

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Friday 17 December 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.

Covid-19 case numbers in Somerset have increased this week and remain high. The expectation is cases will continue to rise due to the Omicron variant, as this variant is more transmissible. With the national rise in Omicron cases, new national measures were put in place this week. These include:

- It is now a legal requirement to wear face coverings in most indoor settings (including theatres and cinemas but NOT hospitality settings) unless you're exempt. A full list of the locations where face coverings are required can be found [here](#).
- People are now encouraged to work from home if they can.
- NHS Covid passes are now mandatory for entry into nightclubs and venues where larger crowds gather. More details regarding the NHS pass can be found [here](#).

Omicron will become the dominant strain of Covid-19 in circulation and going forwards it is best to assume any new infection is the Omicron variant. There is updated information regarding testing and this can be found later in the update.

Omicron is a variant of Covid-19 so the same basic protective measures we can all adopt will still help stop the spread of the virus. Our own lifestyle choices, particularly in the run up to Christmas, play a big part so, even if fully vaccinated, we should all try to keep ourselves and each other safe. Simple ways to do this include wearing a face-covering where required and in crowded and enclosed spaces, ensuring there is good ventilation when meeting inside, washing our hands regularly and continuing to take regular lateral flow tests. If you have any symptoms of Covid-19, you should self-isolate immediately and get a [PCR test](#).

The government announced their intention to offer everyone over the age of 18 a booster jab by the end of December and there are a variety of ways in which a vaccine can be received. The vaccine remains our best line of defence, so please do step forward whether it's for your first, second or booster jab. Full Somerset vaccination and booster information can be found [here](#).

Latest Covid-19 Dashboard: [Somerset Coronavirus \(Covid-19\)](#) Scroll down the page until you get to '**Covid-19 Dashboard**' in the list. Click on this and the dashboard will open. Please note the data reported in this document may differ slightly from the data showing on the dashboard because of discrepancies in reporting periods.

'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_



Somerset Covid Cases

Latest 7 day figures

Number of tests

90807



Number of positive cases

2735



Please grab your jab!



7 day rate per 100k

Somerset

486.5

South West

538.6

England

553.3

In the week up to 5 December, approximately 90,807 tests were carried out across the county with 2,735 new confirmed cases. The rates have increased slightly in the last reporting week to 486.5 per 100.000. This is below both the South-West average and the national average.

Hospitalisation data for Somerset remains at just above 40 Covid-19 in-patients in Somerset hospitals.

This Week's Headlines:

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

- Workplace, Care and School settings
- Vaccinations Update
- Testing Update
- Latest Covid Catch-up Film
- Resources and further information

Workplaces: This week we have heard about several businesses which have significant staff absences following events which staff have attended together, which has seriously impacted their business continuity.

With staff parties planned in the run up to Christmas, it's vital business leaders take all necessary precautions to keep their staff safe and review their business

contingency plans in case staff become infected and need to take time off from work to self-isolate.

To reduce spread, businesses should consider meeting in smaller groups, rather than holding large events, and meeting outdoors is always preferable to prevent spread.

If events are held indoors, organisers should choose well-ventilated venues, where windows and doors can be opened to allow fresh air in.

Staff should be encouraged to do a Rapid Lateral Flow Test (LFDs) before attending events. By doing an LFD, everyone can ensure they are not spreading the virus before seeing friends, family and colleagues. Up to 1 in 3 people with Covid-19 don't have symptoms but can still infect others so it's important everyone tests to prevent passing on the virus without realising.

Care Sector: We are monitoring things closely in our care settings due to the changing picture due to Omicron and the rise in case numbers nationally. We have recently seen outbreaks of not only Covid-19 but other respiratory infections like Flu, so early identification of any type of infection and prompt action is key. We are all working together to promote:

1. Vaccinations, ensuring boosters are provided and recorded on the Capacity Tracker
2. High quality Infection, Prevention and Control measures, including good ventilation
3. Identification, prompt action and reporting of cases of Covid-19 and other infections

Infection Prevention Control: Take a look at our [Infection Prevention Control team's Seasonal Do's and Don'ts](#) to keep everyone safe this Christmas covering handy tips on eating and drinking, hand hygiene, decontamination, ventilation, PPE, care sharing and staff rooms. Feel free to share and use in all care settings.

Visiting arrangements in care homes: The visiting [guidelines](#) have been updated considering the rise in Omicron cases and the need to understand the risk posed by visitors to vulnerable settings. The main changes include:

- every care home resident can nominate up to 3 visitors who will be able to enter the care home for regular visits (this number does not include essential care givers or preschool age children)

- subject to a risk assessment by the health protection team (HPT), outbreak controls may be in place for up to 28 days following the last positive case especially as we learn more about real-world vaccine effectiveness and disease severity of the Omicron variant
- vaccination is one of our best defences to combat infection. The Covid-19 vaccine significantly reduces the transmission of infection, particularly after 2 or more doses. It is strongly recommended that residents and visitors receive 2 doses of the Covid-19 vaccine, plus their booster especially in light of the emergence of the Omicron variant. If eligible, visitors should also get their flu jab when it is offered to them
- visitors should not enter the care home if they are feeling unwell, even if they have tested negative for Covid-19 and are fully vaccinated and have received their booster. Transmissible viruses such as flu, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and norovirus can be just as dangerous to care home residents as Covid-19. If visitors have any symptoms which suggest other transmissible viruses and infections, such as cough, high temperature, diarrhoea or vomiting, they should avoid the care home until at least 5 days after they feel better
- visitors who are not legally required to self-isolate are advised against visiting the care home (for 10 days) if they have been identified as a close contact of someone with Covid-19, unless absolutely necessary, even if they have been fully vaccinated. Where visits do occur, visitors should have received a negative PCR test result prior to their visit, and a negative lateral flow test result earlier in the day of their visit

Care staff mental health and wellbeing: There are resources available to support our care sector during difficult times:

- [Somerset Emotional Wellbeing Staff Hub](#) – a dedicated online resource for all health and care workers in Somerset
- [Our Frontline](#) - mental health and bereavement support for care workers
- [Somerset Mindline](#) – open 24/7 throughout the festive period

12 days of caring at Christmas: In the public health team, we love this video made by our wonderful care sector – thank you to those who put together this celebration of social care and the fantastic work you all do for us all to enjoy. Please share widely. [Watch the 12 days of caring at Christmas video](#)

Schools and Early Years settings: Directors of Public Health (DsPH) across the South West [reached consensus](#) on 15 December to continue to advise enhanced control measures to be in place in education settings on return from the Christmas holidays.

We are currently experiencing a time of great change and uncertainty, but we understand what is most helpful for educators is some clarity for a return in January. We have therefore advised the following:

- Stand up onsite testing (Assisted Test Site) on return in January
- Prepare to come back with enhanced/amber measures in place as per the [contingency framework flow chart](#) which can be found here [Covid-19 School Toolkit | Support Services for Education](#). The South West Association of Directors of Public Health have supported schools to come back in enhanced measures due to the rapidly rising case numbers and emergence of a new variant.

SCC Public Health have secured an allocation of funds based on £2 per pupil per school as an outbreak management fund to help meet the rising costs of cleaning and infection prevention control measures within your settings. We appreciate this only goes some way towards covering these costs, but we hope it will support you through the return to school in the new year. We are currently working on how this money will be distributed in time for the start of term.

Covid-19 Educational Webinar Every Thursday: The South-West Health Protection Team run free weekly Covid-19 educational setting webinars, which all educational settings are welcome to attend. The sessions cover infection prevention principles and then discuss scenarios to illustrate this.

Primary school testing:

We continue to see a rise in cases in primary schools in Somerset, therefore it's important to continue all you can do to encourage, household, parent and staff LFD testing. Please also be aware Public Health could advise daily LFD testing for certain groups during an outbreak.

There's another way to collect rapid covid tests

Use a collect code when picking up your tests from a pharmacy

Online at [gov.uk/get-collect-code](https://www.gov.uk/get-collect-code)

By calling 119

#DoltForSomerset



Close contact daily LFD testing includes students of primary age under parental discretion. The new LFD tests are nasal swabs only and much easier to use than previous stocks.

For primary aged children LFD test kits are available through the usual routes (local pharmacies or online).

Symptomatic and Asymptomatic Testing: For those settings closing over Christmas, all staff and students should test over the holidays in line with national guidance.

SCC PH advice remains consistent with national guidance:

- Only use twice weekly LFD testing for asymptomatic cases
- Make sure you do an LFD according to the instructions and at least 30 minutes after eating or drinking or vaping
- If you get a positive LFD or have symptoms get a PCR and use the supervised PCR testing route at test centre to get the best quality test
- There is no need for primary age pupils (those in year 6 and below) to regularly test, unless they have been identified as a contact for someone who has tested positive for Covid-19 and therefore advised to take lateral flow tests every day for 7 days.

Childhood Immunisation Programme: The Somerset Foundation Trust manage the childhood immunisation programme with SAINT (School Age Immunisation Nursing Team, part of the NHS). SAINT deliver the nasal flu vaccination to all schools in Somerset. SAINT continue to work as quickly and safely as possible to finish the flu programme by end of January.

Any schools who had to be cancelled this week will be contacted in the new year to be rebooked. Some cancellations have been necessary due redeployment of the SAINT team as we focus on delivery of the national Booster programme.

Walk in FLU Vaccination Clinics

SAINT will be offering FLU vaccination clinics for school aged children who have missed their FLU vaccination in school.

Date	Location	Walk in Times
20/12/2021	Minehead Middle School, Ponsford Road, Minehead TA24 5RH	10am – 2pm
20/12/2021	Cheese & Grain, Market Yard, Justice Lane, Frome BA11 1BE	10am – 2pm
21/12/2021	Crispin Hall, 83 High Street, Street BA16 0EZ	10am – 2pm
22/12/2021	Westlands Entertainment Venue, Westbourne Close, Yeovil BA20 2DD	10am – 2pm
29/12/2021	Bridgwater & Albion RFC, Bath Rd, Bridgwater TA6 4TZ	10am – 2pm
30/12/2021	Westlands Entertainment Venue, Westbourne Close, Yeovil BA20 2DD	10am – 2pm
31/12/2021	Community Families Hub East Reach House, East Reach, Taunton TA1 3EN	10am – 2pm

Appointment only clinics below

If you would like to attend a clinic which requires an appointment please email Somersetsaint@somersetft.nhs.uk

Date	Location
21/12/2021	Taunton
22/12/2021	Chard
23/12/2021	Shepton Mallet
23/12/2021	Wells

[Flu vaccination programme - SAINTS \(School Age Immunisation Teams\) \(somersetft.nhs.uk\)](https://www.somersetsaint@somersetft.nhs.uk)

A full range of resources and information can be found here: [Public Health England: Winter Readiness Packs | Support Services for Education](#)

Covid-19 Vaccine Programme:

Special school staff are eligible for Covid-19 boosters. Staff should be able to book on the [National Booking System](#) by self-declaring they are a health and social care worker. Staff can take ID along to the centre in case asked, but they shouldn't encounter a problem. Slots are released into the national booking system as they become available, so you do have to refresh the system if the site you want does not appear.

The government have announced second doses for secondary aged children 12 weeks after their first dose. The School Aged Immunisation Nursing Team (SAINT) have not yet been given any guidance on how this is to be delivered, whether this will be an in-school offer or through community sites. As soon as we have further information, we will let you know.

There is a continued offer for all eligible young people to access their first dose via vaccination sites in Somerset for those who may have missed their school session.

Please could we ask for the following information to be shared with all families via email, newsletter and school websites to ensure parents know how to access the vaccine for their children.

Bookable slots for 12-15-year-olds



The poster features a young woman with red reindeer antlers sitting on the floor in front of a brick wall. To her right is a Christmas tree with gifts. The text on the poster includes: 'We all want a safer Christmas, together.', 'New walk-in COVID-19 jabs for 12 - 15s.', 'Walk-in vaccinations are available for your teen in the run-up to Xmas:', a list of locations (Firepool, Taunton; Somerset Motor Museum; Minehead Hospital; Bridgwater Rugby Club) with green checkmarks, the website 'somersetccg.nhs.uk', the NHS logo, and the hashtags '#VaccinatingSomerset' and '#StayWellSomerset'.

There are bookable slots for 12 -15-year-olds (who have missed their school vaccination date) at vaccination centres; Somerset Motor Museum in Sparkford and Firepool in Taunton.

You can book through the [National Booking Service online](#) or by calling 119.

There are likely to be other clinics starting regularly in other areas in the coming weeks, we will endeavour to circulate this information as soon as it is available.

Please encourage parents/guardians to [check the NHS walk in site for up to date information](#).

Please note: If a child has tested positive for Covid-19 and is not at high risk from Covid-19, they need to wait 12 weeks before they can have a Covid-19 vaccine. This starts from the date they had symptoms, or the date of the positive test if they did not have symptoms.

Vaccination Update: All eligible adults in England aged 18 and over will be offered a Covid-19 booster vaccine by the end of December.



In terms of booking vaccinations this should continue to be done via our local NHS website [Covid-19 vaccinations in Somerset - Somerset CCG](#) this gives local information but also leads into the National Booking Service. Depending on your location, circumstances and availability this system will then show you when and where there are available appointments for vaccination. This may or may not be within Somerset but will give the best options available for vaccination as quickly as possible.

To get your vaccine visit www.nhs.uk/Covid-Vaccination or call 119 for an appointment. There are also convenient walk-in options across the country, which you can find on www.nhs.uk/grab-a-jab.

Testing Update: In light of emerging evidence on the Omicron variant, there have been changes to the testing guidance. The summary can be found below:

- From Tuesday 14 December 2021, fully vaccinated adults, and those aged between 5 – 18 years and 6 months who are contacts of a confirmed Covid-19 case have been told to take daily Lateral Flow Device (LFD) tests. Contacts should test every day for 7 days, or until 10 days since their last contact with the person who tested positive for Covid-19 if this is earlier. If they don't know the date of contact, they should take an LFD test every day for 7 days after they are notified of the contact. Contacts should take this daily test before they leave the house for the first time that day. This service is called DTCC.
- DTCC is also recommended to contacts who are exempt from self-isolation because they are participating in an approved vaccines trial or are unable to be vaccinated for clinical reasons.
- DTCC offers an additional way to minimise the risk of transmission, in addition to other Covid-19 measures.
- If an individual undertaking DTCC has a negative LFD test result they could still be at risk of having and spreading Covid-19 even if they don't have symptoms and they should still:
 - limit close contact with other people outside their household, especially in crowded, enclosed or poorly ventilated spaces,
 - work from home if they are able to (students/pupils should continue to attend education),
 - wear a face covering in crowded, enclosed or poorly ventilated spaces and where they are in close contact with other people
 - limit contact with anyone who is at higher risk of severe illness if infected with Covid-19 and
 - follow the guidance on how to stay safe and help prevent the spread: [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)
- If an individual undertaking DTCC has a positive LFD test result, or develops symptoms of Covid-19 they should self-isolate and order a PCR test (Polymerase Chain Reaction) to confirm the positive result: [Get a free PCR test to check if you have coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/get-a-free-pcr-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus-covid-19).
- DTCC replaces the Omicron-specific self-isolation rules for contacts who are fully vaccinated or under 18 years and six months and will apply to all vaccinated contacts, regardless of whether or not they are linked to a suspected or confirmed Omicron case.

- Children under the age of 5 do not need to do daily testing if they are identified as a contact but they should limit contact with anyone who is at higher risk of severe illness if infected with Covid-19.
- Unvaccinated close contacts are currently legally required to self-isolate unless they are taking part in an approved Workplace Contact Testing scheme. If they are not part of an approved Workplace Testing scheme they should self-isolate in line with current Government guidance for unvaccinated individuals.
- If you are fully vaccinated and currently isolating due to being a contact of someone who has Omicron, you no longer need to isolate and should take daily LFD tests for what would have been remainder of the 10 day the isolation period.

To help manage the demand on the direct to home ordering service we are asking:

1. Contacts use tests they already have at home first
2. If they run out, then they should pick up from their work or school collection points if they already obtain them this way, or pick up tests from their local pharmacy which will be quicker than online ordering. To find out which pharmacies are able to provide lateral flow tests, please visit our website: [Coronavirus – Get a test if you do not have symptoms \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/coronavirus-get-a-test-if-you-do-not-have-symptoms)
3. There is still the possibility of ordering through the deliver direct to home ordering service via [Order coronavirus \(Covid-19\) rapid lateral flow tests](#) or by calling 119. The website will update daily.
4. Finally, we ask people to not stockpile tests and they only hold what they would need for one round of seven days testing for each member of their household.

For every test you take, you should report your LFD result via this easy-to-use Gov.uk page: [Report a Covid-19 rapid lateral flow test result](#). Participants can contact 119 if they need support reporting their results and for language support if English is not their first language.

Covid Catch-up Film: In this week's Covid Catch-Up film, we discuss the ramping up by the NHS of the roll-out of the booster vaccination. The film can be viewed [here](#).

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 [LinkedIn](#) and share our posts with your networks to help us communicate these important messages. Follow our Director of Public Health account [here](#).