

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Friday 09 October 2020

This update is provided by the Somerset Covid-19 Engagement Board and is designed to provide a weekly update on the current Covid-19 situation in Somerset.

It aims to provide you with an update on current infection rates in Somerset and actions we are taking locally in response to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Over-arching message: We are continuing to see an ongoing rise in positive Covid-19 cases across the county. While Somerset's infection rate is lower than nationally, we are all in this together, keeping the virus under control needs all of us to stick rigidly to the infection control measures. This virus doesn't discriminate – if you don't follow the simple guidance, you're as likely as anyone to catch Covid-19 regardless of age, gender or geographical location. ***'Remember, anyone can catch it, everyone can spread it'.***



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Summary of cases: This week there has been an ongoing rise in positive cases across the country and across Somerset. A significant proportion of these cases are students and we are involved in enhanced contact tracing which informs us that the majority of these cases are isolating at their university campuses. We are still seeing a steady number of school and workplace cases in the area however and continue to support settings as needed.

Whilst Somerset remains low in comparison to the rest of the country - which is largely because of our population adhering to the guidelines, it is a clear reminder that Covid-19 is still here and circulating in our communities - anyone can catch it and anyone can pass it on, please continue to be vigilant and follow the guidelines, we are all in this together.

The link below shows the Epidemiological Dashboard which tracks the Somerset epidemic from the start in March, to the current time:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/covid-19-dashboard/>

Our dedicated Public health specialists use a range of data made available to us from organisations such as Public Health England (PHE) and others to provide an enhanced level of contact tracing in order to understand the local picture. This involves a daily in-depth review of all data being received, including:

- identifying the geographical areas in Somerset that have higher incidence
- identifying the age groups trends across Somerset and in the most affected areas
- investigating potential links between cases (e.g. family links, common locations visited, common employers)
- reviewing the known outbreaks in key settings (e.g. workplaces) and how they relate to areas with higher incidence
- reviewing the suspected cases in key settings (e.g. schools) and how they relate to areas with higher incidence

NB: This enhanced surveillance is carried out for the purposes of health protection and is done in line with data protection requirements. The detailed analysis and data is not shared beyond a restricted team at Somerset County Council.

Testing and Cases: As of Friday 08 October, Somerset's infection 7-day rate is 32.6 new cases per 100,000. Between 29 September and the 05 October, 3,427 pillar 1 tests and 9,623 pillar 2 tests were carried out.* During these dates there have been 185 new confirmed cases. *Pillar 1 tests are those undertaken in Public Health England (PHE) labs and NHS hospitals for those with a clinical need, and health and care workers. Pillar 2 tests are for the wider population and include care homes.

This week the proportion of tests that are coming back positive has increased, which suggests that the right people are getting a test. The only people who need to access public testing are those with symptoms.

Somerset's infection rate is lower than both the UK and South West 7-day averages, which at the time of writing stands at 137.4 per 100,000 for the UK and 46.4 per 100,000 for the South West. However, we must stay vigilant and continue to adhere to the guidelines to keep cases low.

Care Homes: Public Health England, Somerset CCG and Somerset County Council are supporting the care home staff by undertaking risk assessments, providing advice and giving support and guidance on infection prevention control and what to do if someone starts to show symptoms or tests positive.

Visiting in care homes is supported with a framework and guidance to ensure we protect vulnerable residents; we have been preventing or restricting visiting if local outbreaks or infection rates suggest that this is a necessary measure.

For the latest known information and advice for adult care providers in Somerset visit: <https://ssab.safeguardingsomerset.org.uk/covid19/>

Schools and early years settings: At the time of writing there have been:

- Eight outbreaks (two or more positive cases in a single setting over a 14-day period) in three schools – NB. These cases are not always linked through the setting and may be sporadic community cases appearing in a single setting
- 17 single cases in 15 schools and two nurseries

Information for parents, carers and guardians:

- New Covid Checker for parents: https://www.cypsomersethealth.org/resources/covidchecker-schools_V2.pdf

- Resources for parents to understand the difference between a cold and Covid-19: <https://www.healthysomerset.co.uk/covid-19/info/ipc/>

Information for schools:

- If a local school has a suspected Covid-19 case, they must notify the Department for Education on **0800 046 8687**
- Schools should also notify Somerset County Council by emailing publichealth@somerset.gov.uk
- All resources for schools are available on the [Support Services for Education website](#)
 - A rapid risk assessment will be carried out with the school to confirm who has been in close contact with the person during the period that they were infectious, and ensure they are asked to self-isolate
 - Schools will send home those people who have been in close contact with the person who has tested positive, advising them to self-isolate for 14 days since they were last in close contact with that person when they were infectious

We continue to be extremely impressed with Somerset schools and early years settings. They are working incredibly hard to deal with cases as they arise and are implementing measures quickly and effectively to help control the spread of the virus.

Workplaces and Events: We are still seeing predominantly sporadic cases in workplaces. This week we delivered a webinar for businesses on some of the key lessons learned from workplace outbreaks. To watch it back, [click here](#).

We have produced a number of useful leaflets and posters on what to do if staff or customers start to display symptoms. These can be found [here](#). We will continue to support our business community as the epidemic continues.

A number of events continue to run in Somerset and the Public Health team at SCC is working closely with district councils and the police to support event organisers to manage these safely, where they go ahead. Some events have been asked to reinforce their Covid-19 secure compliance in order to go ahead, while some organisers have taken the decision to cancel or postpone planned events. We will continue to monitor local levels of Covid-19 infection rates to inform decision making on allowing events to go ahead and where necessary will use the Director of Public Health's legal powers to prevent events proceeding if there is believed to be an imminent threat to public health.

Communications: The focus for communication and engagement this week has been on reinforcing the self-isolation guidance and ensuring people fully understand the importance of complying and understand the number of days they need to isolate for. A poster with really clear guidance on the rules of self isolation has been created and can be found [here](#).

We continue to promote the 'HANDS, FACE, SPACE' message and would encourage people to watch and promote this [video](#).

It's Cold/Flu season: As we move into Autumn and Winter, the colder weather inevitably means that we are more likely to catch a cold or the flu virus. Colds, flu and Covid-19 are caused by different viruses but can have similar symptoms. It is important to remember that whilst these are similar in some ways to Covid-19, in other ways they are very different. Most people who feel ill with coronavirus will have at least one of the key symptoms:

- a high temperature
- a new, continuous cough
- a loss or change to their sense of smell or taste

Our checker can be found [here](#).

NHS Covid-19 App - have you downloaded yours yet? The NHS COVID-19 app is part of the large-scale Covid-19 testing and contact tracing programme. The app allows people to report symptoms, order a test, check in to venues by scanning a QR code and it helps the NHS trace individuals that have covid-19.

The app will help the NHS understand if the virus is spreading in a particular area, so local authorities can respond quickly to stop it spreading further and save lives. The app does this while protecting a user's anonymity. Nobody, including the government, will know who or where a particular user is.

Every person who downloads the app will be helping in the fight against Covid-19.

Engagement: To support and inform the Covid-19 Engagement board, a Health and Wellbeing Advisory Network is being developed to aid the management of the local epidemic and improve overall health and wellbeing. The network will provide a valuable

two-way communication between settings and groups where an outbreak of Covid-19 is likely to have adverse health consequences. The Network will be made up of a wide range of community, public organisations and stakeholders, and key sectors including tourism, businesses.

This will help to shape outbreak prevention and communications activity; for more information and to join the network and help to stop the spread of Covid-19, please contact Lisa Rogers: lzrogers@somerset.gov.uk

Covid Champions: We are holding a live webinar next week to launch our new Covid Champion recruitment. This is a really exciting opportunity for volunteers to sign up to a dedicated team aimed at engaging Somerset's communities to help control the spread of Covid-19. We are working with Spark Somerset and Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership. Champions will receive and provide information to and from their community / setting and will provide leadership to enact changes to prevent and control outbreaks if the needs arise. Volunteers will receive full training.

Details on the date and time of the webinar will be uploaded to our [website](#) and [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages next week.

Finally, we all playing a part in helping to reduce the spread of this virus, and your role is vital in strengthening our communication and engagement with local communities to ensure that the guidance is followed, people remain vigilant and do not get complacent.

Please share the information and particularly the key messages that are informing our current campaigns with your networks. Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) for further updates.

Let us know if you feel there is a gap in our messaging, or a format or resource that the communities you work with or are part of would find useful. Your insights are valuable to us. Please email any feedback you have, to: lzrogers@somerset.gov.uk

Resources and further information: For the latest local information as well as digital resources as well as posters and flyers please visit:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/coronavirus/>

For information and resources on staying healthy happy and safe at the time please visit:

<https://www.healthysomerset.co.uk/covid-19/>

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](#).