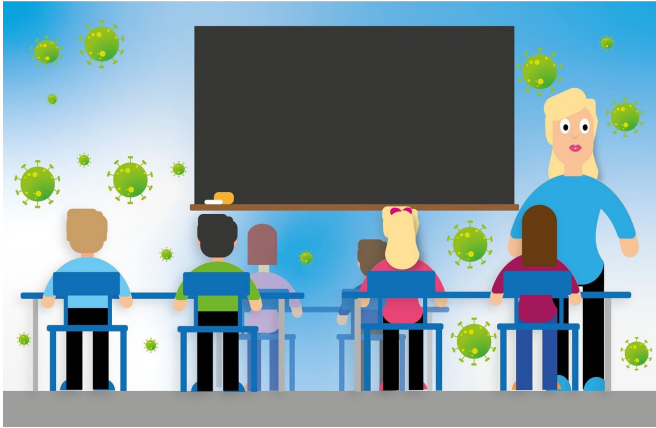


No conclusive links shown for COVID-19 case transmission in face-to-face teaching

18 November 2020



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Analysis of data from the University of Reading's case management system shows that COVID-19 infection is dominated by transmission between students through household and social contacts, and that face-to-face teaching presents minimal risk of transmission.

The University's case management system, which supports NHS and Public Health England contact tracing efforts, looked at all positive COVID-19 cases reported to them (8 staff and 170 students) from 14 October, when tracing began, up to 2 November.

In that period, there were a total of 5,374 timetabled face-to-face classes. Of these classes, 45 had an attendee who went on to develop symptoms within the next 48 hours and later tested positive for [coronavirus](#). Students who were seated within 2 meters of the positive case were asked to self-isolate.

Only one of these students later tested positive, although it could not be conclusively demonstrated that this was due to [transmission](#) in the classroom,

because off-campus activities had not been accounted for.

During the same period, eight University staff members tested positive. None of these members of staff were engaged in teaching and there were no cases where transmission was demonstrated to have occurred on campus.

These findings support national analysis demonstrating that transmission in university settings is primarily through household and social contact.

Gurinder Singh is a lecturer in the Reading School of Pharmacy and practicing registered pharmacist, who previously volunteered for the national NHS testing scheme and now heads the University of Reading's contact tracing operation. He said: "It was clear from an early stage that new cases were overwhelmingly linked with individuals living in the same household who had already tested positive. In almost all cases, individuals notifying us that they had tested positive were already self-isolating because someone in their household had already tested positive."

Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor Parveen Yaqoob from the University of Reading said: "It's reassuring to see that face-to-face teaching does not present an identifiable risk and continues to provide the best environment possible so that our students can safely achieve their full potential. We know that many students, their families, colleagues and members of the local community have been worried by reports of high numbers of cases of COVID-19 on university campuses around the country, and may be confused as to why universities, including Reading, are staying open during lockdown and continuing to teach students in person. Our analysis suggests that the [safety measures](#) we have in place mitigate the risk of transmission in a teaching setting. Our Estates, Campus Services, Health & Safety and Technical Services teams

have adapted buildings, classrooms and labs to provide a safe environment, which is regularly monitored, and students have helped enormously by following the guidance. Seating plans have been extremely helpful in facilitating contact tracing by the Case Management Team."

Thanks to the hard work by the Case Management Team, every single one of the 642 close contacts identified during the five-week period was contacted and asked to self-isolate, representing a 100% success rate.

Provided by University of Reading

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