

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Thursday 29 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 shows small variations daily. The seven-day rate is now 15.7 per 100,000 which is a slight rise from last week. On a national level, cases, hospitalisations and deaths are back to the levels we saw in September.

With the May Bank Holiday this weekend we need everyone to be very aware Covid-19 is still with us. Although we have broadly seen cases level off, we need 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.

The awful reports continuing to come from India show us how deadly this virus continues to be and how we must all work together and do our part to halt its spread. So, particularly if the weather is not too great this weekend, and no matter how tempting it might be, please do not meet socially indoors.

We are now into the third week of the Universal Testing Plan so hopefully many people in Somerset are now making testing a part of their normal weekly routine. Testing is vital in helping us 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. Thank you to everyone who has been taking part.

It is of the highest importance 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.**

Everybody over the age of 42 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 recently reached the amazing figure of 1 million second 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'.



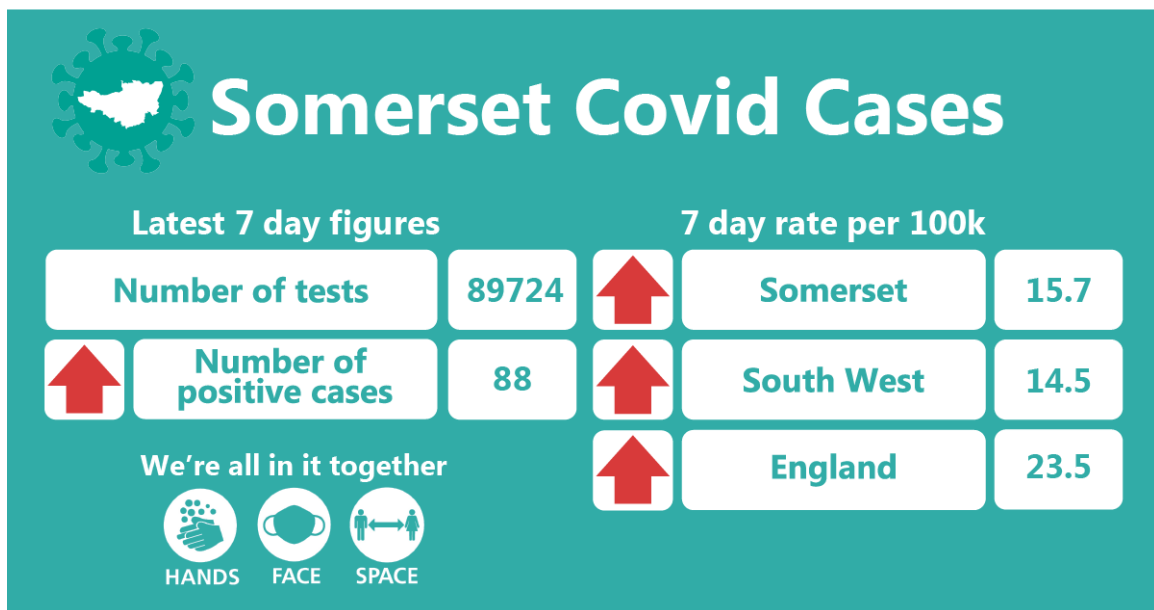
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In the week up to 24 April, approximately 89724 tests were carried out across the county and there have been 88 new confirmed cases – as we test more it is likely we see more cases. Our rate of 15.7 is now higher than the South West rate of 14.5 so 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 24 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
- May Bank Holiday
- Vaccination update
- Vaccination buddies and Covid Champions
- Testing update
- Accessible resources

Workplaces: 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 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.

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

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 that are not well ventilated. The more people occupying an area that is poorly ventilated, 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.

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: 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.

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.

May Bank Holiday: We have been able to enjoy new freedoms such as dining or having a drink outside a pub or restaurant or meeting friends outside again since 12 April. It is very important we do not all go too far and undo all the good work this weekend during the bank holiday, as this could affect the next step in the roadmap. We want everyone to enjoy the new freedoms and to enjoy Somerset however we really do hope everyone does this in a responsible way – particularly if the weather is not very good for meeting outdoors. We were able to reach this stage thanks to the huge efforts made by all age groups and the sacrifices many have made. And we want to continue on the journey to normality.

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 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, 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.

There is some excellent advice regarding ventilation below:

Ventilation in your home:

- Opening windows and doors at home is the simplest way of improving ventilation for most people.
- Opening windows and doors at opposite sides of your room or home will provide a good flow of fresh air.
- Open windows slightly in cold weather or open trickle vents (small vents usually on the top of a window) or grilles.
- If someone is self-isolating, keep a window slightly open in their room and keep the door closed to reduce the spread of contaminated air to other parts of the household.
- If you have people working in or visiting your home let as much fresh air into your home as possible without getting uncomfortably cold while they are there, and for a short period before they arrive and after they have left.
- Keep the temperature in the room you are in to at least 18°C as temperatures below this can affect your health, especially if you are 65 or older, or if you have a long-term health condition.

Ventilation in vehicles:

- Switch ventilation systems on while people are in the vehicle. Make sure you set to drawing fresh air in, not recirculating air.
- Windows can be opened (partially if it's cold).
- Heating can be left on to keep the vehicle warm.
- For vehicles that carry different passengers, such as taxis, clear the air between different passengers or at the journey end so the vehicle is aired before anyone else gets in.

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

Vaccination Update: All people aged 42 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.

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.

Covid-19 Vaccine buddy scheme: As we move down through the age groups, it is possible we may see the uptake of the offer of a vaccine reducing - although recent reports have shown there is more positivity for a vaccine in these groups than previously reported.

We are working with Spark Somerset to ensure people are getting the right information to keep themselves happy and healthy and are launching a programme aimed at supported people who have reservations or concerns about the Covid-19 vaccine.

We are looking to match specially trained volunteers (Vaccination Buddies) with people to help them to make informed decisions about whether they should have the vaccination.

Are you supportive and non-judgemental? Are you looking for a flexible way to help Somerset recover from the impact of Covid -19?

As a **Vaccination Buddy**, you can help people to make informed decisions about whether to have the Covid-19 vaccination. We'll provide full training and match you with someone who has questions or concerns so that you can offer information and support over the phone. You can find out more [here](#).

If you are interested in helping people in your community to get the right information about Covid -19 and general health and wellbeing, you might like to become a **Covid Community Champion**. You can find out more [here](#).

Testing: Universal Testing means everybody can now take part in regular lateral flow testing (LFT) testing in a variety of ways.

A new assisted testing service will launch from Saturday 1 May. So far, 19 Somerset pharmacies have signed up to provide assisted testing, so if you have never used a Lateral Flow (rapid) test before, it is a great way to be shown how to do the test correctly. You can then collect kits and do the testing at home. Or this service might help those people who cannot perform the test on themselves for any reason, allowing them to participate in regular rapid testing.

Full details on how Somerset residents can access rapid testing can be found here: [Lateral Flow 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.

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

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](#).