

Whilst little is known about the new Omicron variant, the government have set out some new measures to help us respond to this new Variant of Concern and support our communities to continue to protect themselves and their families from this virus. All viruses naturally mutate over time and the virus that causes Covid-19 is no exception. At the time of writing, we still don’t have any known cases in Tower Hamlets, but we are seeing a small number of cases in other London Boroughs. Overall there are 9 confirmed cases across London and 22 in England as a whole (1st December).While we wait for more information,there are some sensible steps we can take.

We encourage all faith leaders in our borough to act with caution and due care in planning how to move forward in acts of worship and prayer, in celebrations and memorials, so that you continue to protect your congregations and the wider community of Tower Hamlets.

This caution and due care may require the continued request for worshippers to wear face masks, to maintain some distance from one another, to use sanitiser, etc. We urge you to think about the particular circumstances of your faith building, and the rituals you perform to maintain good levels of hygiene and protection at this time, particularly for those who are most vulnerable within your communities. The excellent work undertaken so far by faith leaders has meant that we have had very few outbreaks in faith buildings in the borough, this is a positive record and one we would like to help you to maintain.

Some faith organisations have already posted guidance to their websites. This will be added to the THIFF website, but until then, please check here: [COVID 19 Guidance from the 30th November 2021 v1.pdf (churchofengland.org)](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/COVID%2019%20Guidance%20from%20the%2030th%20November%202021%20v1.pdf) and here: [Latest COVID19 Advice for British Muslims - Muslim Council of Britain (MCB)](https://mcb.org.uk/resources/coronavirus/)

In addition, of course, it is vital that you help your congregation overcome any vaccine hesitancy they might have, especially now amongst our children and young people over the age of 12, as well as encouraging those most vulnerable to receive their booster jab at their earliest convenience.

**Just a reminder of the new Covid-19 guidance:**

1. It is now law that face coverings must be worn in shops, shopping centres, transport hubs and on public transport. It remains vital that we wear a face covering in all crowded and enclosed spaces where we come into contact with people we do not usually meet.
2. Anyone entering the UK will required to take a PCR test by the second day after their arrival and to self-isolate until they have a negative result
3. Contacts of those who test positive with suspected Omicron need to self-isolate for ten days regardless of vaccination status
4. More countries have been added to the government’s red list – see [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) for more

**Changes to the vaccination programme:**

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), has also updated its guidance in response to the Omicron variant of concern:

* All over-18s in the UK will now be offered a booster vaccine, three months after their second dose - the booster will be offered in order of descending age groups, with priority given to the vaccination of older adults and those in a Covid-19 at-risk group
* 12 – 15 year olds are now eligible for a second dose of the Covid-19 vaccine, three months after their first
* People with extremely weak immune systems who were invited for a third dose, will now be offered a fourth dose, 3 months after their third

 If you require any support or guidance the boroughs Public Health team are available and can be contacted via email PHCov19@towerhamlets.gov.uk. For further updates about this variant and the situation in the borough, please check [Weekly update from Director of Public Health (towerhamlets.gov.uk)](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/health__social_care/health_and_medical_advice/Coronavirus/Weekly-update-from-Director-of-Public-Health.aspx)

We thank you for all that you have done, and continue to do, to serve your congregations and the wider community of Tower Hamlets.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Somen Banerjee

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