

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Thursday 8 April 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 in real terms has decreased since last week showing small variations daily. The seven-day rate is now 20.6 per 100,000. This reduction is potentially not a true representation in part due to the Easter break which we suspect has had an impact on the number of tests being taken.

With increased testing there will naturally be an increase in the number of positive results but this testing is vital in helping us break the chains of transmission - as we can quickly identify and isolate those with Covid-19 who may not necessarily show symptoms.

This weekend, prior to the easing of certain Covid-19 restrictions from Monday 12 April and as we move to the next step of the roadmap, we need to ensure 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 – and continue to wear masks in enclosed spaces. The opening of outdoor hospitality and non-essential retailers will not alter this. The reopening of businesses and high streets will come as very welcome news to many, and it is all down to the amazing efforts made by the vast majority of people in our communities.

With new liberties it might be easy to think the worst is over, however it is a combination of testing, vaccines and following guidance which will get us to step three of the roadmap. Our message is to stay local, minimise travel and 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.

Testing continues to be one of our greatest defences against Covid-19. This week the Universal Testing Plan was announced meaning everybody can now access regular LFD testing kits from a range of different sources including the new Pharmacy Collect option. We will go into more detail regarding this in the section below, but this is great news as it can only increase our chances of spotting cases early. If you or your family are currently taking part in regular testing, please continue to take your tests during the last week of the Easter holidays prior to the reopening of schools.

This week there has been much media attention on the safety of the AstraZeneca vaccine but the main message is still that the benefits of being vaccinated far outweigh the very low risks – and the decision to make the offer of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine to the under 30s is a positive move to ensure confidence within this demographic.

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'.



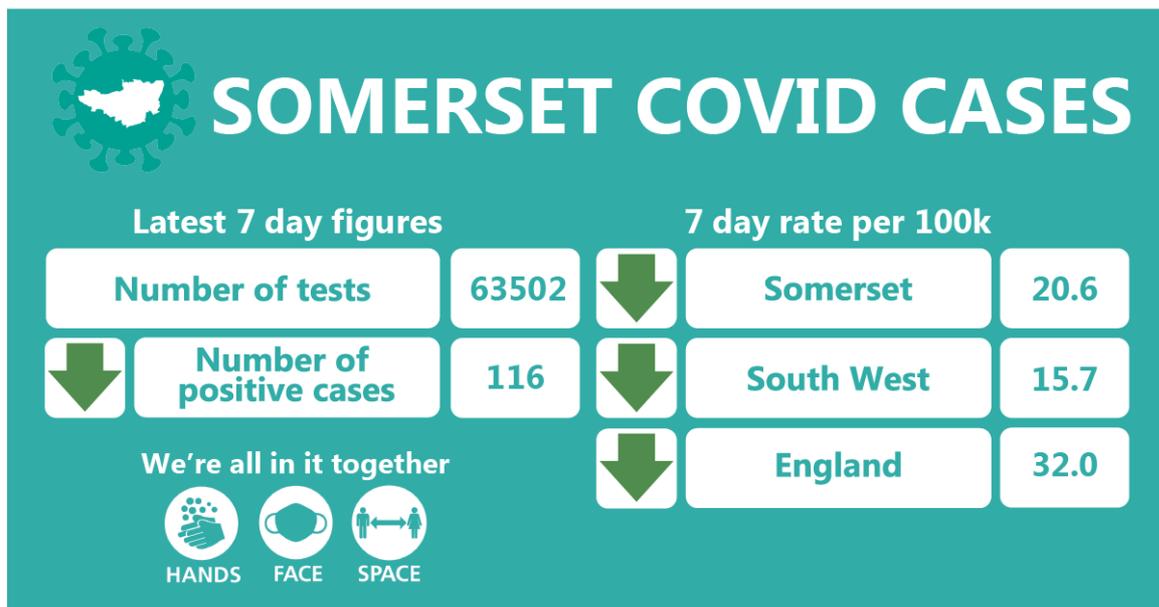
David Fothergill
 Leader
 Somerset County Council
 Twitter: @DJAFothergill



Trudi Grant
 Director of Public Health
 Twitter: @SomersetDPH



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



In week up to the 4th April, approximately 63502 tests were carried out across the county and there have been 116 new confirmed cases. Our rate remains higher than the South West rate of 15.7 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:

- Workplace, care and school settings
- Continued easing of lockdown rules
- Vaccination update
- Vaccination buddies
- Universal testing
- Testing survey
- Accessible resources

Workplaces: We are still seeing an increase of people who do not understand the isolation rules. Individuals have reported their understanding as being - because they can now get easily tested, they don't need to isolate when in contact with a case or someone with symptoms.

The main thing to remember is, whilst having a positive Covid-19 result is a definite red light, having a negative result is not a green light. If you receive a positive test result you must isolate accordingly but a negative result does not mean that you can stop carrying out the vital hands face, space and fresh air measures. This continues to be a really important part in stopping the spread of Covid-19, there is a chance that you could still be infected even if you test as negative and you must still protect yourself from others who may be harbouring the virus.

If you have been identified as a contact of someone who has tested positive for Covid-19, you must self-isolate for ten days 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: 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 \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Care Sector: In the seven days to the 4th April there have been 8 new cases at 7 care homes. We continue to support settings as needed with support and guidance on prevention measures.

It is really important that settings continue to engage with the testing schedules to identify asymptomatic cases, even if the setting has really high vaccination rates.

As the rules on visiting in care homes relax, we would like to remind visitors to help care setting staff to keep their loved ones safe and prevent the spread of all infectious diseases. Please don't visit if you have any symptoms, make sure you do a test before entering the setting and even if it is negative, take all preventative measures, handwashing, physical distancing and fresh air.

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

Schools and Early Years settings: Now we are about to enter the last week of the school break for the majority of local schools it is important to ensure that pupils are continuing their testing routine.

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/government/guidance/covid-19-pcr-home-test-kit-instructions)

Continued Easing of Lockdown Rules: We are encouraging people to continue to enjoy their new freedoms and to take advantage of the lifting of restrictions from Monday 12th April but we are still urging people to not be tempted to meet indoors as the risk of spreading the virus is significantly higher inside, the current planned date for allowing households or groups of up to six people to mix indoors is 17 May at the earliest.

Full details of the changes which will take place on Monday can be found here: [COVID-19\) Coronavirus restrictions: what you can and cannot do - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do)

Always remember, 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.

It is important to reiterate this easing goes ahead with **no changes to social contact rules** and many restrictions are still in place. Outdoor gatherings must still be limited to 6 people or 2 households, and you must not socialise indoors with anyone you do not live with nor have formed a support bubble with.

Vaccination Update: You will have seen the recent reports about the AstraZeneca vaccine and that, as a precaution, people under 30 with no underlying health conditions will be offered an alternative vaccine where possible once they are eligible.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) – the UK's independent regulator, and the Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI) have said that benefits of the vaccine far outweigh the risks for the vast majority of adults. They have said: "Everybody who has already had a first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine should receive a second dose of the same brand, irrespective of age, except for the very small number of people who experienced blood clots with low platelet counts from their first vaccination."

Covid-19 Vaccine buddy scheme: As we move down through the age groups, we are seeing the uptake of the offer of a vaccine reducing. Concerns over the vaccines means our 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

This week's Covid Catch-up video sees Clinton Rogers highlighting the work of our amazing Covid Champions. Clinton speaks to Helen Fielden, the Coordinator for the programme as well as one of the Champions themselves. He also discusses the work and importance of the new 'Vaccine Buddies' programme with one of Public Health's Consultants Matthew Hibbert.

<https://youtu.be/GbRMHizhvQs>

Universal Testing: People taking part in LFD testing on a regular basis will be very important as we move forward especially as society starts to open up again. Regular testing helps break the chain of transmission which might otherwise have gone unidentified. A percentage of positive PCR tests are sent to labs to be "sequenced". This is really important in terms of identifying variants of the virus which may be of concern. Recent guidance has changed to ask all those who have a positive LFD test result to have a follow up PCR test within 2 days.

LFD testing continues to be available through a number of programmes [locally](#) and the Government's announcement encourages everyone in England to access free, regular, rapid COVID-19 testing from Friday 9 April, read more here: [Twice weekly rapid testing to be available to everyone in England.](#)

From Friday the 9th April, people can now be tested by the following routes:

- **Book a test at local Community Test Site** - Please [check this map of test site locations, dates and times](#) for the nearest service to you. You can also find the test site locations listed in the section below.
- **Collect a home test kit from a local Community Test Site** - You do not need to book to collect a test, but the tests will only be available for collection at specific times. [Check this map of test site locations, dates and times](#) for the nearest service to you.

- **Get a test kit sent to your home** - If you are unable to get to a test centre to collect a test kit you can order a home testing kit to be sent to your home. You can order a test online here from 9 April: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): getting tested - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- **Get a test at your workplace** – You may be able to get a test from your workplace or they may be able to send one to your home. Check with your employer for details, if this isn't available you can use one of the other options.
- **Collect a test from a pharmacy** – A new pharmacy collect service is now available in Somerset with 40 pharmacies signed up and more to come online soon. You will be able to use this if you are over the age of 18 without symptoms. Participating pharmacies will provide a box of 7 rapid tests to use twice a week at home. [Find a pharmacy where you can collect tests \(type 'Somerset' in the search bar to view available sites\)](#)

As part of the roadmap, and as we mix more with people, it is important we test more to find cases who may be asymptomatic and pass on the infection. Just like brushing our teeth, taking 10,000 steps a day or eating at least 5 portions of fresh fruit and vegetables a day. Testing for Covid-19 twice a week will be the new routine for us all.

We are encouraging everyone who needs to work away from home, those who are parents or support bubbles of nursery or school and college age children to participate too and anyone else who wants to get a test.

Vaccine and Testing Survey: To support people's ability to access testing we are keen to hear your views and have launched a community survey to seek the views of as many people across Somerset as possible.

As we continue the cautious journey out of national lockdown, we are keen to hear from you about three key areas:

1. testing
2. vaccination
3. self-isolating

Please help us by responding to 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.

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](#).