

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Friday 1 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.

Covid-19 case rates in educational settings remain on the increase across Somerset and the South-West, with the majority of cases in the 5 – 18-year age group representing 60 percent of all Somerset cases at present.

It therefore remains extremely important for children over the age of 11 who attend school or college, along with their parents or carers and school staff, to do a lateral flow test twice a week to help prevent the unwitting spread of Covid-19 in educational settings. We are also reminding parents to ensure children wear face coverings on school transport, to help protect the drivers from catching Covid-19 and to keep the buses running.

Finally, Bridgwater Fair is underway. The organisers have put measures in place to keep staff and the public safe, such as encouraging the use of face masks which will be given out for free at the event and the use of hand sanitiser. We have been circulating advice and guidance on our social media channels, with information about the safety measures individuals can adopt before, during and after attending the event. This includes key information about travelling to the event, in particular car sharing and the importance of testing before and after the event itself. We are also strongly encouraging the use of face coverings whilst in attendance, as well as reminding fair-goers to keep a safe (ideally 2 metre distance) in crowded areas.

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



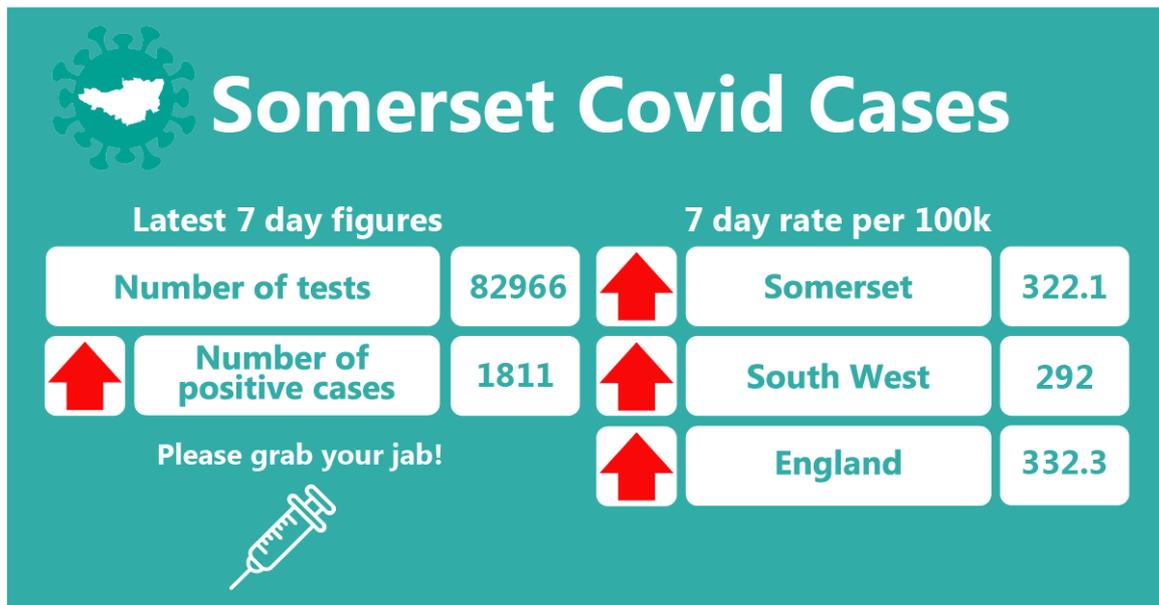
Professor Trudi Grant
Director of Public Health

Twitter: @SomersetDPH



Clare Paul
Cabinet Member for Education and
Public Health

Twitter: @Clarepaul_



In the week up to 25 September approximately 82,966 tests were carried out across the county with 1,811 new confirmed cases. The rates have increased to 322.1 per 100,000, which is above the South West average and only just below the national average of 332.3 per 100,000. Hospitalisation data for Somerset continues to show improvement on previous weeks with just over 20 Covid-19 in patients in Somerset hospitals. **Our message remains, if we all want to continue doing the things we love, we must continue to act responsibly and remember that Covid-19 is still very much in circulation.**

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
- Resources and further information

Workplaces: As we approach our winter season, considering additional cleaning measures can help reduce the risk of common illnesses spreading, not only Covid-19. Settings may need to increase how often and how thoroughly they are cleaning the workplace, as well as cleaning surfaces that are not usually cleaned.

The HSE website has useful advice:

www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/cleaning/cleaning-workplace.htm

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

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (furlough) ended this week. More information on this can be found here:

[Claim for wages through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/claim-for-wages-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme)

Care Sector: Covid-19 outbreaks in care settings remain a concern. Cases are largely affecting staff members, although we are seeing increasing cases in residents.

This serves as a reminder to continue to maintain high standard infection control measures, regular testing, following the current guidance, social distancing, including amongst staff in regular meetings.

It is therefore crucial to continue to mitigate the risks via:

- **Vaccination** – provision of resources to allow informed decision making and to facilitate booster doses when offered
- **Testing** – regular testing according to the latest guidelines, spread throughout the week to avoid result delays, not within 90 days of a positive Covid test and prompt management of suspected cases
- **Infection Prevention Control (IPC)** – strict IPC measures, correct use of PPE, limit cross-sector working, consideration of cohorting/zoning and staff IPC refresher training
- **Ventilation** – opening of windows and doors and inclusion in risk assessment
- **Monitoring and reporting** – recognition of wide spectrum of Covid 19 clinical presentation, reporting all cases to PHE
- **Support and rehabilitation** – recognition and management of the impact of Covid on physical, mental, emotional and social aspects of residents and staff

New media campaign to recruit into the care sector

Sarah Hedges, Proud to Care Engagement Lead is busy uploading job vacancies to their NEW Proud to Care website in time for the launch of their NEW media campaign to recruit people into the care sector. If any care providers wish their job to be advertised for free, please get in touch with Sarah SHedges@somerset.gov.uk .

Testing guidelines for adult social care settings

Updated on 24 September 2021, the link below includes updated graphics to indicate requirements for:

- regular testing cycle - residents and staff
- outbreak testing - residents and staff
- care homes - family and friend visitors
- care homes - visiting professionals
- extra care and supported living
- home care
- day centres
- universal testing

Find out more: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) testing for adult social care settings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-for-adult-social-care-settings)

More information

For information related to Covid-19 for adult care providers please visit [Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board](#) where you will find information on reporting cases of Covid 19, support helplines, webinars and links to guidelines.

Schools and Early Years settings: Covid-19 case rates in educational settings remain on the increase across Somerset and the South-West. There were 941 cases at 144 school settings and 20 cases at 15 nursery settings to the week ending the 25 September.

Some Somerset schools are now in 'Amber' measures which include the cancellation of school trips, reintroduction of face coverings in communal areas and social distancing measures, such as staggered lunch breaks.

From next week (4 October) SCC Public Health will become the first port of call for all mainstream schools with cases of Covid-19. Next week, Public Health England become the United Kingdom Health Security Agency and will take the lead on special schools and residential settings. Their contact details have not yet changed.

In their third week into term, children aged 11+ are still requested to complete two lateral flow tests at home. From the 18 – 24 September there was 21,491 tests recorded with 277 positives, bringing the positivity rate up to 0.8, from 0.5% in the previous week.

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, to keep others safe from infection.

As a reminder, anyone with a positive result on a lateral flow test should book a confirmatory PCR test. You can book a test here [Testing for coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#) or by **calling 119**. Anyone with symptoms of Covid-19 should not attend school and should book a PCR test.

Anti-Vaccination Campaigns: We are aware many of our schools have received letters or emails which feature false or misleading information about the safety, efficacy and purpose of the Covid-19 vaccination programme.

A fake vaccination consent form was recently emailed out to Somerset schools as part of an anti-vaccination campaign. The attachment was sent from a fraudulent email (cvt@nhs-vaccines.uk) by the CVT group who are known to be an organised anti vaccination group.

[COVID-19: NHS director alerts parents to fake vaccine consent letters | UK News | Sky News](#)

This fraudulent email has been reported to both the Somerset Foundation Trust and the Department for Health and Social Care, who have escalated this to communications teams regionally and nationally.

Email correspondence relating to the 12-15 year old vaccination programme will come from a @somersetft.nhs.uk email address. If you are in any doubt, please contact SCC Public Health SCCPHincidentroom@somerset.gov.uk or SAINT by calling 01823 333444.

Headteachers and teachers are advised:

1. Not to engage directly: misinformation narratives and tactics flourish when they are responded to
2. Acknowledge receipt: if a response is needed, simply acknowledge receipt of concerns.

3. More information can be found here: [Vaccine Knowledge | \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)

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. The role of schools is to facilitate access for those who wish to receive the vaccine.

A full range of resources and information can be found here: [Public Health England: Winter Readiness Packs | Support Services for Education](#)

The vaccine is not mandatory; the decision to have the vaccine is a personal decision. No vaccine will be given to any child without parental consent being sought.

COVID-19 resources for parents and schools: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/Covid-19-vaccination-resources-for-schools>

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

Rollout of Covid Booster Vaccination in Somerset

The NHS has started delivering Covid booster jabs to people in eligible groups last week, as the biggest and most successful vaccination programme in health service history moves to the next stage.

The NHS are now inviting eligible people, who had their second Covid jab at least six months ago, for a top up.

Full vaccination rollout will begin from next week, as more vaccination centres and community pharmacy-led sites come online, giving people further protection from the virus ahead of winter.

People do not need to contact the NHS to arrange their booster vaccine. The NHS will be in touch when people become eligible for the jab, 6 months after their second dose. With around 4.5 million people in priority groups becoming eligible for a booster over the coming weeks.

People will get a call or text from their local GP led site to get the jab or will be invited by the National Booking Service.

Booster jabs are effective for topping up protection for people who have had both of their jabs from at the very least six months on after their second dose. Some of those in the original nine priority groups will not be eligible for the top-up until the New Year.

The booster programme will be delivered through existing vaccination sites including pharmacies, hospital hubs, GP practices and vaccine centres.

Local NHS areas will be prioritising care home residents and staff ensuring they are offered a vaccine by the beginning of November.

Those who are eligible for the Covid booster jabs include:

- those living in residential care homes for older adults
- all adults aged 50 years or over
- frontline health and social care workers
- all those aged 16 to 49 years with underlying health conditions that put them at higher risk of severe COVID-19 (as set out in the green book), and adult carers
- adult household contacts of immunosuppressed individuals

Please do not contact your GP regarding an appointment for the booster vaccine. The NHS will contact people by letter or text, when they become eligible to have the booster vaccine. People can book their appointment through the National Booking Service.

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

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'.

Testing: From Monday 4 October, changes will be made to the pharmacy collect service to improve traceability of lateral flow test kits. The main changes you will notice are:

- You will only be allowed to collect two packs of LFT kits, rather than four.

- You will need to register for a collect code on gov.uk/get-collect-code or by calling 119 prior to making a collection from a pharmacy. If you do not wish to register for this collect code, a supply can still be made as an anonymous collection, but we encourage everyone to use collect codes wherever possible

There have been reports of increased rates of positive lateral flow test results, followed by a negative follow up PCR result. If you receive a negative PCR result, you can stop self-isolating, as the result from a PCR test is considered to be the correct result. **To lower the chances of obtaining a false positive lateral flow test**, please do not eat, drink or vape for 30 minutes before performing a lateral flow test.

Please also ensure you carefully read the instructions provided inside the lateral flow test kit, to ensure you are performing the test correctly. There are three different LFT kits available now, and each one varies slightly in the way it needs to be used. The kits are: Innova (nose/throat swabbing) along with Orient Gene and Acon Flowflex (nose only swabbing).

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

We have also received reports that PCR swabs have been distributed which have expired and are therefore not suitable to be used. Please ensure before swabbing yourself for PCR testing, that you **check the expiration date on the box** the test(s) were delivered in, the exterior plastic bag of each test kit, as well as the vial itself. If you find that the swab you have has expired, please dispose of this unused swab in your general waste if at home, or in the green healthcare bags if within a health and social care setting.

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](#).