

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Friday 5 November 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, however they are lower than last week. The majority of our cases continue to be among school and college-age children and also staff within education settings.

Following the half term break for the majority of Somerset schools we are requesting parents and children follow the advice issued by their schools on control measures in place in schools. Further information can be found later in the update.

Research published this week by the Office for National Statistics shows that you are [32 times more likely to die with Covid-19 if you are unvaccinated than if you are double vaccinated](#). If you have been putting off getting a vaccine, this new and important evidence will, we hope, convince you to book today. You can book your vaccine by visiting this [link](#).

With Bonfire Night taking place tonight and events happening over the weekend, we are suggesting some simple guidance to ensure people are 'Covid safe'.

We are encouraging people to remember to take a lateral flow test before and after attending parties or crowded events and to wear a face-covering in crowded and enclosed spaces. If people have any symptoms of Covid-19 they should self isolate immediately and book a PCR test. Please note - there is no Bridgwater carnival this year, but instead the Sedgemoor Masquerade Weekend is taking place, with the traditional squibbing taking place on Saturday.

Finally, as mentioned last week, Remembrance Day events will be taking place next week. We have issued guidance to help stop the spread of coronavirus during these services and events, which you can find [here](#).

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



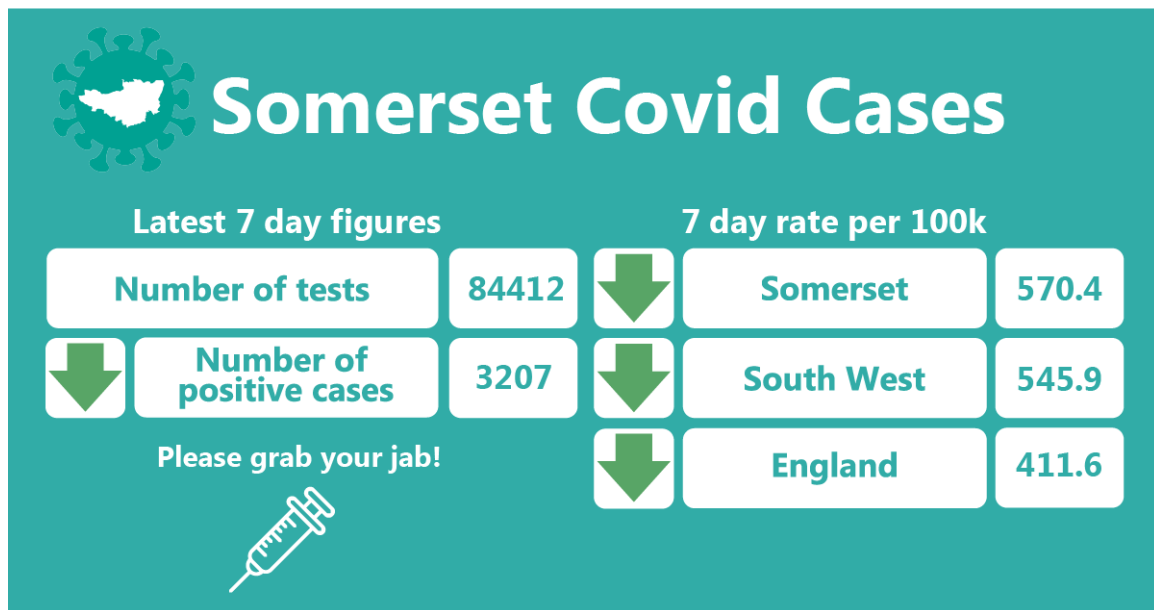
Professor Trudi Grant
Director of Public Health

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Clare Paul
Cabinet Member for Education and
Public Health

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In the week up to 30 October, approximately 84,412 tests were carried out across the county with 3,207 new confirmed cases. The rates have decreased in the last reporting week to 570.4 per 100.000. This is above the South-West and the national average.

Hospitalisation data for Somerset has increased to around 90 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
- Vaccination and Covid Booster update
- Testing Update
- 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](#).

Following the recent spike in cases we have seen an increase in workplace cases, including a number of small office outbreaks. Many businesses who were previously using home working extensively have switched to hybrid working; part office, part home. The more social contacts we have, including work contacts, the greater the risk we become infected. As a SAGE group warned in September:

"There is a clear consensus that continued high levels of homeworking has played a very important role in preventing sustained epidemic growth in recent months. It is highly likely that a significant decrease in homeworking in the next few months would result in a rapid increase in hospital admissions."

So, if it works for the individual and the business, it still makes sense to work from home, in whole or in part. When people are going into the office, use lateral flow tests and stay away if you have tested positive. Be especially aware that spending a long time in poorly ventilated areas with other people, perhaps in a meeting room, greatly increases risk of infection if a Covid-19 positive person is present. With colder weather, ventilating and maintaining comfort becomes more challenging, of course.

Care Sector: We continue to see cases and outbreaks of Covid-19 in our social care settings. Infection Prevention Control (IPC) measures continue to be essential to reduce the risk of Covid-19 as well as other infections. This is a good time to review all IPC practices, ensure all staff have had recent training to prevent not only Covid but other winter infections.

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.

While there is very little flu circulating as yet, remember to be alert to the possibility of flu and other respiratory conditions. It is very easy to be blinded to the possibility of other diseases by negative Covid-19 results.

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](#)

Emotional support

Support is available for care workers in Somerset – look at what is on offer at the Somerset Emotional Wellbeing Colleague Hub – a dedicated online resource for all health and care workers in Somerset [Somerset Emotional Wellbeing Staff Hub](#)

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: Following an individual risk assessment of each school's Covid-19 cases and local community transmission rates, 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 for 14 days post half term**. Although Covid-19 is frequently a mild illness for children, we are aware that the high sickness rates are causing significant disruptions to children's education, which we remain extremely concerned about.

Additionally, within each District in Somerset we have many cases of Covid-19 who had received false negative PCR test results in September and early October, and as a result will have come out of self-isolation and spread Covid-19 within our schools and communities through no fault of their own.

It is for this reason the SCC Public Health team have conducted individual risk assessments and advised educational settings on specific additional actions they can implement for the 14 days post half term. The proposed measures focus on:

- 1.** Introducing 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 close contacts of confirmed cases of Covid-19 identified by NHS Test & Trace, to book a PCR test and whilst awaiting test results undertake a daily LFD test and only attend school if this is negative.

Public Health advice is these measures are to be implemented in addition to other control measures already in place, such as twice weekly LFD testing for

secondary age pupils, households and staff, promotion of good hygiene measures, ventilation measures, enhanced cleaning regimes and the promotion of vaccination. This situation remains under constant review.

All measures which have been suggested by SCCPH should be in place until week ending 12 November when a review will take place. However, please do get in contact with us on SCCPHincidentroom@somerset.gov.uk if you feel like the measures should be escalated or stepped down. Bear in mind though that community transmission remains high.

Schools should include enrichment and extra-curricular activities within their own contingency plans in line with the national contingency framework. To support Somerset schools with their plans Somerset County Council Public Health completed individual risk assessments for every school based on current rates of infection in the setting and the local community. The public health advice is that settings in enhanced measures (amber) should limit residential educational visits, live performances, and indoor events where parents attend.

Therefore, day educational visits, curricular activities such as swimming and visitors to support the curriculum can continue to take place to stop any further disruption to education. Furthermore, any essential visitors who support with business continuity or support needs can carry out their normal duties. As stated within the amber measures we would advise limiting large gatherings or any mixing of settings which are in amber measures, which may include inter-school activities.

The measures are advised in accordance with the DfE contingency framework. The Regional Schools Commissioner, The Director of Children's Services and UKHSA have been made aware of this advice.

The requirement for children aged 11+ to complete two lateral flow tests at home remains as important as ever. From 22-28 October there were 11593 tests conducted with 329 positive, giving a positivity rate of 2.8%.

The SCC Public Health team continue to make every effort to respond to schools the same day and have plenty of capacity to offer support to all affected schools

via sccphincidentroom@somerset.gov.uk . If you need to speak with a member of the team urgently, please call the Public Health Incident Room on 01823 356 100.

SCC Public Health continue to be the first port of call for all mainstream schools with cases of Covid-19. The United Kingdom Health Security Agency (formerly Public Health England) now take the lead on Covid-19 cases within special schools and residential settings. Their contacts have not yet changed and remain swhpt@phe.gov.uk or the DfE helpline (option 1) 0800 0468 687.

Covid-19 School Toolkit | Support Services for Education

If in doubt please email us on sccphincidentroom@somerset.gov.uk
or call 01823 356 100

Symptomatic and Asymptomatic Testing:

Parents or carers of a school or college age child, health, care or education staff are requested to undertake twice weekly asymptomatic testing using LFDs, so those you meet or work with are kept safe from infection.

Please remind parents in any communication from school to take up the offer of free tests and record their results on [NHS Test and Trace](#).

Current Advice:

If staff or a pupil is identified as a close contact by NHS Test and Trace, they may be asked to take daily lateral flow device (LFD) tests, while they wait for their PCR test result. In this scenario, the staff member or pupil should continue to attend school or college as long as their LFD test results remain negative and they feel well.

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 LFD 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

If you think your child is a close contact but has not been contacted directly by NHS Test and Trace then they should take a PCR test via [Get a free PCR test to check if you have coronavirus \(Covid-19\)](#) or by calling 119. **When ordering a PCR test it is important to check the box (online) or tell 119 'I've been told to get a test by my health protection team' and not 'I've been told to get a test by my school or nursery'**

Taking Lateral Flow Tests Correctly:

There are currently three types of lateral flow tests available from NHS Test and Trace and it is **important** to follow the **specific instructions** for each one:-

- The Innova test kit is a throat and nasal swab test
- Orient Gene and Acon Flowflex test kits are nasal only

The table below illustrates the different types of tests:

Test kit	Innova	Orient Gene	Acon Flowflex
Package colour	Blue and white	Green and white	Blue with brown
Nasal swab	Yes	Yes	Yes
Throat swab	Yes	No	No
Resting time	None	1 Minute	None
Wait time	30mins	15-20mins	15-30mins

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 between October and December every year.

This year, the Covid-19 and flu vaccines are being rolled out together for 13-15 year olds through the schools immunisation programme.

Immunisation sessions should still go ahead as planned when a school has a Covid-19 outbreak, unless specifically advised not to by a health protection team (HPT) or Director of Public Health (DPH). Other factors which may impact on the ability to offer immunisation sessions include the number of children still in school and whether the school has had to send some year groups home or close due to lack of staff.

SAINT will work with school settings to ensure children who missed vaccinations because they were self-isolating at home or for other reasons, including exclusion, or missed consent deadline are re-offered immunisation at an appropriate time in the future.

12-15 year olds who have missed their school vaccination date (due to absence or illness) are advised to book their vaccination online.

Book or manage your coronavirus [Book or manage your coronavirus \(Covid-19\) vaccination - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/booking/coronavirus)

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

The government have reported that over 8 million people in the UK have now received Covid-19 booster jabs and more than 820,000 boosters have been administered in the last 3 days and they continue to urge people to get their booster as soon as possible. More info can be found [here](#).

Booster Vaccines: Like some other vaccines, levels of protection for the Covid-19 vaccine may begin to wane over time. With Covid-19 rates still high again this winter, the booster dose will help extend the protection you gained from your first 2 doses, giving you longer term protection against becoming seriously ill from Covid-19.

If you fall into any of the following groups, you are eligible for a booster jab.

- People aged over 50 and over
- People who live and work in care homes
- Frontline health and social care workers
- People aged 16 and over who are a main carer for someone at high risk from Covid-19
- People aged 16 and over who live with someone who is more likely to get infections (such as someone who has HIV, has had a transplant or is having certain treatments for cancer, lupus or rheumatoid arthritis)

People who are pregnant and in 1 of the eligible groups can also get a booster.

Pfizer Booster jabs are being offered to those who are eligible, at least six months after your last Covid-19 vaccination. You will be offered the Pfizer Covid vaccination irrespective of which vaccine was given to you for your first or second vaccination. (If you are unable to have the Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna vaccine, for example if you experienced a heavy allergic reaction to your first two doses, you may be offered a booster dose of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine please let staff at the vaccination centre know you suffered an allergic reaction). To book your booster jab you can visit the Covid **National Booking Service** online or call 119, or wait to be contacted by the NHS to book your appointment. You can book anytime within the four weeks leading up to six month period from when you had your last vaccination.

When you book your appointment, the national Booking Service will give you a choice of places where you can receive your jab including community pharmacies, some GP practices and our large vaccination centres at Firepool in Taunton, Somerset Motor Museum in Haynes and Minehead District Hospital . You do not need to return to the place where you had your first vaccination.

Booster Vaccination Consultation: Currently, in Somerset we want to increase uptake of the Booster Vaccination amongst the over 70's age group.

The consultation aims to understand more about the reasons people are deciding whether or not to take up the offer of the booster jab.

We would like to thank you in advance for taking the time to complete this survey. Responses are anonymous.

[Please respond below: - Covid-19 Booster Vaccine Uptake - Somerset County Council Consultations \(inconsult.uk\)](https://inconsult.uk)

Spark Somerset are offering grants of up to £500 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, 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. Some older and vulnerable people are also struggling to access their booster vaccinations.

If you have ideas about how you might encourage or enable more people to access their vaccination, Spark Somerset can help you put these ideas into action.

What the funding will cover:

Spark Somerset want to fund projects which demonstrate they can have a positive impact on the number of people accessing their Covid-19 vaccinations and/or boosters. 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 for people being better informed.
- Practical support to enable people to book and travel to their vaccination/booster if they would otherwise struggle to do so.

To find out more and access the simple application form, click [here](#). Applications are open until 1st December; projects should be complete by 31st January 2022.

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.

Testing Update: From 25th October, a mobile testing unit became operational in North Parade Car Park in Frome – to help provide additional PCR testing capacity in Mendip. As with all mobile testing units, dates and times of opening will vary, so please be aware of this when booking a PCR test online at [Get a free PCR test to check if you have coronavirus \(Covid-19\)](#) or by calling 119.

Covid Catch-up Film: This week Clinton discusses the need to ensure people keep warm and healthy this winter and offers some useful contacts and advice. 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](#).