

Oxfordshire cases rise by 50 per cent as people are urged to avoid gifting COVID-19 this Christmas

People in Oxfordshire are being urged to continue to abide by the rules before and during the festive season to avoid giving their loved ones COVID-19 this Christmas.

The Government has confirmed that Oxfordshire will remain at the tier 2 'high' alert level for the next two weeks as part of the national system of restrictions in place to combat the virus. The next review of the tier system is expected to take place on 30 December.

Ansaf Azhar, Oxfordshire County Council's Director for Public Health, said: "Christmas is now close. It is a time for enjoyment, but we need to adapt so that we can enjoy ourselves without giving COVID-19 the chance to join the party. We have seen that this virus thrives on human contact - the rules exist to stop it spreading.

"Tier 2 status reflects our current situation locally, but in the past 7 days alone cases have increased by almost 50 per cent in Oxfordshire. So we're far from out of the woods and we could easily find ourselves in tier 3 in the new year unless we take care now. We have seen that our neighbours in Buckinghamshire and Berkshire have been moved to tier 3. That is a clear warning. COVID-19 will not be taking a break for Christmas.

"Clearly different rules apply between December 23 and 27, when up to three households can form an exclusive Christmas bubble. However, until then, you must not mix indoors with other households unless they're part of your support bubble. This means you can't go out for a meal with friends or invite people over for Christmas drinks.

"Unless we all take personal responsibility as individuals and families throughout the coming weeks, we risk creating a situation in January that will see steeply rising numbers of cases at exactly the time of year when viruses thrive. This means putting even more pressure on our NHS at its busiest time of year. We need to protect ourselves and the NHS as we enter 2021.

"The vaccine continues to be a source of good news and we have seen people in Oxfordshire begin the process of being vaccinated. However, it will be some way into the new year before this begins to provide protection to larger numbers of the population and make a material difference to the overall situation.

"We therefore all need to be extra vigilant in the run-up to Christmas and to think carefully about our plans over the festive period. It is up to all of us to stop the spread."

Oxfordshire's COVID statistics

The most recent figures for Oxfordshire (week ending December 11) saw the number of cases at 862 compared with 579 in the previous week. This is 124.6 cases per 100,000 compared to 83.7 per 100,000 for the week ending December 4.

What does tier 2 mean?

- There should be no mixing of households indoors apart from support bubbles. The rule of six applies outdoors.
- Pubs and bars must close unless operating as restaurants. Hospitality venues can only serve alcohol with substantial meals. Venues must stop taking orders at 10pm and must close by 11pm.
- People should reduce the number of journeys they make and walk or cycle if possible.
- Everyone who can work from home should do so

Further information is available at www.gov.uk/guidance/local-restriction-tiers-what-you-need-to-know