

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Thursday 22 October 2020

This update is provided by the Somerset Covid-19 Engagement Board and is designed to provide a weekly update on the current Covid-19 situation in Somerset.

It aims to provide you with an update on current infection rates in Somerset and actions we are taking locally in response to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Over-arching message: We are continuing to see a rise in positive Covid-19 cases across the county. The Somerset seven day rate is still lower (42.1 per 100,000 population) than the England rate (173.6 per 100,000) but the rise over the last few weeks is steadily continuing.

We are closely monitoring where our cases are, so that we can be quick to respond to any trends, clusters or outbreaks.

We have had positive cases in all parts of the county, therefore we want to stress that we are all in this together, and keeping the virus under control needs all of us to stick to the 'Hands, Face, Space' guidance. Anyone can catch Covid-19 regardless of age, gender or geographical location.

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



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Summary of cases: We are seeing a general trend of increased transmission in Somerset, across all age groups and within all districts. Catching the virus from someone within your household is one of the main ways people are becoming Covid positive. Everyone in the household needs to do all they can to try and reduce their risk.

It is vitally important that everyone adheres to the hands, face, space guidance and practices good hygiene in the home - cleaning surfaces and washing hands with soap for 20 seconds frequently. When returning from work or school, try to get in the habit of changing clothes and washing hands straight away.

If someone gets symptoms – a fever, cough or loss of taste and/ or smell you and your household need to self-isolate immediately. The person with symptoms needs to get a test (you don't need a test if you are not experiencing symptoms even if you are living in the same household). To book a test at a local testing site go onto the national portal online at <http://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test> or by phoning 119, sites are open 7 days a week. Order a home test kit if you cannot get to a test site.

Make sure you also self-isolate while you wait for the results. We are seeing several cases of people 'nipping to the shops' when they are meant to be isolating, please be aware this does put others at risk.

The link below shows the Somerset Dashboard which tracks our local epidemic from the start in March, to the current time:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/covid-19-dashboard/>

Contact Tracing: We use a range of data made available to us from organisations such as Public Health England, Department of Health & Social Care and Office for National Statistics to provide as much understanding as possible of our cases. Our Public Health Team, with the back up of local Environmental Health Officers, have been doing what's called 'Enhanced contact tracing'. We are proud to be one of only two local authorities in the South West currently delivering this additional support.

This work is really important, as well as providing support to people locally, this contact tracing gives us valuable information about how local people are catching the virus so that we can target our messaging and actions accordingly. We have also been able to make links between cases that would not have been possible without the local knowledge that we, as a team have.

Testing and Cases: As of Thursday 22 October, Somerset's seven day infection rate is 42.1 new cases per 100,000. Between 10 October and 17 October, 13,873 tests were carried out in Somerset. During these dates, at the time of writing, there have been 227 new confirmed cases in the county.

This week the proportion of tests that are coming back positive has increased slightly. It suggests that the right people are getting a test but also that our infection rates are increasing. The only people who need to access public testing are those with symptoms.

Somerset's infection rate is lower than both the England and South West seven day averages, which at the time of writing stands at 173.6 per 100,000 for England and 81.7 per 100,000 for the South West. Despite our lower rate, we must stay vigilant and continue to adhere to the guidelines to keep cases low.

We are working to increase the number of testing sites in the county and in addition to the mobile testing unit (MTU) at Frome Cricket Club and the regional testing site (RTS) at Taunton Racecourse there are two new sites due to be up and running in November:

- Local Testing Site at Bridgwater Town Hall – this is a walk-through site
- Mobile Testing Unit at RNAS Yeovilton

There are also testing sites across the border that are more accessible for some Somerset residents, currently these are in Trowbridge, Warminster, Weston-super-Mare, Tiverton, Barnstaple, Dorchester, Bridport, Exeter and Bristol.

Care Sector: Somerset County Council Public Health and Adult Social Care, Public Health England and Somerset CCG are supporting staff across the care sector to keep some of our most vulnerable residents protected from the virus.

At the time of writing, in the last seven days we have had 13 positive cases in 10 care settings in Somerset. Most of these cases are relating to staff employed at the care home rather than residents and involve single cases being identified through routine asymptomatic testing.

We have been working closely with care homes to help prevent the spread of infection. Support includes webinars and weekly updates which summarise the national guidance and applies it to our local context. Additionally, support is provided with risk assessments and guidance on reducing the spread of the virus and what to do if someone starts to show symptoms or tests positive.

For the latest known information and advice for adult care providers in Somerset visit: <https://ssab.safeguardingsomerset.org.uk/covid19/>

Schools and Early Years Settings: As many of our schools and early years providers break for a well-deserved half-term, we would like to thank them all for their hard work and dedication to the children and young people of Somerset. We must also thank all the children and young people, and their parents and carers for the part they have played in reducing the spread of coronavirus.

We continue to support all educational settings with both the prevention and mitigation of coronavirus within their school community. Since September, we have supported over 50 educational settings with a range of situations.

At the time of writing, in the seven days there has been:

- 5 single cases in schools, one nursery and one FE College
- 3 schools, 1 nursery and 1 FE College have had two or more positive cases linked to them (over the last 14-days).

More often than not, these cases are from one household or are as a result of social contact outside of school.

These cases refer to both student and staff cases and do not always result in the identification of close contacts from the school community.

Information for parents, carers and guardians:

- New COVID Checker for parents:
https://www.cypsomersethealth.org/resources/covidchecker-schools_V2.pdf
- Resources for parents to understand the difference between a cold and Covid-19:
<https://www.healthysomerset.co.uk/covid-19/info/ipc/>
- School self-isolation guidance:
<https://www.healthysomerset.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/School-Self-Isolation-Guidance-1.pdf>

Workplaces and Events: We are seeing mainly single individual cases in workplaces. This week we have revised our notification processes of workplaces to ensure more joined up support for businesses. We have produced a number of useful leaflets and posters on what to do if staff or customers start to display symptoms. These can be found [here](#). We will continue to support our business community as the pandemic continues.

This week, after seeing an increase in cases in Sedgemoor and on the advice of the Director of Public Health, eat:Festivals have taken the difficult and brave decision to cancel their eat:Burnham market that was scheduled for this weekend 24 October.

We have worked with organisations such as eat:Festival since the start of the pandemic to ensure that their events in Somerset proceed and comply with the covid-19 secure standards, with the aim of reducing the risk of spread of the virus. The eat:Festivals team have done everything we have asked of them (and more) to ensure that events go ahead with the minimum of risk and they are to be applauded for taking such a responsible approach.

Somerset County Council and the relevant District Council officers will work with the festival team to review other events and where they do go ahead, will continue to support them to deliver these events in a covid secure manner

Communications: The focus for communication and engagement this week has been on reinforcing the key HANDS FACE SPACE message as well as the importance of face coverings in reducing the spread of coronavirus.

Medium Tier Alert level posters have been widely circulated to all town and parish councils to enable communities to fully understand what Somerset's alert level 'medium' means for them. We are now able to localise these posters, please find attached some branded Somerset Alert level posters for distribution.

In the next week, our focus will be on targeted communications to Sedgemoor residents and communities who have seen an increase in rates this week. At the time of writing, the seven-day rate per 100,000 is 71 for the Sedgemoor District. We will be sharing information on how to stay safe and reduce the spread of infection. It is important to remember that our rates are still comparatively low to the South West and England rates but we must all play our part to keep rates as low as possible.

Full list of local COVID alert levels by area is available here:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/full-list-of-local-covid-alert-levels-by-area>

Social distance every day – whether at work or play: We continue to reinforce the message that social distancing must be maintained at all times whether in work or socialising; this even means during a lunch or tea break.

With half term approaching and many people likely to take short 'staycations' across the region, it is important to remember that a holiday does not mean a holiday from the guidelines – we want you to enjoy your holiday but please do so safely. Ensure that you try to keep at least 2 metres away from people you do not live with. Social distancing is essential to stop the spread of the virus, as it is more likely to spread when people are close together. Continue to keep up regular hand washing and cover your face in enclosed spaces.

Be Spooky but stay Safe this Halloween: With Halloween a week on Saturday, many of us would now be planning fun (and spooky) things to do with our families. Unfortunately, as we all know, coronavirus means that we need to approach such things differently this year.

Please avoid Trick or Treating if possible, and at all times follow the rule of six as well as the 'hands, face and space' guidance. Knocking on doors and picking up sweets can increase the risk of catching and spreading the virus through touch and close contact. Instead why not use the opportunity to be creative and find alternative Halloween activities within your own home. Organise a Halloween themed treasure hunt around your house and garden and hide the trick or treat sweets to be found in the safety of your home! Or decorate your doorstep and share your pictures with us on social media, we would love to see them.

Finally, please share the information and particularly the key messages that are informing our current campaigns with your networks. Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) for further updates.

Let us know if you feel there is a gap in our messaging, or a format or resource that the communities you work with or are part of would find useful. Your insights are valuable to us. Please email any feedback you have, to: lzrogers@somerset.gov.uk

Resources and Further Information: For the latest local information as well as digital resources, posters and flyers please visit:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/coronavirus/>

For information and resources on staying healthy happy and safe at the time please visit:

<https://www.healthysomerset.co.uk/covid-19/>

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](#).