

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Thursday 13 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 14.2 per 100,000 which is a slight rise on last week. On a national level, cases, hospitalisations and deaths are back to the levels we saw in September.

From Monday 17 May we will be moving to Step 3 of the roadmap. This is such a positive step for all residents and businesses and we hope everyone can enjoy these new freedoms responsibly so we can remain on track for the further reduction of restrictions on 21 June.

The new rules include the return of international travel, indoor gatherings and overnight stays involving two households or six individuals, indoor opening of pubs and restaurants and the re-opening of cinemas and hotels.

We will provide further detail in the section below however we urge people to remember the important tools we all have at our disposal to help keep our rates as low as possible. Until 17 May, and after, it's absolutely vital we continue to follow the current public health guidance so we can keep rates of infection low and protect each other. People also need to remain very cautious about close contact with their friends and family, and when they welcome friends back, they also should let fresh air in too. The message of hands, face, space and fresh air is especially important when mixing indoors. Full details on the changes occurring on Monday can be found using the following link: [Covid-19 Response - changes from 17 May](#)

This week has been **Mental Health Awareness Week** and we have been focussing on those individuals who have been affected by the pandemic and those with anxiety regarding the reopening of society – there is further information later in this update.

Many people in Somerset are now making testing a part of their normal weekly routine. This is vital in helping us quickly identify and isolate those with the virus who may not necessarily show symptoms. We all need to remember the lateral flow testing is for those displaying no symptoms of the virus (known as asymptomatic) – if you have any Covid-19 symptoms you should request a confirmatory [PCR test online](#) or by calling 119. It is through increased testing we can help identify variants of concern which has been highlighted this week with the concerns mounting regarding the variant B.1.617.2 seen in India.

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'.



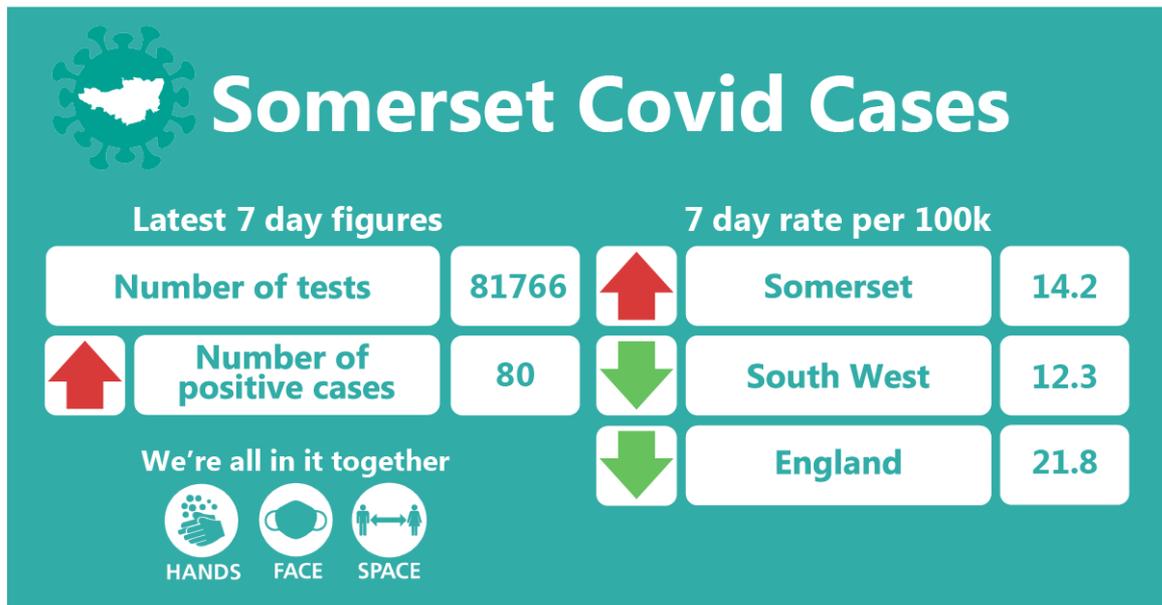
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In the week up to 1 May approximately 81766 tests were carried out across the county and there have been 80 new confirmed cases. The rates have increased slightly since last week and our rate of 14.2 is higher than the South West rate of 12.3 so we must continue all the protection measures such as hands, face, space and fresh air as Covid-19 is still here.

We have had minimal new cases at educational and social care settings in the week up to 8 May.

THIS WEEK'S HEADLINES:

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

- Workplace, care and school settings
- Vaccination update
- Contact Tracing / Local 0 (zero)
- Testing Update
- Communications Focus
- Entering Step 3 of the Roadmap
- Mental Health Awareness Week
- Accessible resources

Workplaces: All workplaces need to be very aware of the need for good ventilation – particularly indoor hospitality prior to moving to Step 3 on Monday 17 May.

The evidence shows Covid-19 is transmitted in an airborne way. It is for this reason we continue to ask all businesses to think about how they will ensure a flow of fresh air through their premises. It is also still very important to ensure businesses have a robust cleaning regime to keep all high touch surfaces contamination free and it is a combination of testing, good ventilation and routine cleaning which will allow us all to keep progressing through the road map.

Advice for ventilation in the workplace:

- Employers should provide employees with clear guidance on ventilation, why it is important, and instruction on how to achieve and maintain good natural ventilation or to operate systems if there are user controls.
- It is important to identify and deal with areas which are not well ventilated. The more people occupying a poorly ventilated area, and the longer they remain in it, the greater the risk of spread of Covid-19.
- Control measures such as avoiding certain activities or gatherings, restricting or reducing the duration of activities, providing ventilation breaks during or between room usage should be considered alongside ventilation for reducing the risk of airborne transmission.

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](#)

Finally, we have attached a useful helpline poster/graphic for your use.

Care Sector: Cases of Covid-19 within social care settings continue to be low, although we are providing settings with support and guidance on prevention measures as needed.

Settings are continuing to test regularly and testing schedules are being maintained, alongside high vaccination rates, and we would like to encourage all staff and residents to be tested regularly. A quick reminder to please not re-test within a 90 day period of a positive test unless new symptoms are present to avoid unnecessary self-isolation and inconvenience.

Further changes are occurring regarding visiting care homes after 17 May – five named visitors (two at a time) will be allowed, provided visitors test negative for Covid 19 – see [Coronavirus restrictions: what you can and cannot do](#)

We hope our social care communities are able to safely enjoy the gradual easing of restrictions from next week, whilst keeping up the handwashing, physical distancing where required and enjoying as much fresh air and physical activity as you can.

Information and guidance related to Covid-19 within adult social care settings is updated regularly – 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.

From 17 May, as we move to Step 3, schools will be able to organise trips with overnight stays and the guidance around the use of face coverings by staff, pupils and students in schools and further education in England will be revised ([guidance on face coverings](#)).

Vaccination Update: All people aged **38 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. Also, it has now been decided to offer an alternative to the AstraZeneca

vaccine to all those aged below 40. This is because the JCVI has advised a preference for adults aged under 40 without underlying health conditions to receive an alternative to the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine – where available and only if this does not cause substantial delays in being vaccinated.

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.

Contact Tracing / Local 0 (zero): Following last week's report on the Local 0 (zero) scheme, we have now brought all local Covid-19 contact tracing in-house which will mean residents who have tested positive for Covid-19 will be contacted by a local contact tracer instead of NHS Test and Trace.

This will drastically reduce the amount of time required to track cases and provide a more efficient response to further outbreaks if they arise.

We believe the early identification of person-to-person transmission is vital to keeping the number of Covid-19 cases low in Somerset. Our local contact tracers, as well as seeking to understand activities undertaken, will also be able to provide support to people who have tested positive and for members of their households who will also have to self-isolate.

As previously mentioned, the huge benefits of this system are:

- Better engagement by our local citizens:
Local numbers, local accents, etc. have resulted in a better uptake of citizen engagement
- Outbreak Identification:
Local Authorities see the whole 'epi' picture in their area which allows for early identification, response to outbreaks & breaking chains of transmission
- Better local support and wellbeing for citizens and call handlers:
Local Authorities have been able to offer their local support/well-being information into calls (e.g. food/prescription deliveries, mental health services, etc.), which helps people isolate more effectively
Well-being of call handlers has improved as they speak to people who are more compliant/more likely to engage in the process.

Regular Testing: Regular lateral flow testing by the public remains to be an effective tool in identifying Covid-19 infection in those who are not displaying symptoms. If you get a positive LFT you must go for a follow up PCR test. Identifying these cases as early as possible reduces the rate of transmission and will be even more important as restrictions ease further on 17 May.

Uploading the results of your lateral flow tests onto the government website here: [Report a COVID-19 rapid lateral flow test result](#) helps us understand how many people are testing regularly in Somerset, and what proportion of these tests are negative. However, it can be very easy to select the incorrect result on the website. Please take a second to review and check the result you have selected is correct before submitting it on the website.

If you have any Covid-19 symptoms you should request a confirmatory [PCR test online](#) or by calling 119.

Communications Focus: This week we will be focusing our communications on Entering Step 3 of the Roadmap and Mental Health Awareness Week.

With the new relaxations going ahead on 17 May we are very keen for people in Somerset to be prepared and continue to adhere to the guidance around hands, space, face and fresh air. Finally, we wanted to mention Mental Health Awareness Week and in particular highlight the work of Mindline.

Entering Step 3 of the Roadmap: We have been able to reach this stage thanks to the huge efforts made by all age groups and we will enter Step 3 of the roadmap on 17 May.

There are a number of changes to the rules so we thought it might be useful to summarise them for you below:

- **You should continue to work from home if you can.** When travelling within the UK, you should aim to do so safely and plan your journey in advance.
- **Outdoor gatherings will be limited to 30 people and indoor gatherings will be limited to 6 people or 2 households** (each household can include a support bubble, if eligible).
- **New guidance on meeting friends and family will emphasise personal responsibility** rather than government rules. Instead of instructing you to stay 2m apart from anyone you don't live with, you will be encouraged to exercise caution and consider the guidance on risks associated with Covid-19 and actions you can take to help keep you and your loved ones safe. Remember the risks of close contact may be greater for some people than others and in some settings and circumstances, there will be specific guidance you will need to follow even when you are with friends and family.

- **Indoor entertainment and attractions** such as cinemas, theatres, museums and children's indoor play areas will be permitted to open with Covid-secure/capacity measures in place.
- **Indoor hospitality** venues such as restaurants, pubs, bars and cafes can reopen.
- **Organised indoor sport** will be able to take place for all (this includes gym classes). This must be organised by a business, charity or public body and the organiser must take reasonable measures to reduce the risk of transmission.
- **All holiday accommodation will be open (including hotels and B&Bs)**. This can be used by groups of up to 6 or 2 households (each household can include a support bubble, if eligible).
- **The rules for care home residents visiting out and receiving visitors will change, allowing up to five named visitors (two at any one time)**, provided visitors test negative for Covid-19.
- **All higher education students will be able to access in-person teaching**. No masks in secondary schools
- **There will no longer be a legal restriction or permitted reason required to travel internationally**. There will be a traffic light system for international travel

And if you are meeting friends in a park or an outside setting, ensure you keep your distance as our message remains - 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.

Transmission rates are highest in enclosed spaces so ensure the rule of 6 is understood and adhered to - we have come so far and we really need to keep up the good work.

Make sure you understand and abide by the [current rules and restrictions](#) on meeting others.

And this week our Covid Catch-up film focuses on the lifting of restrictions and also touches upon Mental Health Awareness Week. It can be found here so we hope you enjoy it and please feel free to share with your networks: [Somerset Covid Catch up - Week 23, 12 May 2021 - YouTube](#)

I have also attached some graphics relating to 17 May which you may find useful, please share these with your networks.

Mental Health Awareness Week: This week is Mental Health Awareness Week. Now more than ever we need to be sharing information as some of the challenges of lockdown become more visible such as possible debt from rent arrears, anxiety about coming out of lockdown, strained relationships.

There may be times when people need some extra support to deal with their situation. We need to try and get across the fact it is ok to ask for help. Mindline is an important resource to help give this support – We have attached a graphic which may be of use.

If you are feeling anxious or having difficulty with your mental health support is available – Mindline is a confidential listening service which is available twenty-four hours a day – 01823 276 892.

There is also some excellent guidance to be found here: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and mental wellbeing - Every Mind Matters - NHS](#)

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](#).