

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Thursday 22 July 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.

As you are aware, on Monday the majority of legal restrictions relating to Covid-19 were lifted. We know that for some people and businesses this is a huge relief, but we are also seeing a great many people suffer from what experts are calling 'Covid-19 anxiety syndrome'. We all have our own unique feelings about the restrictions lifting, so now more than ever, it's important to be respectful of each other. If you or anyone you know is feeling anxious, this website [How to cope with anxiety about lockdown lifting - Every Mind Matters - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#) is a good resource, as is our local **Mindline** available 24/7 on 01823 276892.

One of the most powerful tools we have to fight the virus is the vaccination programme, and here in Somerset, 74 per cent of residents have now had both doses. While this is great news, we must also be realistic about the fact Covid-19 is not going away. Please remember, even if you have received both doses of the vaccine, you **can** still catch Covid-19, and while symptoms are likely to be less severe, you can still pass it onto others who may be more vulnerable. The aim of the vaccine has always been to protect against serious illness and hospitalisation, so with our case rate not far off the highest it has ever been, we make no apology for urging everyone in Somerset to **'think twice, do the right thing, and don't let your guard down.'**

This is important not only for yourselves, your family and loved ones, but to protect our vulnerable residents and frontline workers. In the latest Covid Catch up film which you can watch [here](#), Clinton talks to members of the public about their views on restrictions lifting as well as some of our healthcare colleagues about the importance of continuing to manage demand on our GP surgeries and hospitals. No one needs the healthcare system to come under the intense pressure it faced last winter, so please do watch this great film and think about how you can help.

Latest Covid Dashboard: The following link below will take you to our website: [Somerset Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#). Then scroll down the page until you get to **'COVID-19 Dashboard'** in the list. Click on this and the dashboard will open.

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



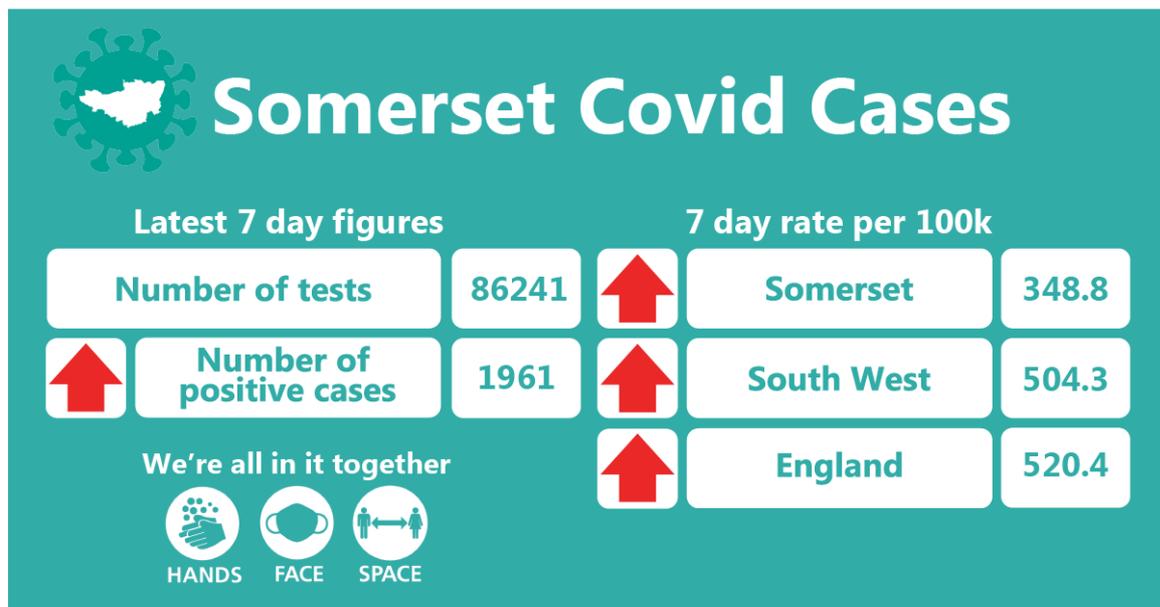
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In the week up to 17 July approximately 86241 tests were carried out across the county and there have been 1961 new confirmed cases. The rates have increased from 159.4 per 100,000 to 348.8 per 100,000, though as you can see from this graphic, we still remain below the South West and England rates.

THIS WEEK'S HEADLINES:

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

- Step 4 of the Government Roadmap
- Workplace, care and school settings
- Vaccination update
- Testing Update
- Resources and further information

Step 4 of the Government Roadmap: The Government's top level information about the move to Step 4 of the Roadmap can be found here:

[Coronavirus: how to stay safe and help prevent the spread - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/coronavirus-how-to-stay-safe-and-help-prevent-the-spread)

The Government has confirmed that while Covid-19 restrictions have now ended in many settings in England, Public Health England's [infection prevention control guidelines and hospital visiting guidance](#) remain in place for staff and visitors across all health services, for the protection of both staff and patients.

Any guidance that we have relating to workplaces, the care sector and schools can be found in the relevant section of this update, and we will continue to signpost to new information as it is issued. In the meantime, despite the lifting of many restrictions, we recommend the following to protect ourselves and each other:

1. **Consider wearing a face covering** – although legal restrictions have lifted, you can continue to protect yourself and others by continuing wearing a face mask indoors and in crowded areas. When wearing a face covering, the risk of transmission is reduced by up to 25 per cent.
2. **Make space for others** – giving one another space, particularly in crowded areas, can help you and others around you. The UK's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) estimates that the risk of transmitting Covid-19 at 1 metre could be up to ten times higher than at 2 metres – so keep 2 metres apart as a general rule where you can.
3. **Ventilate spaces** – letting fresh air into indoor areas helps to fight infection and protect your family and loved ones. It can help remove air that contains virus particles and prevent the spread of coronavirus. Meet up outside where possible but when inside, please open windows and/or doors.
4. **Get your vaccination** – when it is offered to you, we encourage you to come forward for both doses of your vaccination. Two doses gives you strong protection against the virus. Go to [Covid-19 vaccinations in Somerset - Somerset CCG](#) to find the easiest way to book in and keep an eye out on social media for the 'grab a jab' walk in centres that have been taking place each weekend.
5. **Participate in testing** – lateral flow (rapid) testing for people with no symptoms is still widely available locally, and you can get a free box of test kits from many local pharmacies or order online for home delivery. If you have symptoms, book a PCR test online at www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test or by calling 119.
6. **Self-isolate when required** – the rules on self-isolation remain in place until at least Monday 16 August. A positive test or being identified as a contact means you must self-isolate – this is still a legal requirement and helps stop the spread.

Workplaces: From 19 July employers have been able to start working towards employees returning to the workplace.

The Government's message to employers is one of caution. Employers have a duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of their staff and customers and Covid-19 risk assessments will need to be reviewed in the light of the latest advice.

It is important to respect and be considerate of those who may wish to take a more cautious approach as restrictions are lifted. The following behaviours should be encouraged by staff to help protect themselves and reduce sickness absence:

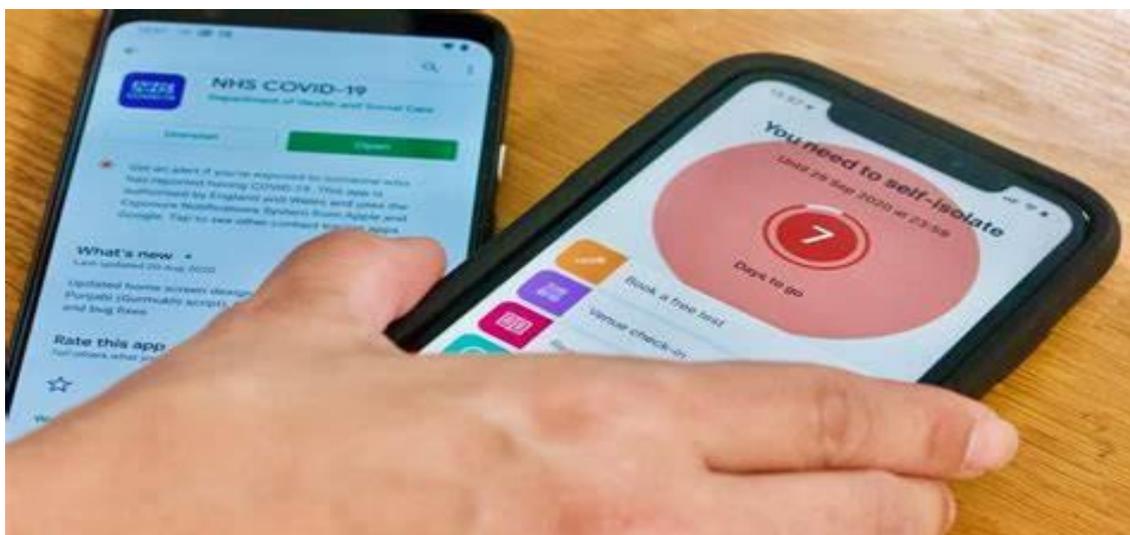
1. Meeting in well-ventilated areas where possible, such as outdoors or indoors with windows open.
2. Wearing a face covering where you come into contact with people you don't normally meet in enclosed and crowded spaces.
3. Washing your hands with soap and water or using hand sanitiser regularly throughout the day.
4. Covering your nose and mouth when you cough and sneeze.
5. Staying at home if unwell, to reduce the risk of passing on other illnesses onto colleagues and others in your community.
6. Considering individual risks, such as clinical vulnerabilities and vaccination status.

Businesses must not require a self-isolating employee to come to work and should make sure that workers and customers who feel unwell **do not** attend the setting.

Businesses are encouraged to display QR codes for customers to check in using the NHS Covid-19 app, to support NHS Test and Trace, although it is no longer a legal requirement.

The latest guidance on working safely by sector is available now:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-covid-19>



What to do when 'pinged' by the Covid-19 app. The app alert is advisory but should be taken seriously. It indicates your phone has been close to the phone of a Covid-19 case for long enough for you to be at risk of catching it, so you should isolate. Any decision to disregard the advisory alert by employers or individuals should only be taken where it is clear that the 'ping' has occurred in a situation where there is a high degree of confidence that the source is known and that close contact has not occurred, in or out of work. An example would be where phones have been placed in lockers, and all ping at the same time, AND all relevant staff are known not to have been in close contact. With cases increasing in the community, it becomes increasingly difficult to be sure why a person has been pinged, so we advise you to err on the side of caution. If the person who was pinged attends work and subsequently tests positive, contact tracing may lead to even more staff being required by law to isolate. Information about the app and FAQs can be found here:

[Home · COVID-19 app support](#)

Covid-status certification will not be required in law as a condition of entry for visitors to any setting, for the time being at least. Organisations are already able to ask visitors for proof of Covid-status, as long as they meet existing legal obligations including under equality law. The Government is providing a way for individuals to easily demonstrate their Covid-status. This can be achieved by completion of a full vaccine course, a recent negative test, or proof of natural immunity - through the NHS Covid Pass on the NHS app.

Care Sector: In the week ending 17 July, there have been 48 cases of Covid 19 at 39 social care settings across Somerset.

Latest guidelines

Following recent Government announcements, there have been several guideline changes for the care sector, largely to reflect changes to guidance in Step 4 of the roadmap. The list of updated guidelines is below:

[Guidance on protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19](#) - updated 20 July 2021

[COVID-19: how to work safely in care homes](#) - updated 19 July 2021

[How to work safely in domiciliary care in England](#) - updated 19 July 2021

[Admission and care of residents in a care home during COVID-19](#) - updated 16 July 2021

[Personal protective equipment \(PPE\) resource for care workers working in care homes during sustained Covid-19 transmission in England](#) – updated 19 July 2021

[Supported living services during coronavirus \(Covid 19\)](#) - updated 16 July 2021

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) testing for adult day care centre workers and service users](#) - updated 1 July 2021

[Testing service for extra care and supported living settings](#) – updated 1 July 2021

[Coronavirus \(Covid-19\) testing for homecare workers](#) – updated 14 May 2021

[Restricting workforce movement between care homes and other care settings](#) – updated 3 March 2021

Schools and Early Years settings: In the week to 17 July there were 251 cases at 99 school settings and 14 cases at 11 nursery settings.

The end of term is near – it's important that education and enrichment activities continue as planned. It is also important for families to be able to continue with holiday plans whilst remaining safe.

There are several ways in which we can help achieve this:

- We would advise that all educational staff, pupils aged over 11 years and the parents/carers of school aged children continue to take part in twice weekly asymptomatic testing until the end of term.
- If attending summer school (or other related activities), please continue to take part in twice weekly testing - information on how to obtain test kits can be found by [following this link](#).
- If anyone in a household is experiencing any of the symptoms of Covid-19, please continue to isolate, seek a PCR test and await the result.
- If you are asked to self-isolate as a close contact of someone with Covid-19, please follow the self-isolation guidance exactly as you would have previously (the easing of restrictions has not changed the self-isolation guidance for close contacts).

What is self isolation?

As a case or close contact you are required to isolate. So:

- do not go to work, school or public places – work from home if you can
- do not go on public transport or use taxis
- do not go out to get food and medicine – order it online or by phone, or ask someone to bring it to your home
- do not have visitors in your home, including friends and family – except for people providing essential care
- do not go out to exercise – exercise at home or in your garden, if you have one

If you do not have anyone who can support you with essentials you can click on this link [Get Covid-19 Help Somerset](#) or call our helpline on 0300 790 6275. This line is open from 8am to 6pm every day.

Vaccination Update: For the latest information about the Somerset vaccination programme follow this link: [Homepage - Somerset CCG T](#)



The coming days will see more walk in vaccination centres across the county. For full details, click here:

[Grab a jab - this week's walk-in locations \(19-29 July\) - Somerset CCG](#)

Do you have, or know someone who has concerns over receiving the Covid-19 Vaccine? We have a team of trained Vaccination buddies who are here to help! The programme enables people to be offered support via a 'buddy' who can help them to make informed decisions about having the Covid-19 vaccination.

People can be [referred \(or self-refer\)](#) to the scheme and a Vaccination Buddy will contact them by phone to discuss their concerns and offer information and reassurance. Vaccination Buddies come from all walks of life and have the necessary skills and knowledge to support people in a friendly, non-judgemental way. And don't just take our word for it. Here's a quote from someone who recently had a call with a buddy: *"I would 100 percent recommend the Vaccination Buddy scheme to a family member or friend. Julie was well informed and non-judgemental. She gave me lots more insight and reasons to say 'Yes' to the vaccine."*

Testing: It remains very important that people who do not display symptoms (asymptomatic) take lateral flow tests twice a week even if you have received one or both doses of the vaccine. This is because regular lateral flow testing leads to earlier identification of people who are infected without having symptoms. We would ask that

before meeting any vulnerable friends and family socially, or working with vulnerable colleagues, you continue to use these tests.

You can order [lateral flow tests online to be delivered to your home](#), call 119 to have a kit home delivered through the post, or collect a kit at [a local pharmacy](#). For further information on lateral flow tests, including a video showing how to perform one, you can visit our website [here](#).

It still remains the case that if you have symptoms of the infection, to take a PCR test, which can be done by phoning 119 or ordering a test here: [Get a free PCR test to check if you have coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#). Due to rising case numbers, you may find testing appointment slots are not available. Please try again later as more slots are released.

Resources and further information: Please do keep an eye 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](#).