

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Thursday 22 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 has decreased since last week whilst showing small variations daily. The seven-day rate is now 12.6 per 100,000. On a national level, cases, hospitalisations and deaths are back to the levels we saw in September.

As we continue to enjoy the new freedoms, it is vital to remember Covid-19 is still here. It can be easy to become complacent particularly when the weather is nice but, at this time when all evidence shows a levelling off with cases at levels lower than we have seen for a number of months, it is important we continue to reinforce important safety measures and encourage everyone to follow the guidance. This means continuing to remain two metres apart from anyone who is not an immediate member of the household or support/childcare bubble when socialising outside as part of the rule of six – and continuing to wear masks in enclosed spaces. 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.

We know transmission rates are highest in enclosed spaces and all evidence shows the virus is overwhelmingly airborne, so it is important we all consider proper ventilation at home, in workplaces and even in the car. We will go into more detail regarding this in the workplace section later in this update as it will be in this environment, particularly in the hospitality sector, where extra care will need to be taken in the run up to the next step of the roadmap.

We are now into the second week of the Universal Testing Plan. Testing continues to be one of our greatest defences against Covid-19 and everybody can now access regular LFD testing kits in whatever way suits their lifestyle the best. 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 and quickly identify and isolate those with the virus who may not necessarily show symptoms. These tests are not 100% accurate as has been widely reported however they have proven to be an excellent screening tool which can help to identify cases that may have gone undetected. The more people that take part in regular testing, the more we can help to control and suppress the spread of Covid-19.

Everybody over the age of 45 can now book a vaccination and we recommend everyone in this age group book their appointments online or by calling 119. The benefits of vaccinations far outweigh the minimal risks and we have now reached the amazing figure of 1 million vaccinations in the South West.

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'.



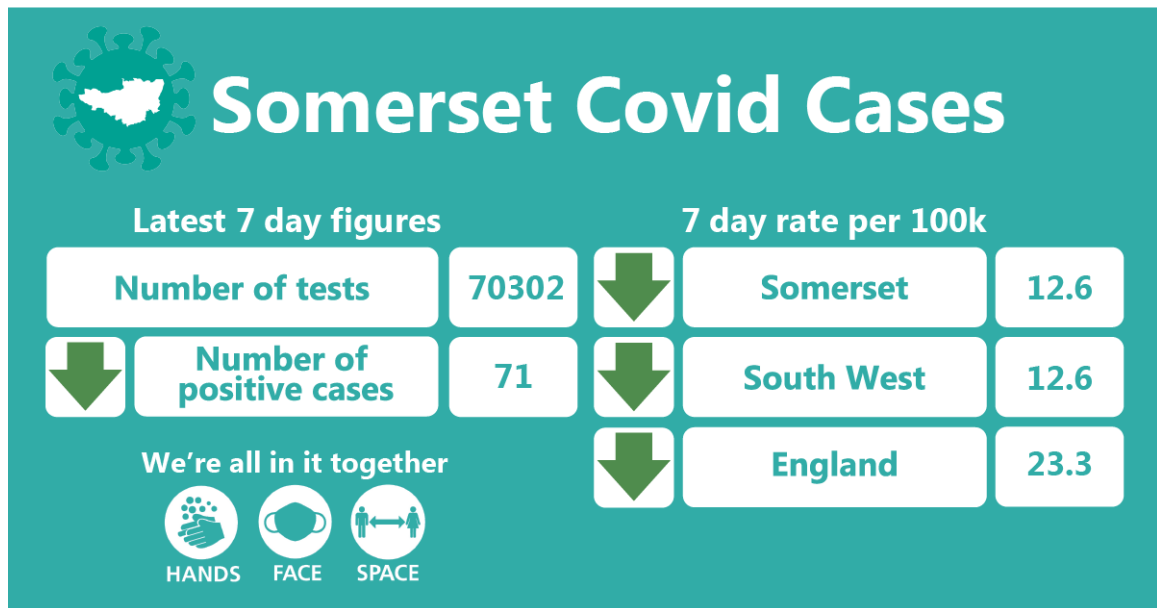
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In the week up to 17 April, approximately 70302 tests were carried out across the county and there have been 71 new confirmed cases. Our rate is now equal the South West rate of 12.6 so we must continue all the protection measures such as hands, face, space and fresh air.

We have had minimal new cases at educational and social care settings in the week up to 17 April.

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
- Easing your way out of lockdown
- Vaccination update
- Vaccination buddies
- Testing update
- Testing survey
- Accessible resources

Workplaces: Although we are still broadly seeing a reduction in workplace outbreaks, we need to remain vigilant and ensure there is no confusion over testing.

In workplaces we are seeing clear evidence of transmission through car sharing and in households, notably shared housing, with onward transmission in workplaces. Some very useful information and advice regarding this can be found here: [Coronavirus and Indoor Spaces](#)

All workplaces need to be very aware of the need for good ventilation – particularly indoor hospitality in the planning phase of the next step in the roadmap. The evidence shows Covid-19 is transmitted overwhelmingly in an airborne way. It is for this reason we 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 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.

The best way to see whether the ventilation at your workplace is good enough it to use a carbon dioxide monitor and aim to keep levels below 700ppm. Do not mistake these for carbon monoxide monitors.

There are some excellent videos which can be watched and shared here which focus on ventilation and were made by Professor Greenhalgh and her team of scientists at Oxford Uni: [Aerosols and Making Spaces Safe](#)

Care Sector: 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, but it is important that those people without symptoms are not to be retested for 90 days following a positive test, unless new symptoms have appeared.

As the rules on visiting in care homes have relaxed slightly to allow two visitors, 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. This includes encouraging people not to visit if they have any symptoms, making sure they test before entering the setting and, even if it is negative, continuing to take all preventative measures: handwashing, physical distancing and letting in as much fresh air as possible.

For all the latest information and guidance related to Covid-19 visit [Coronavirus updates for Somerset Adult Care Providers – Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board \(safeguardingsomerset.org.uk\)](https://safeguardingsomerset.org.uk).

Schools and Early Years settings: Schools and Colleges have returned this week and we have seen very little activity in terms of positive cases. Ongoing, we need to ensure everyone gets back into the routine of regular testing for those eligible; this applies to all educational staff and students of secondary school age.

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)

It is important that if you or anyone in your household is displaying the symptoms of coronavirus, you obtain a PCR test and isolate while awaiting the test results.

Continued Easing of Lockdown Rules: Now we are in Step 2 of the roadmap, we have been able to enjoy the new freedoms such as having a drink outside a pub or meeting friends outside again for the last few days. We were able to reach this stage thanks to the huge efforts made by all age groups and the sacrifices many have made.

To continue on the roadmap we must reinforce all the important safety measures and encourage everyone to follow the guidance. This means continuing to remain two metres apart from anyone who is not an immediate member of the household or support/childcare bubble when socialising outside as part of the rule of six – and continuing to wear masks in enclosed spaces.

And if you are meeting friends in a park or a 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, even though it can be very tempting, it is vital people do not carry on their social gatherings indoors. We have come so far and we really need to keep up the good work.

Ease your way out of lockdown: As lockdown restrictions ease, people might find they are feeling a mixture of emotions. While there might be some things they are really looking forward to, there may be others which leave them feeling overwhelmed or anxious. It's completely understandable and normal to experience a mixture of highs and lows right now. The following advice and links from our Public Mental Health and Neighbourhoods Programme can be shared with those feeling anxiety about society reopening:

We should be prepared for the fact the end of lockdown might be as hard for us as the start was. Just as it took us time to find ways of coping during lockdown, we should also expect that it will take time to find our way back, and to reconnect with life. Only by building up tolerance gently can we move through these fears.

"Don't force yourself to start again immediately – it's OK to need to take time to readjust."

Eight ways to manage post-lockdown anxiety

- 1. Go at your own pace** - recognising you need to go at the right pace for you is important. You might feel nervous about getting out of your comfort zone again and navigating situations you haven't been in for a long time. The key is to recognise this and take things one step at a time. It's important to discuss concerns with those close to you, but also to allow other people space to move at their own pace as well.
- 2. Vary your routines** – try and vary your routines so you see different people and encounter different situations. If one supermarket makes you nervous, try another. If a walk at one time of the day is very busy, try mixing walks at busy times with walks at quieter times
- 3. Build up tolerance** – try doing something which challenges you every day, or every few days. Don't beat yourself up if it doesn't go well but keep at it. Keep a note of things you've achieved, enjoyed or surprised yourself doing

4. **Speak to someone you trust** - try to accept any worries, fears or concerns you have are valid and to be expected. Share how you're feeling with someone you feel comfortable talking to. The chances are they're experiencing similar feelings. So opening up about how you're feeling can help you both to feel supported and understood. If you don't feel comfortable talking to someone you know, you can contact Somerset Mindline 01823 276 892 (24 hours / 7 days a week)

5. **Plan ahead** - consider which situations you're feeling particularly anxious about and decide what you could do in this situation to help ease your concerns. For example, if you're anxious about taking public transport, can you find another way to travel? If not, could you travel at a quieter time of day when there may be less people around?
 - a. If you're worried about returning to work, could you speak to your manager and ask to compress the hours you spend in the office? Plan ahead where possible, and take a positive, problem-solving approach.

6. **Look after your wellbeing** - taking care of your physical health can help you to cope with feelings of anxiety and stressful situations when they arise. Try to eat a healthy diet, limit alcohol, exercise regularly and get good-quality sleep. Even if life starts to get a little busier, remember to keep taking time out to look after yourself. Gradually build up what you're doing as much as you feel comfortable. Don't be afraid to set boundaries and turn down invitations if you need to. If you need some support with this take some time to look at Every Mind Matters website Every Mind Matters | One You (www.nhs.uk)

Get Your Mind Plan <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/> Answer 5 quick questions to get your free plan with tips to help you deal with stress and anxiety, improve your sleep, boost your mood and feel more in control.

7. **Focus on the positives** - try to focus on the present moment. Take pleasure from the little things you can enjoy again with each stage of restrictions easing. Maybe you're looking forward to playing outdoor sports again, dining al fresco or spending the lighter evenings in the garden catching up with a friend. You might find it helpful to keep a gratitude journal, where you write down what you're grateful for each day.

8. **Arm yourself with trustworthy information** - arming yourself with the correct facts will help you feel confident you know what to do and can help ease your worries. But if watching or reading the news about coronavirus makes you feel anxious, limit this to once a day. It's important to make sure the information and advice you're reading comes from sources that are up-to-date, trustworthy and evidence-based. Keep up to-date with the latest guidance and local information

on the Somerset County Council website [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
(somerset.gov.uk)

Vaccination Update: All people over the age of 45 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.

And our advice regarding vaccinations remains that the benefits of getting vaccinated with any of the available vaccines offered far outweigh the very low risks.

From the 24 – 30 April it will be [World Immunisation Week](#) so you will see mention of this on our social media networks – if you know of anybody who would like to join in and is scheduled for a jab, please get them to send through a jab selfie or photo for us to upload. Feel free to send to ghaslock@somerset.gov.uk

Covid-19 Vaccine buddy scheme: As we move down through the age groups, it is likely that we will see 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.

Spark Somerset has been working with Somerset County Council to help local people access information about Covid-19 in a way that makes sense to them through the [Covid Community Champion](#) Network. To register your interest in becoming a champion, please visit: [Covid Community Champions | Spark a Change](#)

Testing: We are into the second week of Universal Testing and everybody can now take part in regular LFT testing in a variety of ways.

For full details on all things test related can be found here: [Covid-19 Testing Somerset](#)

We strongly advise you take at least one supervised test at a centre if you intend to do your regular, twice weekly testing at home. If you are unable to go to a centre, the following video provides a great demonstration of the correct testing technique:

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

And please remember – if you are taking the tests at home it is very important for you to log your results using this website: [Report a COVID-19 rapid lateral flow test result - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). It may take a few moments the first time you provide results, but, once you have an account, the process is very simple the next time you upload your results.

Last week's Covid Catch-up video sees Clinton Rogers highlighting the importance of testing: [Somerset Covid Catch up - Week 19, 13 April 2021 - YouTube](#)

What is most important to remember as well is that 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.

Also, please ensure if you are symptomatic in any way that you take a test as quickly as possible.

Vaccine and Testing Survey: A huge thank you to everybody who took the time to complete the survey. WE had over 1,300 responses which we are now analysing and the results will be a big factor in our planning going forward.

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](#).