

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Friday 29 October 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.

The number of cases of Covid-19 in Somerset remains high and the majority of our cases continue to be among school and college-age children and also staff within education settings. These infections were contracted prior to half term.

This week is the half term break for the majority of Somerset schools, so we are requesting parents and children follow the advice issued by their schools on control measures in place in schools after half term and ensure all secondary school or college students test before returning to school or college. Further information can be found later in the update.

With Halloween and Bonfire night fast approaching, we are suggesting some simple guidance to ensure people are 'Covid safe'. This includes trying to stay in household groups if trick or treating, washing hands regularly and avoiding sharing treats with other households.

We are encouraging people to remember to take a lateral flow test before attending parties or crowded events and wear a face-covering in crowded and enclosed spaces. If people have any symptoms of Covid-19 they should not meet others or attend parties and they need to take a test.

As we mentioned last week, from 1 November there will be a reduction in the opening hours at regional and local testing sites. Instead of opening from 8am until 8pm, they will operate from 8am until 6pm – 2 hours less per day.

Finally, a heads-up about Remembrance Day on 11 November. Unlike last year, events will be happening and we will be providing full information based on national guidance when it is published.

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



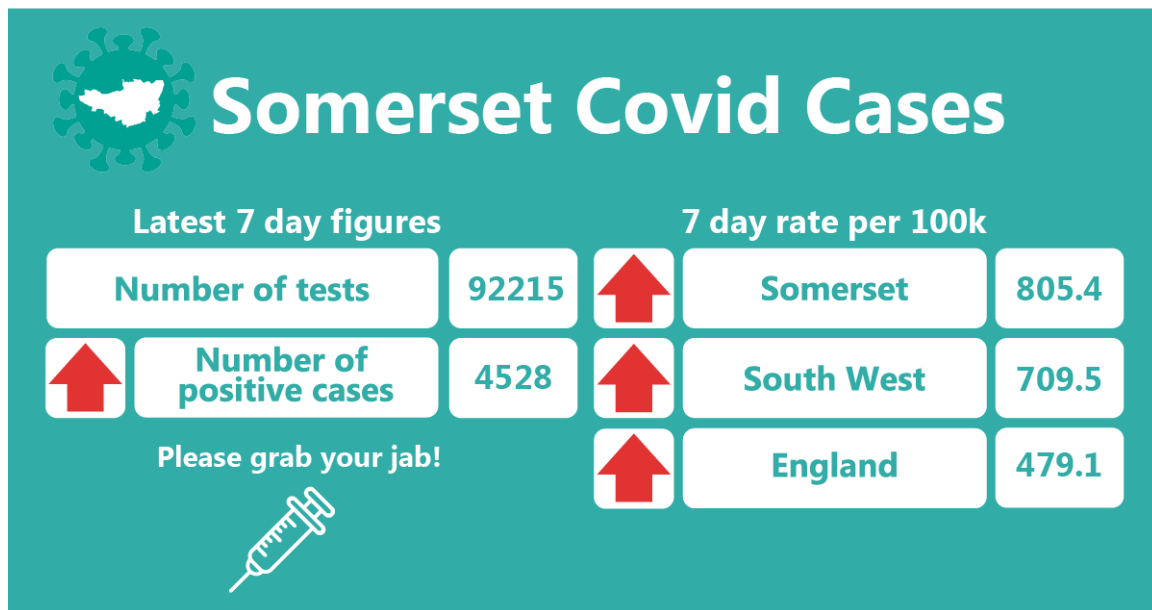
Professor Trudi Grant
Director of Public Health

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Clare Paul
Cabinet Member for Education and
Public Health

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In the week up to 23 October, approximately 92,215 tests were carried out across the county with 4,528 new confirmed cases. The rates have increased in the last reporting week to 805.4 per 100.000, which is above the South-West and the national average.

Hospitalisation data for Somerset has increased to over 80 Covid-19 in-patients in Somerset hospitals, which is similar to the rates earlier in the pandemic, but most of these patients are not critically unwell.

This Week's Headlines

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

- Workplace, Care and School settings
- Vaccination and Covid Booster update
- Covid Champions
- Latest Covid Catch-up Film
- Resources and further information

Workplaces: Once again, with so many cases being seen in our education settings, it is worth reminding any staff with a child in education to do twice weekly lateral flow tests, to avoid bringing Covid-19 into the workplace.

Find out more about what you can do to keep [working safely to reduce the risk of transmission](#).

Regarding home working, SAGE has previously advised with high confidence that working from home can reduce transmission significantly. Working from home reduces the risk of infection, primarily by reducing the average number of contacts an individual has.

The risk of infection at a workplace comes from:

- Infection risk at the workplace (i.e. the ability to social distance, ventilation measures)
- Risk from travelling to/from the workplace
- Risk from additional activities that would otherwise not be engaged in if working from home (i.e. socialising with colleagues outside of the workplace)

Working from home will also provide a benefit to workers who are unable to work from home. It will do this by reducing the average number of contacts and risk of exposure in settings such as public transport through reduced occupancy in workplaces.

Care Sector: Cases of Covid-19 are affecting all sectors and continue to affect social care settings across Somerset. With the advancing winter months, it

is essential to reduce the risk of Covid-19, as well as other infections and it is as important as ever to maintain Infection Prevention Control measures. Regular testing, vaccination promotion, ventilation, monitoring for a wide spectrum of symptoms and prompt action where infection is suspected is essential, as well as promotion of health and wellbeing in general.

Winter vaccinations

- Both Covid 19 booster vaccinations and flu vaccinations are available
- The Covid 19 vaccination national booking service can be accessed by frontline health and social care staff to book a booster vaccine appointment through self-referral for those who had their 2nd dose at least 6 months ago.
- Book online via [Coronavirus \(Covid-19\) vaccination - NHS](#) or phone 119
- Winter vaccinations communications assets are available, including posters, social media graphics [CARE: Winter vaccinations campaign assets | Campaign Resource Centre](#)

Further information

More information about Covid-19 in care settings can be found on the Adult Social Care webpage: [Coronavirus updates for Somerset Adult Care Providers](#)

Schools and Early Years settings: As you will know, the Covid-19 infection rate in Somerset remains high. The majority of our cases are among school and college-age children, with the highest rates of cases among 10-14 year olds. The half term break will have reduced mixing within the school setting but may have brought about more mixing in a social setting.

With several different factors influencing infection rates currently, it is difficult to predict what position we will be in after the half term break. To help with their Covid-19 management plans, each school has received a letter from the Director of Public Health, giving public health advice on the levels of control measures to be in place post half term.

Balancing the need to keep students in education with the need to keep infection rates under control has been really challenging, but we have pulled together well locally to do our best for Somerset children and young people.

SCC Public Health have undertaken an individual risk assessment for every school in Somerset. In order for infection rates to stabilise, SCC Public Health have recommended these measures are kept in place for two weeks following the half term break, unless there is a significant outbreak that requires increased measures. This is only a recommendation based on specialist public health advice.

The proposed measures focus on the following:

- 1.** Introduce face coverings in communal areas, such as corridors, when movement occurs between lessons (for secondary school and college settings) and on school transport if used.
- 2.** Reducing mixing between groups of students as much as possible including consideration of pausing 'whole school' assemblies for the time being and other 'large gatherings'.
- 3.** Promoting social distancing and reducing crowding where possible and minimising pinch points in the school day e.g. staggered lunch times or start times.
- 4.** Reinforcing social distancing and good infection prevention control (ventilation, touchpoint cleaning) amongst staff (and in areas where staff gather) as much as possible due to the large numbers of staff who are contracting the virus.
- 5.** As we are in an outbreak situation, any household contacts of confirmed cases of Covid-19 are advised to book a PCR test and whilst awaiting test results undertake daily LFD tests and only attend school if this is negative.

Public Health advice is that these measures are to be implemented in addition to other control measures already in place, such as twice weekly LFD testing for pupils, households and staff, promotion of good hygiene measures, ventilation measures, enhanced cleaning regimens and the promotion of vaccination.

We encourage all educational staff and parents of school and college-aged children to be aware of any additional measures that are being recommended by their educational setting. These may have been communicated via email, letter, or the messaging platform used by each school.

Staff, secondary and college students and pupils are being reminded to test twice weekly at home, with LFD kits, over the half term period. **As well as testing at home, they should do a LFD test on the evening before they return to their educational setting. This will be key to ensuring that students start back in the best way possible.**



Please look out for social media, press and radio advertising encouraging the use of rapid lateral flow tests before returning to educational settings and share widely with your networks.

The requirement for children aged 11+ to complete two lateral flow tests at home remains as important as ever. From the 16th – 22nd October there were 19,938 school age tests recorded with 674 positive, doubling the positivity rate on the previous week to 3.4%.

Order tests for home delivery before 8pm on 29 October to get them the next day. You can also [collect a pack of tests from your local pharmacy.](#)

Symptomatic and Asymptomatic Testing:

I have Covid-19 symptoms

- Anyone with Covid-19 symptoms should arrange a PCR test, stay at home and self-isolate until you receive the result from the PCR test.

I do not have Covid-19 Symptoms

- School Staff and pupils of secondary schools should take part in regular LFD testing, as per local public health guidance

- Guidance is issued to each individual school, based on a risk assessment with the public health team and may include the requirement for additional testing

At present, there is no evidence of technical issues with LFD or PCR test kits, people should test as normal according to guidance from the educational setting.

SCC PH advice remains consistent with national guidance:

- Only use twice weekly LFD testing for asymptomatic cases
- Make sure you do an LFD **according to the instructions and at least 30 minutes after eating or drinking**
- If you get a positive LFT or have symptoms get a PCR and **use the supervised PCR testing route at test centre to get the best quality test**
- Encourage secondary school age children to wear face coverings in crowded or enclosed places, for example on school transport
- Take up the offer of vaccination

Covid-19 Vaccine Programme for 12-15yr olds:

Getting the vaccine will help to protect children and young people against Covid-19. Whilst most children usually have mild illness, they can pass on their infection to others in their family and those they come into contact with.

Getting vaccinated will also help to reduce the chance of disruption to their education from Covid-19. This is an important decision more information can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-resources-for-schools/covid-19-vaccination-programme-for-young-people-guidance-for-parents> to help parents and young people make an informed decision.

The Secretary of State for Education, Nadhim Zahawi, has written an [open letter](#) to parents, carers and guardians about the importance of children aged 12 to 15 getting their Covid-19 vaccine either at school, or at a local vaccination centre. The letter also reminds parents about the importance of testing.

The programme is being rolled out across some schools already in Somerset and schools will continue to be contacted by SAINT (Schools Immunisation programme) to arrange a date.

NHS Opens Online Covid-19 Vaccination Bookings For 12-15 Year Olds

Parents are now able to book Covid-19 vaccinations online for their 12-15 year old children the NHS has announced.

People will be able to go online and check the National Booking Service to see if their local site has appointments to vaccinate children and young people, as the NHS Covid-19 vaccination programme continues at pace.

The booking service will provide an additional option for parents to book a vaccine for their child, alongside the schools' programme, which has already vaccinated nearly half a million young people and visited thousands of schools.

If a child has already been invited through their school, they do not need act on their invite unless parents wish to get their child vaccinated outside of school.

Parents and guardians will be advised to attend vaccination sites with their children if they want them to get jabbed outside of school hours and consent will be sought on the day. Parents and young people are being asked to read the patient information in advance of arriving for their appointment. This can also be accessed online.

The NHS has said that it is a new option for parents who may want to get their child vaccinated during half term.

Letters have been sent to parents and guardians of children aged 12 – 15 inviting them to book the vaccine online or by calling 119 as the NHS Covid-19 vaccination programme continues at pace.

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

The Vaccine Inequalities Small Grants Fund - Grants of up to £500 are available to support work to enable more people in Somerset to access their Covid-19 vaccination

The local vaccination programme has been a considerable success, with over 90% of adults in Somerset having received both jabs. However, some people have been slower to take up the offer of vaccination. According to statistics from Somerset County Council, young people aged between 16 and 18 years and people from minority ethnic groups are less likely to access their vaccination. There are also geographical areas where uptake has been lower. Do you have ideas about how we might encourage or enable more people to access their vaccination? Spark Somerset can help you put these ideas into action.

What we will fund:

We want to fund projects that demonstrate they can have a positive impact on the numbers of people accessing their Covid-19 vaccination. This could include:

- Community led activities that provide space and opportunities for people in identified groups to reflect on the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular the vaccine, share their stories, experiences and discuss what matters to them, and to create a response to this. These conversations should include discussion about the vaccination and aim that people are better informed.
- Practical support to enable people to book and travel to their vaccination if they would otherwise struggle to do so.

To find out more and access the simple application form, click [here](#).

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'. And please accept your offer of a booster jab should you receive one.

Visit [Somerset CCG Covid-19 vaccination programme](#) for more information on the Somerset Covid-19 Vaccination programme.

Covid Champions – Request for new Champs: We are making a renewed call for people to step forward and become Covid Community Champions. The Covid Community Champion Network has been going from strength to strength since it was first launched in October last year. There are now well over 100 trained Champions across Somerset, sharing messages about Covid-19 and how to stay healthy, happy and safe with their friends, family and work colleagues.

The Covid Community Champions scheme is funded by Somerset County Council and delivered by a partnership between Spark Somerset and the Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership (SASP).

As Covid-19 is very much still with us it is important for Somerset residents to have the right information and advice as we head into the challenging winter period.

After attending a short online induction, Covid Community Champions can help their workplace, family friends and the wider community to understand the latest guidance around Covid-19 and signpost them to other health and wellbeing support. Covid Community Champions can attend regular meetings which will allow them to get to know the other Champions, keep up to date with the latest information, and feedback about how things are going where they live and work. They will also receive weekly emails with the latest information.

If you, or someone you know might be interested in becoming a Covid Community Champions, you can find out more and sign up for the next training session [here](#).

For more information, please contact Helen Fielden, Covid Community Champion Coordinator by emailing helen.fielden@sparksomerset.org.uk or call 07535 800944.

Covid Catch-up Film: This week Clinton meets with Screwfix to highlight the need for businesses to ensure they are a Covid-19 safe environment for staff. The film can be viewed [here](#).

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](#).