

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Thursday 1 April 2021

Welcome to the latest edition of the weekly Somerset Covid-19 update for key stakeholders. The update is produced on behalf of the Somerset Covid-19 Engagement Board and is designed to provide a weekly update on the current Covid-19 situation in Somerset.

Somerset's Covid-19 data continues to plateau showing small variations daily but the seven-day rate hovers around the late 30's / early 40's per 100,000. This is in part due to the increased numbers of people being tested so we would expect to see these increases. Increased testing allows us to case find and take public health action early; avoiding the virus being spread to others. With Easter weekend around the corner and new freedoms allowed such as meeting up outdoors with one other household or the rule of six, it's vital we continue to remain two metres apart from anyone who is not an immediate member of our household or support/childcare bubble when socialising outside.

We all need to remain vigilant, careful and abide by social distancing rules. Covid is still here in our communities and we don't want cases to rise as this could affect the roadmap. Enjoy these new freedoms but enjoy them safely. If we all follow this guidance now and all play our part, then we will stay on target for further restrictions to be lifted. Our message is to stay local, minimise travel and continue to follow 'hands, face, space' with the new message of 'fresh air' to minimise catching Covid-19 and spreading it to others – even if you have been vaccinated.

This week's Covid Catch-up video sees our very own Director of Public Health receive the first dose of her vaccine and it features medical professionals discussing the vaccine, in particular having the second dose. Watch it here: <https://youtu.be/YJ6GYMbfj38>

Testing continues to be one of our greatest defences against Covid-19. This is because the more positive cases we can detect, the greater the chance of breaking the chain of transmission to others. If you are currently taking part in regular testing, please continue to take your lateral flow tests during the Easter holidays. If you know someone that is, please encourage them to continue the process.

The link below shows the Somerset Dashboard which tracks our local epidemic from the start in March 2020, to the current time: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/covid-19-dashboard/>

'Remember, everyone can catch it, anyone can spread it'.

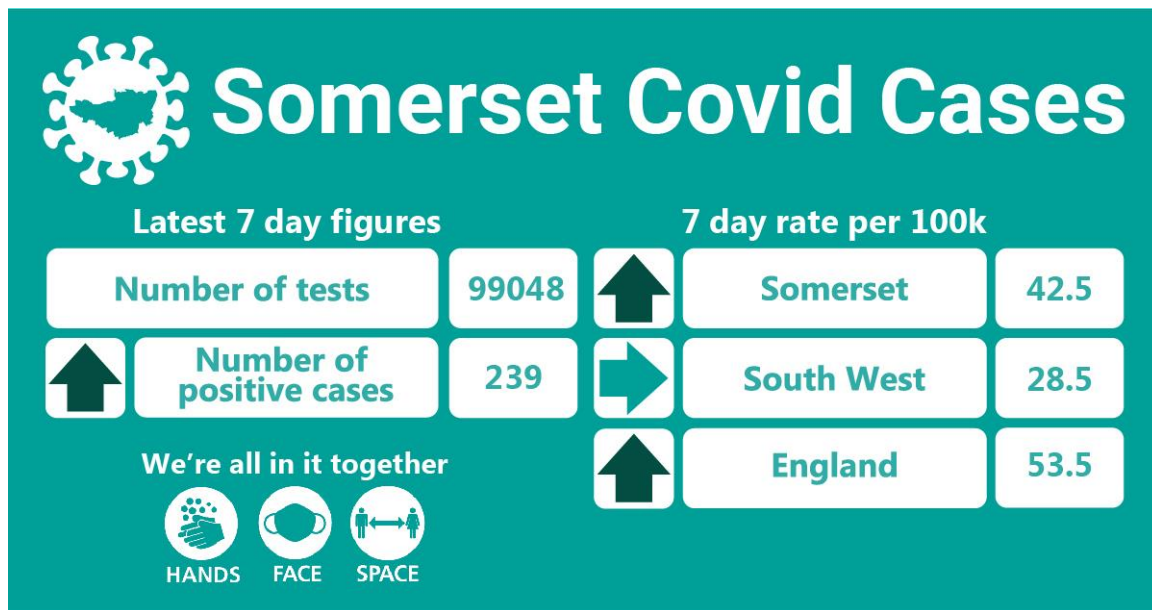


We're all in it together

David Fothergill
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Director of Public Health
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for Public Health and
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In week up to the 27th March, approximately 99048 tests were carried out across the county and there have been 239 new confirmed cases. Our rate remains higher than the South West rate of 28.5 so now, more than ever, we must keep up all the protection measures such as hands face space and fresh air.

THIS WEEK'S HEADLINES:

The main items this week that are featured in this update are:

- Schools, workplaces and care settings
- Workplace testing
- Easter Holiday messaging
- Vaccination update
- New testing guidance
- Vaccination buddies
- Testing survey
- Communications and Engagement focus
- Accessible resources

Workplaces: We have had an increase of people not understanding the isolation rules. Some people are reporting that, because they can now get easily tested, they don't need to isolate when in contact with a case or someone with symptoms.

If you have been identified as a contact of someone who has tested positive for Covid-19, you must self-isolate even if you have received one or more doses of Covid-19 vaccine. This will reduce the risk of spreading infection and help to protect other people.

If you live in the same household as a person who has symptoms of coronavirus (Covid-19) or who has received a positive test result, follow the [Stay at Home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed COVID-19](#).

If you have been in close contact with, but do not live with, a person who has tested positive for Covid-19, follow the guidance below. This may include contact with people in your support bubble. A close contact is defined at the minimum as being within 2 metres of someone infected with Covid-19 for more than 15 minutes (either as a one-off contact, or added up together over 1 day)

For more guidance if you are concerned about being a close contact of someone that has tested positive for Covid-19, please visit:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person>

Workplace testing: Businesses with more than 10 employees can now sign up for home testing kits. On the 28th March, the department of Health and Social care also released an expansion to the workplace testing scheme. All businesses with over 10 employees, but cannot offer on-site testing, can now sign up to receive rapid home testing kits. Businesses must register their interest by the 12th April to access free tests until the end of June – even if they're not yet open or are not able to start using the tests straight away. Full information on this press release can be found here: [Workplace testing programme expands to offer free rapid home testing - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Testing for seasonal agricultural workers:

On the 29th March, the department of Health and Social Care also announced that seasonal agricultural workers can receive free COVID-19 tests on farms. Employers must register for the programme by the 12th April to receive a supply of free test kits until the end of June. Full information on this press release can be found here: [Seasonal workers to receive free Covid-19 tests on farms - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

LFD testing needs to be regular testing, ideally twice a week, certainly at least once a week, to be an effective tool. A positive test almost certainly means a true positive – isolate. A negative test is less certain. Positive people can and do test negative, typically

because their viral load is low, for example shortly after infection. So between 30 and 50% of people who are true positives actually test negative with LFDs. That is why it is crucial to keep following all guidance despite a negative test.

Care Sector: In the seven days to the 27th March there have been 14 new cases at 14 care homes. We continue to support settings as needed with support and guidance on prevention measures.

For all the latest information and guidance related to Covid19 visit [Coronavirus updates for Somerset Adult Care Providers – Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board \(safeguardingsomerset.org.uk\)](https://safeguardingsomerset.org.uk).

Schools and Early Years settings: In the seven days to the 27th March there were 64 new cases at 36 schools and 6 cases at 5 nurseries.

This is an increase on last week; the regular asymptomatic testing taking place means that we are able to find more cases in people who are positive but do not have symptoms of Covid-19.

Guidance on how to use a home lateral flow test kit is available in other languages on this link to the Government website: [COVID-19 PCR home test kit instructions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Easter weekend and the Easter holidays: We are encouraging people to enjoy new freedoms over the Easter break but urging people to not be tempted to meet indoors as the risk of spreading the virus is significantly higher inside. This is because the closer you are to people, the higher the risk of breathing in infected particles, particularly when indoors, as the space will not be as ventilated. Outside there is more room to distance, reducing the risk of breathing in particles from an infected person. When indoors, smaller droplets and aerosols containing the virus can remain suspended in the air for some time, especially if there is no ventilation and therefore build ups are more likely to be inhaled by others, but when outside in fresh air, the virus disperses more easily.

Vaccination Update: Since the launch of the Somerset Covid-19 Vaccination Programme in December 2020, a phenomenal 310,378 vaccinations have now been given to the most vulnerable residents and front-line health and care workers across the county. Work continues to encourage everyone eligible to take up the offer of a Covid-19 vaccination. This includes people who are aged 50 and over, people with a health condition that puts them at greater risk, and health or social care workers.

Vaccination sites across the county are continuing to offer vaccinations and are following the JCVI guidance on priority cohorts and when to administer second doses.

All booked appointments for April will be honoured including first and second doses. Activity will focus primarily on second doses for the people who received their first dose at vaccination centres in December and January.

Over the next few weeks, operating days and times at our vaccination sites will flex up and down. This is due to the recent national fluctuations in vaccine supply limiting the number of new appointment bookings available at the vaccination centres in April and following the JCVI guidance on priority bookings.

Confirmatory PCR testing required on all positive lateral flow tests: On the 29th March, the department of Health and Social care announced that they are now reintroducing confirmatory tests for all positive lateral flow tests performed in England. Recent analysis showed that lateral flow devices (LFD) have a specificity of at least 99.9%, however, at times of low prevalence, the risk of a false positive from an LFD is higher. This is one of the reasons for re-introducing the confirmatory PCR, as well as the need to be able to identify samples which may contain a variant of concern – testing which can only be performed on PCR samples. Full information on this release can be found here: [Government reintroduces confirmatory PCR testing for assisted testing - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-reintroduces-confirmatory-pcr-testing-for-assisted-testing)

Covid-19 Vaccine buddy scheme: With confidence around the vaccine waning within particular groups, vaccine buddies will be a key part of ensuring that people get the right information from official sources and are reassured and informed about the vaccination process and its importance.

In collaboration with Spark Somerset we are offering Vaccination Myth Buster Training to **anyone** who is able and willing to have conversations about the vaccine.

People attending this training will also be offered the opportunity to become **Vaccination Buddies:** specially trained volunteers who can have supportive telephone calls with people that have questions and concerns about the Covid-19 vaccine.

If you would like more information, please don't hesitate to get in touch with Helen, Covid Community Champion Coordinator at: Helen.Fielden@sparksomerset.org.uk

Testing Survey: We have launched a community survey to seek the views of as many people across Somerset as possible. As we begin the cautious journey out of national lockdown, the team is keen to hear from you about three key areas:

1. testing
2. vaccination
3. self-isolating

Many asymptomatic testing programmes (regular testing for those without symptoms) are well underway including testing in schools, care settings and workplaces but regular asymptomatic testing has now been made available to many more groups locally, including if you are a parent, or part of a household, childcare bubble or support bubble of school staff or a pupil at nursery school or college.

People taking part in this testing on a regular basis will be really important as we move forward as it helps to break the chain of transmission which might otherwise have gone unidentified. Along with maintaining 'hands, face, space and fresh air', these are key interventions in helping us to prevent the spread of the virus.

We would like to understand any barriers that may prevent people from doing these things or having the vaccine when it is offered.

Please help us by responding to and promoting our survey to help us get a better understanding of **any barriers that may prevent people from doing these tested or having the vaccine when it is offered.**

Please [click here](#) to take part.

Communications and Engagement:

- Don't burst your bubble this Easter – graphic attached for sharing
- Easter communications; keeping up hands face space and fresh air and staying safe
- Continued promotion of 'One day at a Time' campaign
- Promotion of latest Somerset Covid Catch up Video
- Continued promotion of short videos fronted by medical professionals from Ethnic Minority communities discussing common questions and concerns around the Covid-19 vaccine. These have been produced in collaboration with Somerset Diverse Communities (part of CCS) and the Somerset Foundation Trust. The videos can be seen on SCC's YouTube Channel here:
<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLbpaA5vdlqbVYEVKbEBbbFPdPfruFRN3Z>
- Translated materials on frequently asked questions on the Covid-19 vaccine are in development and will be shared as soon as they are ready
- Continued vaccine buddy recruitment
- Promotion of Covid Community Champions hitting the 100th Champion milestone

Resources and further information: Please do keep an eye on our Healthy Somerset website, which has a huge amount of information and resources to help keep everyone healthy happy and safe at this time: <https://www.healthysomerset.co.uk/covid-19/>

For the latest local information as well as digital resources, posters and flyers please visit: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/coronavirus/>

The Somerset Local Outbreak Management Plan outlines how we, the council, will work with the NHS Test and Trace Service, PHE, the NHS and other partners to ensure a whole system approach to preventing and managing local outbreaks. This can be found [here](#).

Finally, please like us on [Facebook](#), follow us on [Twitter](#) and share our posts with your networks to help us in communicating these important messages. Follow our Director of Public Health account too [here](#).