

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Thursday 27 May 2021

Welcome to the latest edition of the weekly Somerset Covid-19 update for key stakeholders. This 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 shows small variations daily. The seven-day rate is now 6.8 per 100,000 which is a reduction on last week. On a national level, cases, hospitalisations and deaths are still at a low level however there has been a slight rise in the last week.

We are hoping everybody is looking forward to next week's Bank Holiday and the school holidays and are aware this will be a very busy week for travel and tourism. This is great news not just for local businesses but also for local Somerset people. It looks like the weather may be favourable so we are hoping everybody can enjoy Somerset safely and make space for each other.

While we welcome this holiday, it is vital for people to know we still have to adhere to [the guidance](#), in particular when socialising indoors – and please remember it may well be busier than normal this weekend if you are eating out or travelling so please be patient and make space for each other.

The message of hands, face, space and fresh air is especially important when mixing indoors. We know Covid-19 is easily transmissible in badly ventilated indoor spaces. Outside is best, but if meeting inside then please open windows to let fresh air in and Covid-19 particles out. When you let friends in, let fresh air in - fresh air is your friend too!

As a result of all the hard work by the people in Somerset in adhering to Covid-19 guidance such as hands, face, space and fresh air, testing when required and self-isolating when asked to do so, case rates in the area are currently low. This is great news, and something we all want to continue.

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'.



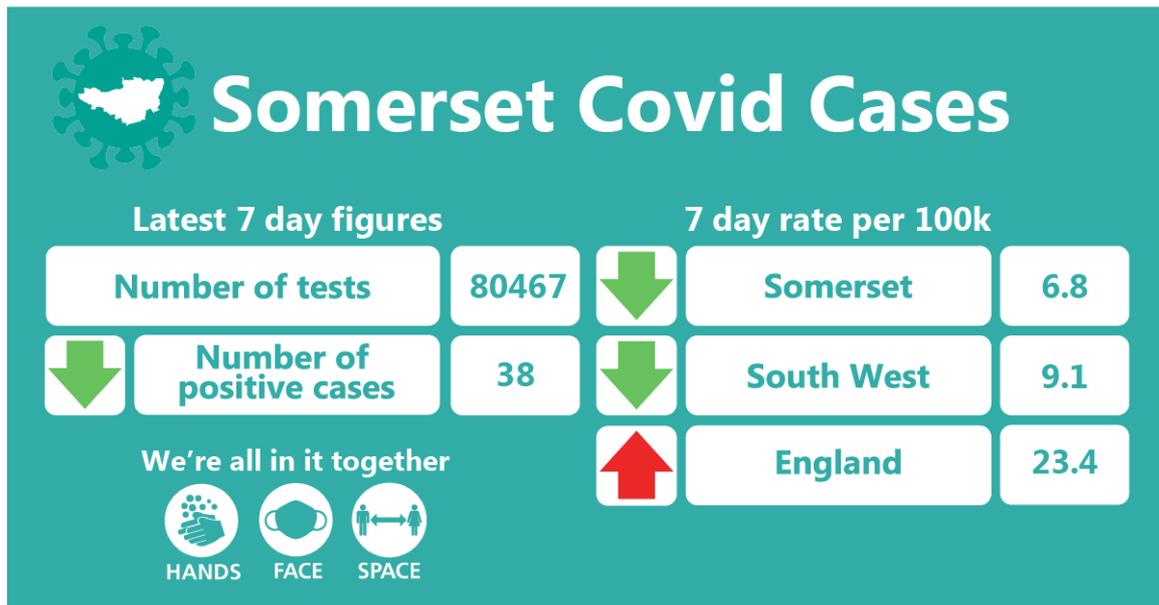
David Fothergill
 Leader
 Somerset County Council
 Twitter: @DJAFothergill



Professor Trudi Grant
 Director of Public Health
 Twitter: @SomersetDPH



Clare Paul, Cabinet Member
 for Education and Public
 Health
 Twitter: @Clarepaul_



In the week up to 15 May approximately 80467 tests were carried out across the county and there have been 38 new confirmed cases. The rates have decreased since last week and our rate of 6.8 is now lower than the South West rate of 9.1.

THIS WEEK'S HEADLINES:

The main items featured in this week's update are:

- Workplace, care and school settings
- Vaccination update
- Launch of Vaccination Buddies
- Testing Update
- Communications Focus
- Bank Holiday and Travel
- Self-Isolation guidance
- Accessible resources

Workplaces: All workplaces need to be very aware of the need for good ventilation, and it is also important for the required workplaces to make it clear and easy to customers about using QR codes when visiting premises, and each person needs to register not just one for the group.

It is important for all business to be Covid-19 secure and there is some excellent guidance here: [Working-safely-during-covid-19](#)

And please remember - businesses can give confidence to customers by testing staff regularly or having staff test themselves regularly.

We also would like to highlight the following advice to employers which should be followed if any of your workers test positive:

Employers should call the Self-Isolation Service Hub on 020 3743 6715 as soon as they are made aware about any of their workers who have tested positive.

Employers will need to provide the 8-digit NHS Test and Trace Account ID (sometimes referred to as a CTAS number) of the person who tested positive, alongside the names of co-workers identified as close contacts. This will ensure all workplace contacts are registered with NHS Test and Trace and can receive the necessary public health advice, including the support available to help people to self-isolate.

Further information can be found here: [NHS-test-and-trace-workplace-guidance-for-employers](#)

Care Sector: Cases of Covid 19 are still low in social care settings in Somerset and we continue to support our care sector as required in conjunction with other partners across Somerset and the South West.

Information and guidance related to Covid 19 within adult social care settings is updated regularly, including guidance on PPE and other aspects of infection prevention and control, testing, visiting and working safely within care homes, home care and day care – please visit [Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board](#)

Schools and Early Years settings: We continue to see very little activity in terms of positive cases. Ongoing, we need to ensure everyone continues with the routine of regular testing for those eligible; this applies to all educational staff and students of secondary school age – and it is very important for testing to continue over the half term break

Vaccination Update: All people aged **30 and over** are now being offered the vaccine so please go [online](#) or phone 119 to book if you have not already done so and are in this age group.

And if you are offered your second dose – please do accept it at your earliest convenient date, or book it online if offered the chance whilst booking your first vaccine. The second dose has been found to be particularly important in ensuring improved protection.

Full information regarding the vaccination program can be found here:

[Covid-19 vaccinations in Somerset - Somerset CCG](#)

Launch of Vaccination Buddy Scheme: SCC's Public Health has recently launched our Vaccine Buddy Programme in partnership with Spark Somerset, where we have trained a team of volunteer [Vaccination Buddies](#) who can offer 1-2-1 telephone support to people who are worried or unsure about having the vaccine. The Buddies come from all walks of life and have the right skills to support people to make informed decisions about having the Covid-19 vaccination. Individuals can be referred (or self-refer) to the scheme and a fully trained Vaccination Buddy will then contact them by phone to discuss their concerns and offer information and reassurance.

If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to get in touch with Helen Fielden at Spark Somerset: Helen.Fielden@sparksomerset.org.uk

The importance of testing to help contain the spread of Covid-19: With cases of Covid-19 in the community being significantly lower than they have been since the beginning of the year you may be asking why there is still a need to continue to test ourselves regularly.

The more the virus replicates, the more likely it is there will be a natural, unintentional mistake which occurs in its genetic material when making copies of itself – known as a mutation. Some of these mutations can give rise to an advantageous trait to the virus. For example: making it more infectious – such was the case with the B.1.1.7 strain- the variant which was first detected in Kent at the end of last year. Mutations may also potentially allow new variants of Covid-19 to reduce the effectiveness of the current vaccines available.

If we continue to identify new cases of Covid-19 infection quickly through regular testing, identify close contacts to those individuals and both the case and their close contacts self-isolate for 10 days, we can continue to reduce transmission of the virus. This gives the virus less opportunity to replicate and spread and also reduces the chance of mutations occurring - leading to a lower chance of new variants appearing.

Regular (twice a week) and continued testing for those people without symptoms using LFTs is a vital tool going forwards, as it will identify if we are infectious and stop us from meeting friends and family and passing the infection onto them.

To find out when, how and where to get lateral flow tests for COVID for twice weekly testing when you have no symptoms, please visit: [Coronavirus – Get a test if you do not have symptoms](#)

To find out more about getting a COVID PCR test if you have symptoms for COVID, please visit: [Coronavirus – Get a test if you have symptoms](#)

Communications Focus: This week we will be focusing our communications on reinforcing safety messages in the lead up to the Bank Holiday and half term, ensuring people enjoy time with friends and family but continue to do so safely.

We know people who do not speak English as a first language can struggle with understanding the guidelines and can find being able to access key information extremely difficult. In order to help address this, we have translated a range of materials, from vaccination frequently asked questions to our One Number helpline information, these can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

Working in partnership with Somerset CCG and Diverse communities, we also created some short films fronted by medical professionals, addressing common concerns from within ethnic minority groups around the Covid-19 vaccine. Watch the videos [here](#).

Bank Holiday Weekend and Travel: Although infection rates in Somerset are low, the virus is still with us and it is very important to remember we are still in Step 3 of the lockdown and we adhere to [the guidance](#).

We all want to help our high streets and businesses recover after a difficult year – so we hope everyone will enjoy Somerset respectfully, follow the guidance and help to keep our county safe. Remember - the more we mix with one another, the more opportunity the virus has to spread.

We have attached five useful graphics for use and sharing.

If you are heading off for a weekend break in the UK, remember to travel safely and plan ahead – things like insurance, checking with your accommodation, what to do should you develop symptoms or test positive during your stay and ensuring you have your testing kits.

If you need to get tested while you're travelling, there are many options:

- If you have symptoms and need a test, book on [here](#) or call 119
- If you do not have symptoms please continue with your LFT routine.

If you test positive whilst on holiday, you should make your own assessment about where to self-isolate for 10 days based on your health and safety. Options are:

- Remaining in the accommodation you are currently in if the accommodation is happy/has capacity to host you, and you have the funds to cover additional cost
- Seeking alternative local accommodation you and your travel party could move into and safely self-isolate if your current accommodation cannot extend
- Driving home in your own vehicle without stopping anywhere on route if you are well enough to travel and have the means to do so

There is no longer a legal restriction on travelling abroad, but a traffic light system with strict testing and quarantine rules depending on whether you return to England from a red, amber or green list country [Red, amber and green list rules for entering England](#)
We advise against travel to countries on the amber list for leisure purposes, including holidays.

And if you are meeting friends in a park or an outside setting, ensure you keep your distance as our message remains - continue to follow **'hands, face, space and fresh air'** to minimise catching Covid-19 and spreading it to others – even if you have been vaccinated.

Self Isolation guidance: On Wednesday we learnt Somerset was [the only area in the South West](#), and only one of twelve nationally, to receive additional funding to target hard-to-reach groups through community testing.

This was in response to the fact we had identified particular challenges for rural populations to access the asymptomatic testing we recommend for rural workers. It also gives Somerset a chance to learn how to provide better support for these workers.

This is a fantastic vote of confidence in the SCC Public Health team and will allow greater support to members of these groups should they test positive for Covid-19 and need to self-isolate.

If an individual has tested positive for Covid-19 it is vital they self-isolate to prevent the spread. By doing this as quickly as possible it helps to protect friends, family and the local community.

Those isolating may be eligible to access the test and trace support payment scheme, which provides a £500 payment to help during their isolation.

If they do not meet the eligibility criteria for the test and trace support payment, there are other local organisation such as the [Village Agents](#) who will explore what other support options are available based on the individual needs.

Full information, including how to apply for the £500 grant can be found here: [Self Isolating Guidance](#)

And this week's Clinton Covid Catch-up film focusses on Self isolation and can be watched here: [Clinton Covid Catch-up Week 25](#)

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](#).