

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Thursday 29 July 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.

In Somerset the cases of Covid-19 are still high so we know the pandemic is not over yet. We, like the rest of the country, have seen a reduction of rates in the last week but it is too early to be sure of the reasons why our cases are falling and it might not mean there is less virus within our communities. To keep yourself and others safe you should get vaccinated, participate in testing and self-isolate when required. Although it's no longer a legal requirement, we would also recommend you continue to wear a face covering, keep your distance, meet outdoors and ventilate indoor spaces.

A main reason we are progressing so well in the fight against the virus is the vaccination programme and here in Somerset a huge percentage of our residents have now had both doses. This is fantastic news, but we must be very aware Covid-19 is still in circulation and even if you have received both doses of the vaccine, you can still catch and spread the virus.

Now we are moving into a more open society, it is a good time to look at our lifestyle – potentially a few of us have drifted into a slightly less healthy way of living over the last 18 months due to lockdown – drinking more, eating a less healthy diet and exercising less. One of the ways you can take stock, providing you don't have long term health issues, and if you are aged between 40 and 74 is to book a health check. In the latest Covid Catch up film, which you can watch [here](#), Clinton discusses this and also takes a health check himself.

Finally, we have seen reports highlighting the fact about **one million** people are experiencing Long Covid in the UK: [ONS Long Covid in UK](#)

The best protection against Long Covid is to not get Covid. The best protection against Covid is vaccination.

Latest Covid-19 Dashboard: The following link will take you to our website: [Somerset Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#). Then scroll down the page until you get to 'Covid-19 Dashboard' in the list. Click on this and the dashboard will open.

'Remember, everyone can catch it, anyone can spread it'.



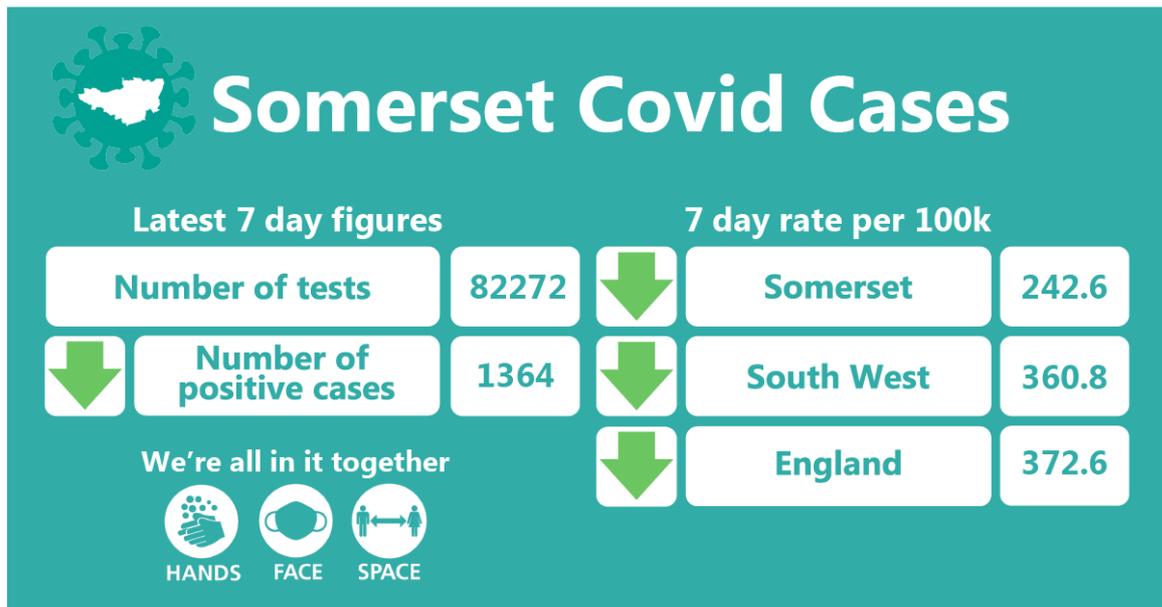
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In the week up to 24 July approximately 82272 tests were carried out across the county and there have been 1364 new confirmed cases. The rates have decreased from 348.8 per 100,000 to 246.2 per 100,000 and we still remain below both the South West and England rates.

THIS WEEK'S HEADLINES:

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

- Step 4 of the Government Roadmap
- Workplace, care and school settings
- Vaccination update
- Testing Update
- Resources and further information

Step 4 of the Government Roadmap: The Government's top-level information about the move to Step 4 of the Roadmap can be found here:

[Coronavirus: how to stay safe and help prevent the spread - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-how-to-stay-safe-and-help-prevent-the-spread)

Covid-19 restrictions have now ended in many settings in England. However, Public Health England's [infection prevention control guidelines and hospital visiting guidance](#) remain in place for staff and visitors across all health services, for the protection of both staff and patients.

Despite the lifting of many legal restrictions, we recommend the following to protect ourselves and each other:

1. **Consider wearing a face covering** – although legal restrictions have lifted, you can continue to protect yourself and others by continuing wearing a face mask indoors and in crowded areas. When wearing a face covering, the risk of transmission is reduced by up to 25 per cent.
2. **Make space for others** – giving one another space, particularly in crowded areas, can help you and others around you. The UK's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) estimates the risk of transmitting Covid-19 at 1 metre could be up to ten times higher than at 2 metres – so keep 2 metres apart as a general rule where you can.
3. **Ventilate spaces** – letting fresh air into indoor areas helps to fight infection and protect your family and loved ones. It can help remove air which contains virus particles and prevent the spread of coronavirus. Meet up outside where possible but when inside, please open windows and/or doors.
4. **Get your vaccination** – when it is offered to you, we encourage you to come forward for both doses of your vaccination. Two doses give you strong protection against the virus. Go to [Covid-19 vaccinations in Somerset - Somerset](#)

[CCG](#) to find the easiest way to book in and keep an eye out on social media for the 'grab a jab' walk in centres which have been taking place each weekend.

5. **Participate in testing** – lateral flow (rapid) testing for people with no symptoms is still widely available locally, and you can get a free box of test kits from many local pharmacies or order online for home delivery. If you have symptoms, book a PCR test online at www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test or by calling 119.
6. **Self-isolate when required** – the rules on self-isolation remain in place until at least Monday 16 August. A positive test or being identified as a close contact means you must self-isolate – this is still a legal requirement and helps stop the spread.

Workplaces: Since 19 July employers have been able to start working towards employees returning to the workplace. The Government's message to employers is one of caution. Employers have a duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of their staff and customers and Covid-19 risk assessments will need to be reviewed in the light of the latest advice.

If businesses are interested in the daily test-to-release scheme for close contact of cases then they need to contact their sponsoring government department – for example: DEFRA for food businesses.

It is worth noting this it is not a required process and there is a large change coming on 16 August, which may remove the need for these processes particularly for double vaccinated staff.

It is important to respect and be considerate of those who may wish to take a more cautious approach as restrictions are lifted. The following behaviours should be encouraged by staff to help protect themselves and reduce sickness absence:

1. Meeting in well-ventilated areas where possible, such as outdoors or indoors with windows open.
2. Wearing a face covering where you come into contact with people you don't normally meet in enclosed and crowded spaces.
3. Washing your hands with soap and water or using hand sanitiser regularly throughout the day.
4. Covering your nose and mouth when you cough and sneeze.
5. Staying at home if unwell, to reduce the risk of passing on other illnesses onto colleagues and others in your community.

6. Considering individual risks, such as clinical vulnerabilities and vaccination status.

Businesses must not require a self-isolating employee to come to work and should make sure workers and customers who feel unwell **do not** attend the setting.

Businesses are encouraged to display QR codes for customers to check in using the NHS Covid-19 app, to support NHS Test and Trace, although it is no longer a legal requirement.

The latest guidance on working safely by sector is available now:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-covid-19>

Care Sector: In the week ending 28 July, there have been 33 cases of Covid 19 at 27 social care settings across Somerset, a decrease from last week's figures.

Mandatory vaccinations for care home workers

It will be mandatory for care home workers to have Covid 19 vaccinations later this year with the following timescales:

- **22 July 2021** – 16 week grace period starts
- **16 September 2021** – last date for care home workers to get their first dose to be fully vaccinated when regulations come into force
- **11 November 2021** – regulations come into force

Please continue to have conversations with staff to support vaccinations and please contact Adult Social Care if any concerns asccovid19@somerset.gov.uk

Health and social care staff identified as a contact of a case of Covid 19

Care staff should continue to self-isolate if instructed to do so. Last week, the Government announced it may, in exceptional circumstances be necessary for a staff member to work where additional safety measures can be upheld and following an individual risk assessment.

In Somerset, this has been reviewed across our systems and providers are being asked to ensure staff maintain isolation if required, business continuity plans are implemented and appropriate actions are taken to minimise the risk to the vulnerable people we support. Only in exceptional cases where all efforts have been exhausted should the ability to exempt the individual from isolation be considered and only after they undertake a negative PCR test and daily LFT tests remain negative.

More information

For information related to Covid 19 for adult care providers please visit [Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board](#)

Schools and Early Years settings: In the week to 29 July there were 317 cases at 111 school settings and 14 cases at 14 nursery settings.

Now the Summer holidays are here it is important education and enrichment activities continue as planned. It is also important for families to be able to continue with holiday plans whilst remaining safe.

There are several ways in which we can help achieve this:

- If attending summer school (or other related activities), please continue to take part in twice weekly testing - information on how to obtain test kits can be found by [following this link](#).
- If anyone in a household is experiencing any of the symptoms of Covid-19, please continue to isolate, seek a PCR test and await the result.
- If you are asked to self-isolate as a close contact of someone with Covid-19, please follow the self-isolation guidance exactly as you would have previously (the easing of restrictions has not changed the self-isolation guidance for close contacts).

What is self-isolation? As a case or close contact you are required to isolate. So:

- do not go to work, school or public places – work from home if you can
- do not go on public transport or use taxis
- do not go out to get food and medicine – order it online or by phone, or ask someone to bring it to your home
- do not have visitors in your home, including friends and family – except for people providing essential care
- do not go out to exercise – exercise at home or in your garden, if you have one

If you do not have anyone who can support you with essentials you can click on this link [Get Covid-19 Help Somerset](#) or call our helpline on 0300 790 6275. This line is open from 8am to 6pm every day.

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

The coming days will see more walk-in vaccination centres across the county. For full details, click here:

[Grab a jab - this week's walk-in locations \(28 July - 2 August\) - Somerset CCG](#)

Vaccines and Pregnancy Unfortunately, we are seeing a rise in the number of pregnant women with Covid-19 and nationally some pregnant women are being hospitalised. A part of this is because vaccination rates in pregnancy remain low. This is mainly down to a lack of information so we would ask you to share the below with as many people as possible please as we would like to increase the uptake to protect women and their unborn babies.



COVID-19 Vaccination and Pregnancy

COVID-19 in pregnancy

- Most will have no or mild cold / flu symptoms
- A positive diagnosis is more dangerous after 28 weeks pregnant
- Higher risk of admission to intensive care
- Higher risk of premature birth
- Risk of stillbirth doubled
- Increased risk of pre-eclampsia.



The data so far...

- No vaccine is known to be harmful in pregnancy
- UK vaccines are not 'live', so cannot give you the virus
- Pfizer and Moderna given to 130,000 pregnant women in USA with no safety concerns.



Women who are at higher risk of severe disease include:

- Clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV)
- Underlying medical condition e.g. diabetes
- BMI 25 or more
- Age 35 or more
- Over 28 weeks pregnant.



You are at higher risk of catching COVID-19 if:

- You or someone in your household is a health / social care worker
- Your community has a high rate of infection
- You have frequent contact with people outside your home
- You live with someone who works in the hospitality or tourist industry
- You are from a minority ethnicity background.



With thanks to The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust

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. And don't just take our word for it. Here's a quote from someone who recently had a call with a buddy: *"I would 100 percent recommend the Vaccination Buddy scheme to a family member or friend. Julie was well informed and non-judgemental. She gave me lots more insight and reasons to say 'Yes' to the vaccine."*

Testing: From 9 August, please be aware a new brand of lateral flow tests will be in circulation. The brand is called Acon (Flowflex) and the new packaging can be seen below. This new brand of LFT still comes in packs of 7 tests, and still needs to be performed twice a week. **However, this new kit requires nasal swabbing only.** The test kit components do not differ too much from the current Innova kits, apart from the extraction tube already being pre-filled with the buffer solution. This new Acon Flowflex test only takes 15 minutes for a final result rather than 30 minutes with the current ones. Please ensure you read the kit instructions before performing any LFT test and ensure kits are kept at room temperature between 15-30 degrees Celsius prior to being used.



It remains very important for people who do not display symptoms (asymptomatic) to take lateral flow tests twice a week even if you have received one or both doses of the vaccine. This is because regular lateral flow testing leads to earlier identification of people who are infected without having symptoms. Before meeting any vulnerable friends and family socially, or working with vulnerable colleagues, we ask you to continue to use these tests.

You can order [lateral flow tests online to be delivered to your home](#), call 119 to have a kit home delivered through the post, or collect a kit at [a local pharmacy](#). For further information on lateral flow tests, including a video showing how to perform one, you can visit our website [here](#).

If you have symptoms of the infection you need to 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 \(COVID-19\)](#)

Resources and further information: Please do keep an eye 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/>

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](#).