

Director of Public Health for Derbyshire

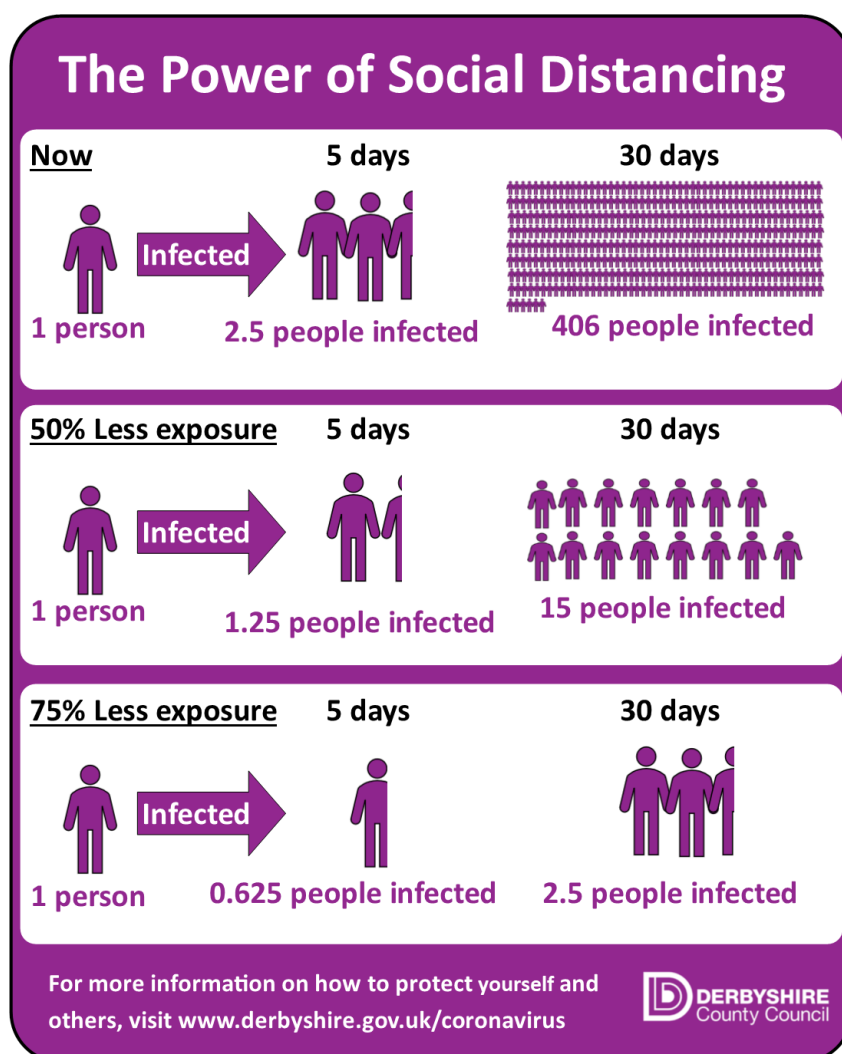
An important message from Dean Wallace, Director of Public Health – 3rd April 2020

Dear parents & carers,

The coronavirus outbreak has brought sudden changes to everyone's life in a way that has not been seen for generations. As a dad to school-age children I know of the additional challenges of keeping young people and families safe and well in these challenging times. As such, I wanted to make sure you have some high quality information to support you and your family.

As you know, it is vital that as parents/carers you help to ensure the safety and protection of your children against the spread of Coronavirus (Covid-19). All children and young people should be at home, where possible. It is important your children know how to socially distance themselves from other children and young people as this will help to protect your children and the most vulnerable people in Derbyshire.

Why does social distancing matter?



The picture shows that if someone with the virus (including those without symptoms) has contact with half the number of people they would normally, then this means that they only infect half the number of people they would have done if they had stayed seeing the same number of people, but those people also reduce the number of people they see and so after a month nearly 400 less people could be infected, this in turn massively reduces the pressure on local health and social care services. As we do not yet have a vaccine and social distancing is the best approach we have to reduce the spread of this virus.

I know this isn't going to be easy

I have two children myself and so I know that the young people you are responsible for will want to go out and be with their friends. Over the coming weeks we need your help to make sure that the only face to face social contact they have is with the people living in their household, unless there is a shared custody agreement, in which case the Government recognises that children can move between two households. I know that this will be hard but it will be a big help in keeping your young people and the most vulnerable people within your family and community safe.

Some things that can help when talking to your children at this time

- Choose a good time to talk it through with them when you are both feeling calm.
- You may need to talk to them about this many times, this is normal, this is how children process information.
- It will be important for them to understand what they need to do and why they need to do this (at the end of this letter we have some things that can help with this).
- Keep listening to their worries and concerns. They are important to them.
- You may not be able to fix or answer all their worries. If your child knows you have listened it will help them.

I have also provided some specific ideas for talking to younger children and talking to teenagers.

I know that it can be hard to support others when you may not feel that you have all of the answers yourself, or you have your own worries. It is really important that you also look after your own wellbeing. You can find support on the 'emotional health and wellbeing' section of our special website at www.derbyshire.gov.uk/coronavirus.

The national Government guidance on coronavirus is at www.gov.uk/coronavirus. In brief the current advice is:

Stay at home:

- Only go out for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home).
- If you go out, stay 2m away from other people at all times.
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home.
- Do not meet others, even friends or family. You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

This is a time when, as a country, we need to do all we can to look after our health and to ensure our NHS will be able to cope with the high demands it will face in saving lives, and caring for the many people who will need hospital care as a result of the virus.

In Derbyshire we have also put information online to give additional local support. You can find our special website at www.derbyshire.gov.uk/coronavirus which has a wide range of advice including:

- Staying safe during the pandemic – avoiding scams, support for addiction, protecting children and vulnerable adults and domestic violence.
- Emotional health and wellbeing.
- Money, benefits and debt advice.
- Information for schools and parents.
- Support for carers.

Some of the information about coronavirus might be hard to take in and explain to children and young people, particularly around understanding social distancing, so we have provided what we hope is some useful information below that is easier to communicate to children and young people.

Talking to primary school age children about social distancing

It can help to show children how they are helping others by the things they do. You are showing them how to protect their friends and family.

Some parents have found it helpful to tell their child about it in this way:

'You can go outside and ride your bike, walk the dog or just go out for walk but for now you cannot do this with your friends. If you do see other people whilst you are out then you can wave and shout to them but you cannot get too close to them.

So imagine that you have a really big hula hoop: imagine the space that you would need around you to use that really big hula hoop and do not let anyone who does not live with you inside that hula hoop. Whenever you are outside imagine that you always have your hula hoop with you'.

Talking to young people and teenagers about social distancing

Young people are often have a lot of physical contact with their friends. This means that getting into a routine of social distancing will be difficult for them and some may have boyfriends, girlfriends or special friends who they want to spend time with.

Young people will have been taking in a lot of the information on the news and social media from a lot of different sources. Not all of this information will be correct, particularly on social media. Because of this it will be really important for you to speak to them and give them correct information. Talking about social distancing is really important for this age group.

Here are some ideas for talking to teenagers about social distancing:

- It can work best with teenagers to ask questions and help them think it through.
- Talk with them about why it's important in slowing the spread of the virus.
- Talk with them how they personally have an important role in following the guidance and stopping the spread of the virus.
- Talk with them about how by keeping their physical distance they are protecting their friends and their families.
- Share with them that they can make a huge contribution to society and the world.
- Listen to their worries – it's probably a really tough time for them too.

Young people have lots of ways of communicating with their friends through social media and through mobile phones. Young people should not be allowed to socialise in person or to meet up with their friends, even if this is hard. The risk to them, your family and our wider community is just too great.

These restrictions won't be in place for ever. Things will get back to normal and it's important to reassure them, and yourself, of this.

Finally this is a worrying time and many young people may be feeling anxious about COVID-19. There are a number of resources available through them online where they can find answers and support directly; the 'Schools and parents' page of www.derbyshire.gov.uk/coronavirus has links to:

- Free online counselling for young people in Derby and Derbyshire.
- Links to information from a range of organisations including Young Minds, the council's Educational Psychology Service and Mencap.
- An interactive creative activity for children under 7 years old.

The situation we all find ourselves in is very hard and it adds stress on households. The best way for us to combat this virus is all to work together in our approach to beating it: at present the best weapons we have are hand washing and social distancing and so - as hard as it is - please do all you can to support your young people in following the guidance.

Thank you for all your efforts in helping us reduce the spread of this virus. In the years to come your children, and your grandchildren, will remember the spring of 2020, how you

supported them through it, how we came together as a community and how we looked after each other in the face of adversity.

I salute all of the efforts of parents and carers across Derbyshire and we are walking this new path together. Thank you.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dean Wallace'.

Dean Wallace,
Director of Public Health, Derbyshire County Council

