

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Thursday 06 May 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 13.5 per 100,000 which is a reduction from last week. On a national level, cases, hospitalisations and deaths are back to the levels we saw in September.

Although the numbers of cases are showing a reduction, the virus is still very much present and our Public Health team is working hard contact tracing Somerset's cases to help break the chains of transmission. This new scheme named '**Local 0**' (zero) means that **all** contact tracing is now undertaken locally. We were one of the pilot local authorities that supported Public Health England in this contact tracing right back at the start of the pandemic and very much welcome the approach enabling us to undertake all local tracing as it is invaluable. This is so important as it helps to reach individuals who have tested positive for Covid-19 in a more rapid way. Full details can be found in the appropriate section later.

As we look forward to the latest set of restrictions lifting (currently on target to happen on 17 May), which will include two households or groups of six allowed to mix indoors and indoor hospitality recommencing for example, we are encouraging everyone to remember the all important tools we all have at our disposal to help to keep our rates as low as possible. This includes the message of hands, face, space and fresh air – this is especially important when mixing indoors. Full details on the road map can be found using the following link: [COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021 \(Summary\)](#)

We are now into the fourth 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. 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.

Mental Health Awareness Week starts from 10 May and we are particularly keen to focus on those individuals who have been affected by the pandemic, or those with anxiety regarding the reopening of society. Please help us to encourage people to speak up if they are struggling and ask others how they are doing too - one simple conversation can be so powerful. More details can be found in the section below.

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'.



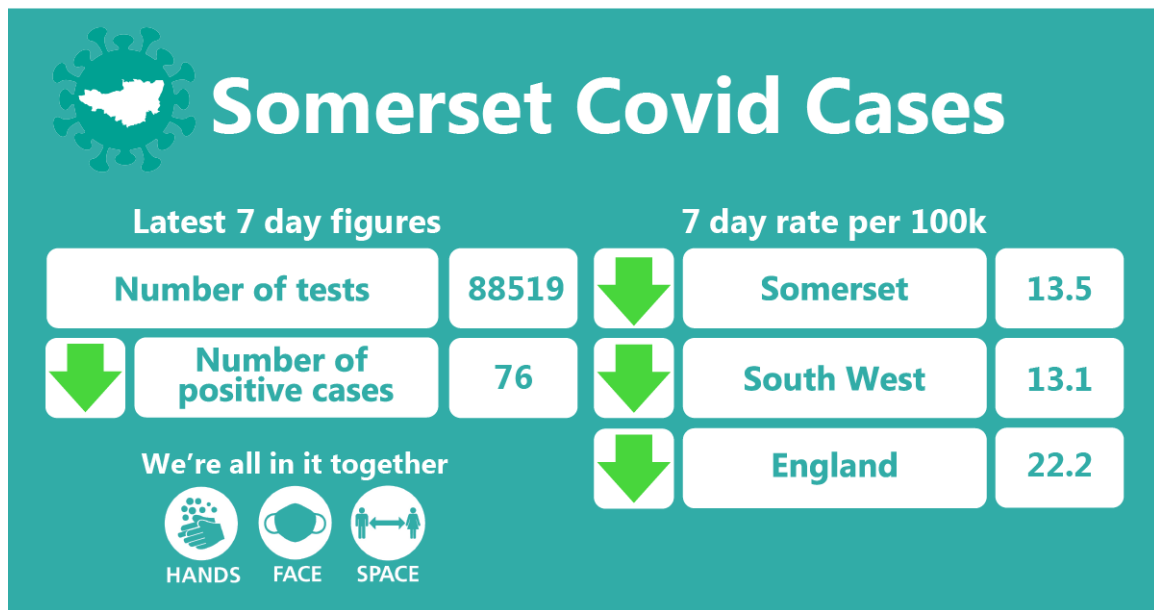
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In the week up to 24 April, approximately 88519 tests were carried out across the county and there have been 76 new confirmed cases. Although the rates have dropped since last week, our rate of 13.5 is higher than the South West rate of 13.1 so we 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 01 May.

THIS WEEK'S HEADLINES:

The main items this week that are featured in this update are:

- Workplace, care and school settings
- Vaccination update
- Local 0 (zero)
- Testing Update
- Communications Focus
- Social Responsibility
- Mental Health Awareness Week
- 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. Please note we have attached three posters for indoor hospitality to be aware of. 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.

Attached to this mail are details regarding a webinar aimed at helping businesses reopen or adjust operations, as we look ahead to the next stage in the Government's Covid-19 roadmap out of lockdown which local businesses may want to sign up for.

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.

Residents in care homes can now leave their care home to walk with a care worker or named visitor. Residents can also leave their homes to visit a friend or family member's garden, go on walks in places such as parks, public gardens and beaches, and will not need to self-isolate on their return.

This is very important for the quality of life for care home residents. Further details can be found here: [Visiting out of a Care home](#)

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

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.

Vaccination Update: All people aged **40 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.

Local 0 (zero): Local 0 is a new scheme to help reach individuals who have tested positive for Coronavirus soon. Somerset has been a part of this in a slightly different way since the beginning of the pandemic as part of the pilot. This is a joint initiative will help support local Authorities to contact positive cases faster by bringing them in right from

the start of the tracing journey, at the same time the case is entered into the National NHS test and trace System.

Through the new approach, which we commenced on the 12th April, we will endeavour to contact the individual directly rather than the national service and will be responsible for instructing the individual to self-isolate. As a local contact tracing provider, we can support our Somerset Citizens that have tested positive and for members of their household that are required to self-isolate.

As a local authority, we have a unique knowledge of our community and can provide an invaluable service as we work together and with the support of the National Tracing service.

We feel that now we offer this service this offers:

- Better engagement by our local citizens:
Local numbers, local accents, etc. have resulted in a better uptake of citizen engagement
- Outbreak Identification:
Local Authorities see the whole 'epi' picture in their area which allows for early identification, response to outbreaks & breaking chains of transmission
- Better local support and wellbeing for citizens and call handlers:
Local Authorities have been able to offer their local support/well-being information into calls (e.g. food/prescription deliveries, mental health services, etc.), which helps people isolate more effectively
Well-being of call handlers has improved as they speak to people who are more compliant/more likely to engage in the process

Regular Testing: Universal Testing means everybody can now take part in regular lateral flow testing (LFT) for those not displaying symptoms in a variety of ways.

The new assisted testing service was launched on Saturday 1 May. So far, many 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](#) . 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.

The differences between the two types of tests and are highlighted very well in the latest [Somerset Covid Catch-up film](#)

Communications Focus: This week we will be focusing our communications on Social Responsibility and Mental Health Awareness Week. With the new relaxations planned to take place on 17 May we are very keen for people in Somerset to be prepared and continue to adhere to the guidance around hands, space, face and fresh air. We also want to clarify any confusion surrounding the differences between the two types of testing – asymptomatic and symptomatic. Finally, we wanted to highlight Mental Health Awareness Week which starts on 10 May.

Encouraging social responsibly: We have been able to reach this stage thanks to the huge efforts made by all age groups and we want to continue on the journey to normality – at present we are still on target to reach Step 3 of the roadmap on 17 May.

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.

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

Mental Health Awareness Week: Next week is Mental Health Awareness Week with a theme this year of 'nature' – a fitting subject, after a year where we have seen more of our four walls in our homes than the four seasons.

As lockdown restrictions ease, re-adjustment can be difficult for people's mental health. Many will have a feeling of mixed emotions. It's completely understandable and normal to experience a mixture of highs and lows right now. Connecting with nature is a good way to unwind and cast those anxieties aside.

Starting with a 'Tweetathon' on Monday, we will be sharing well-being tips, personal stories of what people have been doing to cope with the stress of the last year and advice on where to get help if you are feeling anxious or mentally stressed throughout the week on our social media channels – Twitter: @SomersetCouncil, Facebook: @somersetcountycouncil and Instagram: @somersetcouncil.

If you are feeling anxious or having difficulty with your mental health support is available – Mindline is a confidential listening service which is available twenty-four hours a day – 01823 276 892.

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](#).