

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Friday 7 January 2022

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.

Covid-19 case numbers in Somerset continue to increase and are currently at 1,162.9 per 100k. The expectation is for Somerset cases to continue to rise. Omicron is now the dominant strain of Covid-19 in the South-West. We are behind the peak of cases seen in London and the South-East and we anticipate South-West cases will peak in the next week or two and so this case rate will continue to rise.

Given the high transmissibility of Omicron, estimates suggest that absence among the workforce may be between 20-25%, which will cause notable business continuity issues in all sectors.

The vaccine remains our best line of defence, so please do step forward whether it's for your first, second or booster jab. Full Somerset vaccination and booster information can be found [here](#).

One major change this week is regarding testing. From 11 January, no confirmatory PCR test will be required for asymptomatic cases identified on LFD. People with symptoms do still need to get a PCR test. Please see further in the update for full details.

With the spread of Omicron, it is vital we take simple steps to help reduce the spread of Covid-19. So, even if fully vaccinated, we should all try to keep ourselves and each other safe and the main way to do this is to not mix with people you don't **need** to mix with. Other simple ways to protect yourself and others include wearing a well fitting face-covering where required and in crowded and enclosed spaces, ensuring there is good ventilation when meeting inside, washing our hands regularly and continuing to take lateral flow tests just before meeting other people.

Latest Covid-19 Dashboard: [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.'



We're all in it together



David Fothergill
Leader Somerset County Council

Twitter: @DJAFothergill



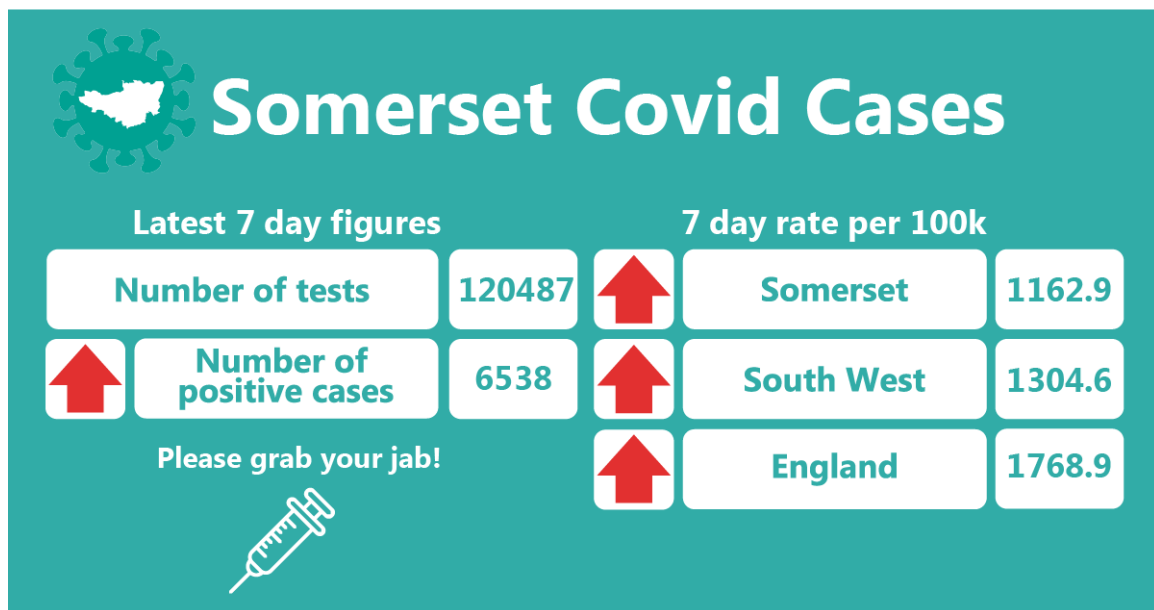
Professor Trudi Grant
Director of Public Health

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Clare Paul
Cabinet Member for Education and
Public Health

Twitter: @Clarepaul_



In the week up to 2 January, approximately 120,487 tests were carried out across the county with 6,538 new confirmed cases. The rates have increased in the last reporting week to 1,162.9 per 100.000. This is below both the South-West average and the national average.

Hospitalisation data for Somerset is now around 35 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
- Vaccinations Update
- Testing Update
- Resources and further information

Workplaces: With case rates in the county now well over 1000 per 100,000 population, and the much increased transmissibility of Omicron, the risk of contracting Covid-19 is now the highest it has ever been. Fortunately, in people of working age who have been vaccinated and boosted the risk of serious illness appears very low. The greatest risk for employers over the next few weeks is staff absence due to Covid-19 and the impact on business continuity. In addition to direct employees being affected, there is a risk that other public and business services you rely on will also be unable to operate normally for the same reasons. Services such as buses and trains, refuse collection, schools and health services are all under pressure with high absence rates at present.

We are anticipating case rates will continue to increase for two, perhaps three, weeks, so staff absence is likely to be an issue throughout this month. Please make sure you have contingency plans in place to cope with high levels of absence and disruption arising from other services that are not available in whole or in part.

Staff are now able to return to work from isolation before the 10 day period is up, provided they no longer have a fever and have tested LFD negative on day 6 and at least 24 hours later from a second test on day 7. This should help with staffing levels.

The controls that were effective against Delta are also effective against Omicron. Ventilation is key to minimising risk from Covid-19 in enclosed spaces, alongside LFD testing and where appropriate the wearing of well fitted face coverings. Anyone experiencing symptoms, including cold like symptoms should test, preferably with a PCR test. With the very high levels of Covid-19 at the moment and many vaccinated people presenting with cold-like symptoms, there

is a relatively high probability that a cold is actually Covid-19, not just a cold, although colds are of course circulating at this time of year.

Due to the high case rates the Somerset County Council Public Health Incident Room is prioritising outbreaks and settings with vulnerable populations. If you require guidance or support please in the first instance check the [government coronavirus website](#) to see if your query is dealt with there. If you still require support then email sccphincidentroom@somerset.gov.uk

Care Sector: We hope you have managed to have a break over the Christmas period and wish you a Happy New Year.

In line with the national picture, we have seen an increase in cases of Covid-19 in our care settings and as such we are all facing an increase in demand. It is during these busy times we are trying to ensure all processes are followed and we provide the support that is required and appreciate everyone's understanding if there are delays in responding to requests.

We are working closely with our partners in Infection, Prevention and Control, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and Adult Social Care to support:

1. Vaccinations, ensuring boosters are provided and recorded on the Capacity Tracker
2. High quality Infection, Prevention and Control measures, including good ventilation
3. Identification, prompt action and reporting of cases of Covid-19 and other infections

Support for the care sector with Covid-19 cases

- Please continue to follow all the guidelines for management of cases of Covid-19:

[Covid-19: management of staff and exposed patients or residents in health and social care settings](#)

- All cases of Covid-19 in care settings are to be reported to the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) on 0300 303 8162 (option 9 for a Covid call) and for more than one case or any residents, please report to swhpt@phe.gov.uk

- The Infection, Prevention and Control (IPC) team will provide support to care homes with outbreaks at days 3 and days 7-10 and as required after this. They can be contacted on somccg.infectionpreventioncontrolteam@nhs.net

Care staff mental health and wellbeing

We are encouraging care staff to maintain their [wellbeing](#), model good self-care and be available to each other for everyday support and friendly conversation to support a culture of openness around good mental and emotional health. In addition, there are resources available to support our care sector during difficult times:

- [Somerset Emotional Wellbeing Staff Hub](#) – a dedicated online resource for all health and care workers in Somerset
- [Our Frontline](#) - mental health and bereavement support for care workers
- [Somerset Mindline](#) – open 24/7 throughout the festive period

Schools and Early Years settings: The SCC Public Health Team are committed to supporting all settings with measures to help control transmission and therefore protect face to face learning as much as possible, for all children and young people. In line with this and working again with Directors of Public Health (DsPH) across the South West [consensus](#) was reached to continue with current Covid-19 response measures in place in educational settings.

In addition to the DfE guidance issued on the 2 January for face coverings to be worn in in classrooms and teaching spaces where students in year 7 and above are educated, SCC Public Health advice is to remain with [enhanced/amber measures](#) in place as per the [contingency framework](#) flow chart which can be found here [Covid-19 School Toolkit | Support Services for Education](#).

Testing remains a priority for the new term. All secondary school students will have undertaken one on-site test on return. In addition, FE and HE students, and staff were asked to self-test at home before they return. All staff and students are strongly encouraged to test twice a week using an LFD test and to report all results to [the NHS](#) and to their setting.

Even if someone has tested positive for Covid-19 within the last 90 days, they are strongly encouraged to take part in LFD testing on-site or at home once they have completed their isolation period. Pupils and staff are therefore able to return to regular twice weekly testing, or daily close contact testing after the 10 day isolation period has ended for their current infection.

Covid-19 Educational Webinar Every Thursday: The South-West Health Protection Team run free weekly Covid-19 educational setting webinars, which all educational settings are welcome to attend. The sessions cover infection prevention principles and then discuss scenarios to illustrate this.

Please use the Eventbrite page to register: [Covid-19 Educational Settings Webinar Tickets, Multiple Dates | Eventbrite](#)

Primary school testing: We continue to see a rise in cases in primary schools in Somerset, therefore it's important for people to continue all they are doing to encourage household, parent and staff LFD testing. Please also be aware Public Health could advise daily LFD testing for certain groups during an outbreak.



There's another way to collect rapid covid tests

Use a collect code when picking up your tests from a pharmacy

Online at gov.uk/get-collect-code

By calling 119

#DoItForSomerset

SOMERSET Council
SOMERSET Safety Group
NHS

Close contact daily LFD testing includes students of primary age under parental discretion. The new LFD tests are nasal swabs only and much easier to use than previous stocks.

Elected Member Cllr Clare Paul has been lobbying in support of the Public Health team's advice to directly supply Primary Schools with LFDs, rather than relying on availability through usual ordering channels. As a result of this work, MP Rebecca Pow is now engaged with moving this issue forward.

For now, Primary school students and parents are requested to access tests via community routes (collection at [local participating pharmacy](#)) or via the [online ordering service](#).

Symptomatic and Asymptomatic Testing: It's important for all households with parents of school aged children and staff to continue with regular twice weekly LFD testing.

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 or vaping
- If you have symptoms get a PCR and use the supervised PCR testing route at test centre to get the best quality test
- If you are asymptomatic and receive a positive LFD test, there is no need to seek a confirmatory PCR test and self isolation can begin from the date of the positive LFD result
- There is no need for primary age pupils (those in year 6 and below) to regularly test, unless they have been identified as a contact for someone who has tested positive for Covid-19 and therefore advised to take lateral flow tests every day for 7 days at parental discretion

Childhood Immunisation Programme: The Somerset Foundation Trust manage the childhood immunisation programme with SAINT (School Age Immunisation Nursing Team, part of the NHS). SAINT deliver the nasal flu vaccination to all schools in Somerset. SAINT continue to work as quickly and safely as possible to finish the flu programme by end of January.

Any schools who had to be cancelled this week will be contacted in the new year to be rebooked. Some cancellations have been necessary due to redeployment of the SAINT team as we focus on delivery of the national Booster programme.

FLU Vaccination Clinics: If you would like to attend a clinic which requires an appointment please email Somersetsaint@somersetft.nhs.uk

[Flu vaccination programme - SAINTS \(School Age Immunisation Teams\)](https://www.somersetft.nhs.uk/flu-vaccination-programme-saints)
([somersetft.nhs.uk](https://www.somersetft.nhs.uk))

Covid-19 Vaccine Programme: Special school staff are eligible for Covid-19 boosters. Staff should be able to book on the [National Booking System](https://www.nhs.uk/nationalbooking) by self-

declaring they are a health and social care worker. Staff can take ID along to the centre in case asked, but they shouldn't encounter a problem. Slots are released into the national booking system as they become available, so you do have to refresh the system if the site you want does not appear.

Young people aged 12 to 15 in England are now being offered a second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine at a minimum of 12 weeks from the first dose, following advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

Parents can book vaccinations for their child, if aged 12 or over, through the [NHS booking system](#).

There is a continued offer for all eligible young people to access their first dose via vaccination sites in Somerset for those who may have missed their school session.

There are bookable slots for 12 -15-year-olds (who have missed their school vaccination date) at vaccination centres; Somerset Motor Museum in Sparkford and Firepool in Taunton.

You can book through the [National Booking Service online](#) or by calling 119.

There are likely to be other clinics starting regularly in other areas in the coming weeks and we will endeavour to circulate this information as soon as it is available. Please encourage parents/guardians to [check the NHS walk in site for up to date information](#).

Please note: If a child has tested positive for Covid-19 and is not at high risk from Covid-19, they need to wait 12 weeks before they can have a Covid-19 vaccine. This starts from the date they had symptoms, or the date of the positive test if they did not have symptoms.

Vaccination Update: All eligible adults in England aged 18 and over have been offered a Covid-19 booster vaccine.



In terms of booking vaccinations this should continue to be done via our local NHS website [Covid-19 vaccinations in Somerset - Somerset CCG](https://www.somersetccg.nhs.uk/covid-19-vaccinations) this gives local information but also leads into the National Booking Service. Depending on your location, circumstances and availability this system will then show you when and where there are available appointments for vaccination. This may or may not be within Somerset but will give the best options available for vaccination as quickly as possible.

A poster for COVID-19 vaccinations at the Alfred Gillett Trust. The left side has a green background with white and yellow text. The right side shows a photograph of a large, classical-style building with a portico. The NHS logo is in the top right of the photo. A yellow box at the bottom right contains the hashtag #VaccinatingSomerset.

COVID-19 Vaccinations
Alfred Gillett Trust
at
Clarks Village
Sat 8th January 9-4.30
Sun 9th January 10-3.30
Street BA16 0BQ - Use Grange Car Park 2.
Then follow the path to the right-hand side of Clarks Village Entrance.
www.somersetccg.nhs.uk/covid-vaccines/


NHS

#VaccinatingSomerset

COVID-19 Vaccinations

**Walk-in clinic at
Wincanton Health
Centre**

Saturday 8th Jan
Opening times: 10.30 - 13.00

 Dykes Way, Wincanton, BA9 9FQ

www.somersetccg.nhs.uk/covid-vaccines/

NHS

#VaccinatingSomerset

To get your vaccine visit www.nhs.uk/Covid-Vaccination or call 119 for an appointment. There are also convenient walk-in options across the country, which you can find on www.nhs.uk/grab-a-jab.

Testing Update: [Prime Minister reissues call for public to get boosted and announces new critical workforce testing measures](#)

- The government have announced that they will provide 100,000 critical workers in England with free lateral flow tests to help keep essential services and supply chains running. The provision of precautionary testing will be for an initial period of five weeks and will start from Monday 10th January.
- Included in the scheme are those who work in critical national infrastructure, national security, transport, and food distribution and processing. This includes roles in Border Force, Police and Fire and Rescue Services control rooms, electricity generation, test kit warehouses and test surge labs.
- Tests will be separate from public sectors who already have a testing allocation with UKHSA, such as adult social care or education, and separate to those delivered to pharmacies and homes.

[Confirmatory PCR tests to be temporarily suspended for positive lateral flow test results](#)

- UKHSA have announced that confirmatory PCR tests will be temporarily suspended for positive lateral flow test results.
- From 11 January in England, anyone who receives a positive LFD test result should [report their result on GOV.UK](#) and must self-isolate immediately but will not need to take a follow-up PCR test. This is a temporary measure while coronavirus (Covid-19) rates remain high across the UK. Whilst levels of Covid-19 are high, the vast majority of people with positive LFD results can be confident that they have Covid-19.
- Anyone who develops 1 of the 3 main Covid-19 symptoms should stay at home and self-isolate and take a PCR test. They must self-isolate if they get a positive test result, even if they have had a recent negative lateral flow test – these rules have not changed.
- In line with the reduced self-isolation approach announced on 22 December, anyone who tests positive will be able to leave self-isolation 7 days after the date of their initial positive test if they receive 2 negative LFD results, 24 hours apart, on days 6 and 7.
- Finally, around one million people in England who are at particular risk of becoming seriously ill from Covid-19 have been identified by the NHS as being potentially eligible for new treatments. They will be receiving a PCR test kit at home by mid-January to use if they develop symptoms or if they get a positive LFD result, as they may be eligible for new treatments if they receive a positive PCR result. This group should use these priority PCR tests when they have symptoms as it will enable prioritised laboratory handling.

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](#).