

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Friday 24th September 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.

While rates started to decrease over the past week, we can see from the information received over the last few days that they are increasing again going into next week. This is largely due to the return of schools and colleges and is in line with the regional picture. We would like to remind everyone how important it is to get a PCR test if anyone in your household has tested positive. Individuals can have Covid-19 without showing symptoms and we need to identify people who have Covid-19 and may be infectious. Close contacts of Covid-19 are likely to have caught the virus.

As we would expect, there has been a lot of discussion following the announcement that the Covid-19 vaccination has been made available for 12-15 year olds. Making facts and information about the vaccination easily available to parents and children will help families reach an informed decision about whether to take up the invitation. The vaccine **is not** mandatory and no one should feel pressured or stigmatised following their decision.

We hope these two videos from the Department of Health and Social Care help explain how we know the vaccine is safe in more detail: [video 1](#) and [video 2](#). The UK has also benefited from having data from the US, Canada and Israel, countries already offering the Covid-19 vaccine universally to young people aged 12 to 15 years. You might also like to watch actor Jason Forbes tackle some common myths about the vaccine in this brilliant [short video](#). Please do share all these videos on social media and with your networks.

Finally, Bridgwater Fair starts next Wednesday and whilst it's great to see local events such as this returning, we welcome with caution. The organisers have put measures in place to keep staff and the public safe, such as encouraging the use of face masks which will be given out for free at the event and the use of hand sanitiser. Please look out for more information about the fair on our social media channels in the coming days.

Latest Covid-19 Dashboard: The following link will take you to our website: [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



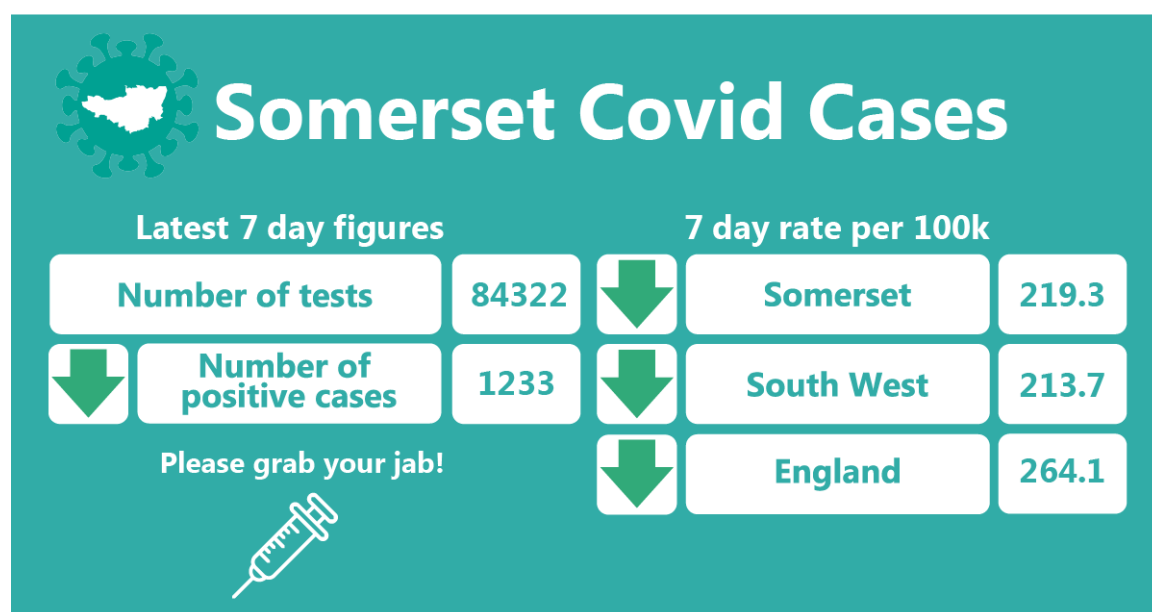
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In the week up to 18 September approximately 84322 tests were carried out across the county with 1233 new confirmed cases. The rates have decreased to 219.3 per 100,000, and we remain below the national average of 264.1 per 100,000.

Hospitalisation data for Somerset is showing an improvement on previous weeks with just over 30 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
- Vaccination and booster update
- Testing Update
- Resources and further information

Workplaces: To support businesses through the autumn and winter period, the Government will continue to provide up-to-date Working Safely guidance on how employers can reduce the risks in their workplace. Businesses should consider this guidance in preparing their health and safety risk-assessments and put in place suitable mitigations. In line with government guidance issued when step 4 took effect, an increasing number of workers have gradually returned, or are preparing to return, to offices and workplaces. As staff return to the workplace, employers should follow the Working Safely guidance. [Working safely during coronavirus \(Covid-19\) - Guidance](#)

Locally, we also have a wide range of local resources available to help, with posters, postcards and social media assets available to print and download here: [Stay safe \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk)

Care Sector: Covid-19 outbreaks in care settings remain a concern. For the week to 18 September there were 66 cases (one or more residents/staff tested positive for Covid-19) across 41 settings in Somerset. Cases are largely affecting staff members, although we are seeing increasing cases in residents. We would like to thank all our workers within the care sector for paying attention to infection prevention control measures, as our rates among this sector are lower than other geographical areas and we believe this is due to good infection, prevention and control.

It is therefore crucial to continue to mitigate the risks via:

- **Vaccination** - provision of resources to allow informed decision making and to facilitate booster doses when offered
- **Testing** - regular testing according to the latest guidelines, spread throughout the week to avoid result delays, not within 90 days of a positive Covid-19 test and prompt management of suspected cases

- **Infection Prevention Control (IPC)** - strict IPC measures, correct use of PPE, limit cross-sector working, consideration of cohorting/zoning and staff IPC refresher training
- **Ventilation** – opening of windows and doors and inclusion in risk assessment
- **Monitoring and reporting** - recognition of wide spectrum of Covid-19 clinical presentation, reporting all cases to PHE
- **Support and rehabilitation** – recognition and management of the impact of Covid-19 on physical, mental, emotional and social aspects of residents and staff

More information. For information related to Covid-19 for adult care providers please visit [Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board](#) where you will find information on reporting cases of Covid 19, support helplines, webinars and links to guidelines. Please ensure you sign up to the weekly ASC bulletin via the website.

Schools and Early Years settings: Covid-19 case rates in educational settings are on the rise across Somerset and the South West, a trend which was to be expected with the start of a new school term. Somerset County Council's Public Health (SCCPH) team maintain regular communication with the affected schools to manage the outbreaks and advise on additional control measures. These include the cancellation of school trips, reintroduction of face coverings in communal areas and the reintroduction of social distancing measures.

There have been three Covid-19 cases in early years settings from the 11 Sept – 23 Sept. According to the graduated response based on the case threshold, there are currently 7 educational settings in Somerset at amber level, 13 at blue level and no settings currently assessed as red. This is across all ages and stages and all funded sectors.

Home Testing: In their second week back, children aged 11+ are completing two lateral flow tests at home with 25,917 tests done and 134 reported positive from the 11th – 17th of September, that's a positivity rate of 0.5% up 0.1% from the previous week.

Parents of a school or college age child, health, care or education staff are requested to undertake twice weekly asymptomatic testing using LFDs, in order to keep those you meet or work with safe from infection. Please take up the offer of free tests.

Schools need to keep adequate LFT stocks to manage this, and also take time to communicate with pupil's households to underline the importance of regular asymptomatic testing.

As a reminder, anyone with a positive result on a lateral flow test should book a confirmatory PCR test. Please also book a PCR test if you are a household contact of a positive case because it is important to stay at home if you have Covid-19, and you may have it without showing any symptoms. Finally, anyone with symptoms of Covid-19 should not attend school and should book a PCR test.

Vaccination Programme for 12-15 year olds: The UK's Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) all agree that while Covid-19 is typically mild or asymptomatic in most young people, 1 dose of the vaccine will provide good protection against severe illness and hospitalisation and help reduce disruption to education and minimise the risk of spread of Covid-19 within schools.

Invitations for the jabs have begun and parental, guardian or carer consent will be sought by vaccination healthcare staff prior to vaccination. This is a well-established process used for all school vaccination programmes.

The School Age Immunisation Service (SAIS) will manage the roll out and administration of the Covid-19 vaccines in schools, including special schools.

The government has outlined three primary roles for schools, as per existing vaccination programmes:

- to provide information to SAINT on which children on their roll are eligible for the vaccine
- to share the information leaflet, consent form and invitation letter supplied by the SAINT team with parents and children
- to provide the space within school, and the time away from the timetable, to enable vaccinations to take place

What this means is that the role of schools is about facilitating access for those who wish to receive the vaccine.

The UK Health Security Agency published COVID-19 vaccination guidance to assist all school staff and headteachers with questions about the COVID-19 vaccination programme. The COVID-19 vaccination invitation letter template can be downloaded and sent to parents of eligible children, along with an accompanying information leaflet and consent form.

Please make sure this is available to all members of school teams who need to know about the programme. [Covid-19 vaccination programme for children and young people: guidance for schools](#)

COVID-19 resources for parents and schools:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-resources-for-schools>

COVID-19 vaccination leaflets for children and young people:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-resources-for-children-and-young-people>

COVID-19 vaccination easy read guides for at risk children:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-easy-read-resources-for-children-and-young-people>

Please visit the Somerset County Council Covid-19 School Toolkit for guidance and information on managing cases in educational settings

[Covid-19 School Toolkit | Support Services for Education](#)

Vaccination Update: For the latest information about the Somerset vaccination programme follow this link: [Homepage - Somerset CCG T](#)

It remains very important for anyone who has not had their first or second dose of the Covid-19 vaccine, to do so as soon as possible. While the first dose starts to provide some immunity, it is only two weeks after the second dose when you are considered to be 'fully vaccinated'.

Millions of vulnerable people are now being offered a Covid-19 booster vaccine. The programme will be rolled out to the same priority groups as previously. This means care home residents, health and social care workers, people aged over 50, those aged 16 to 49 years with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of severe Covid-19, adult carers, and adult household contacts of immunosuppressed individuals will be prioritised.

This flu vaccination and Covid-19 boosters will be critical to protecting lives, livelihoods and the NHS and ensure the protection vaccines provide for those most at risk of severe illness from Covid-19 will be maintained over the winter months. It's critical to maximise uptake of both vaccines amongst eligible groups. The national campaign will focus on the following eligible groups.

Covid-19

- Care home residents & staff
- Frontline health and social care workers
- People who are clinically extremely vulnerable
- Adults 16-65 in at risk groups
- 50+ year olds

Flu

- 65+ year olds
- People with long term health conditions
- Pregnant women
- Parents of 2-16 year olds
- 50-64 year olds
- Frontline health and social care workers

There will be flexibility in the programme, allowing all those eligible to receive their booster from 6 months after their second doses. This approach will allow more vulnerable people to be given their boosters quicker.

Data published by ONS shows people who have not been vaccinated account for around 99% of all deaths involving Covid-19 in England in the first half of this year.

Do you have, or know someone who has concerns over receiving the Covid-19

Vaccine? We have a team of trained Vaccination Buddies who are here to help! The programme enables people to be offered support via a 'buddy' who can help them to make informed decisions about having the Covid-19 vaccination. People can be [referred \(or self-refer\)](#) to the scheme and a Vaccination Buddy will contact them by phone to discuss their concerns and offer information and reassurance. Vaccination Buddies come from all walks of life and have the necessary skills and knowledge to support people in a friendly, non-judgemental way. We also have an excellent video introducing one of our Vaccination Buddies which can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/Ri1F2RZ1c1s>

Asymptomatic testing: For people who **do not** have symptoms of Covid-19, it remains very important to participate in twice weekly asymptomatic testing if you are out and about and meeting up with people.

You can call 119 or click on the following link to order [lateral flow tests online to be delivered to your home](#). You can also collect a kit at [a local pharmacy](#). Please remember to report your LFT result here [Report a Covid-19 rapid lateral flow test result](#)

If you have symptoms of Covid-19: it is important you don't take a lateral flow test but ensure you take a PCR test, which can be done by phoning 119 or ordering a test here: [Get a free PCR test to check if you have coronavirus \(Covid-19\)](#)

Finally, we would also like to remind you that if you have previously received a positive PCR test result, you should not re-test yourself by either using a rapid lateral flow kit or by having another PCR test within 90 days of the first positive result **unless** you develop any new symptoms of Covid-19.

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](#).