to be tested although we have encouraged the universities who are part of the mass testing pilot to focus on those students who attend university away from their home towns and who we know will want to go home at the end of term and therefore have the potential to transfer the virus to new communities.

There should also be a particular focus on students and staff who are vulnerable, or live with someone vulnerable to COVID 19.

This is because it may take a little time to scale-up the testing process. The Welsh Government will be able to supply as many tests as a university needs, so we hope that over time tests will be available to any student or staff that wants one.
If you are feeling anxious and are worried about your own mental health you should contact your student services.

- **Have you been living in a large shared accommodation setting during term-time (with shared kitchen/bathroom facilities serving lots of other people)?**

We know that the more people you come into contact with the higher the risk of getting COVID 19. If you have been following the guidance, keeping social distance, maintaining good hygiene, washing your hands regularly, cleaning surfaces, wearing a face covering in public areas, not letting other people gather in your room or party in your flat or house, and not joining gatherings outdoors, then you should be reasonably safe. However if you think you may have been taking risks, meeting in shared spaces, sharing cutlery, plates, towels etc. then you may want to think about getting a test before you go home.

**SHOULD I OPT IN FOR AN ASYMPTOMATIC TEST?**

To decide if a test would be helpful to you, you may want to think about:

**The people you live with:**

- **Will you be moving home to live with someone categorised as high risk?**

  This might be someone over the age of 60 or someone who has been ‘shielding’, because they have particular existing health conditions or people from Black, Asian, Minority or Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds as these individuals have been seen to be at risk of poorer outcomes from COVID 19.

  If yes, then if you do go home and pass on the virus they could become very ill and need to go into hospital

- **If you are anxious about taking COVID 19 home.**

  If you are particularly worried about taking COVID 19 home, you may find taking an asymptomatic test helpful to make you feel happier about going home. You may also want to remember the responsible behaviours and keeping social distance from the people you are worried about once you get home.
You can reduce this risk by wearing a face covering and keeping the windows open, but the best way to reduce the risk is to make sure you are not infectious before you travel. Find out more about travelling safely.

A part time job:

- Do you have a part time job near your term time accommodation and need to stay after 9 December?
- Do you have a part time job that means you come into contact with a lot of people?

If yes, then you may want to think about getting an asymptomatic test before you travel home. This is because you may not be able to lay low because of your work and we know that the more contact with other people you have, the more risk there is that you can catch or spread COVID 19. In addition, if you do get an asymptomatic test you will be helping to reduce the risk of spreading COVID 19 in the place where you work. Remember this is a joint effort and if we all do all we can to stop the spread of the virus then we help keep our families, friends, communities and Wales safe.

TRAVEL PLANS

- Will you be getting a lift from a family member? Is that person in a high risk category?
- Do you need to car share to get home?

If yes, to reduce the risk to others in the car you may want to think about getting a test before you travel. If you travel by car you are highly likely to pass any virus to the other people in the car. That is because you are in a confined space and small droplets from speaking, singing along to the radio and breathing will quickly fill that space and be breathed in by everyone in the car. We know these droplets are the main way the virus spreads.

- Do you need to use public transport?

If yes, you may want to think about getting a test before you travel to help keep everyone safe. If you have COVID 19 you are likely to pass it on to other people who sit near you on public transport.

That is because you are in a confined space and small droplets from speaking and breathing will quickly fill that space and be breathed in by everyone close to you.
We have agreed a set of principles with our universities to allow your university to be flexible and make decisions that are appropriate to their circumstances and the needs of their students and staff.

However, you may still be able to opt in for asymptomatic testing if you would like. Your university will be able to tell you if this is possible.

Our universities will need to remain open for any individual who may need or may choose to remain on campus over the Christmas period.

You should speak to your university to let them know that you will be staying in your term time accommodation over the holiday period. They will be able to help if you think you need support over the holiday period.

We recognise that our students and institutions in Wales are varied and diverse. Not all students will need to travel to return home for Christmas.

We have high levels of students who live at home and travel to campus to access education around their daily lives, living with and caring for family members as well as studying.

You have been managing the risks in your life in the same way as everybody else. We think it is important that you continue to get the support of your university and for some students, this will mean that in person teaching and on campus activities may continue, especially if there are a lot of other students commuting from home to study.