

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Thursday 15 April 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 in real terms has decreased since last week whilst showing small variations daily. The seven-day rate is now 16.2 per 100,000.

On Monday 12 April we moved to the next step of the roadmap and certain Covid-19 restrictions were lifted. This is great for local businesses and high streets and also for people's sense of returning to normality. At this critical point we really need to continue to remain two metres apart from anyone who is not an immediate member of our household or support/childcare bubble when socialising outside as part of the rule of six – and continue to wear masks in enclosed spaces.

The reopening is all down to the amazing efforts made by the vast majority of people in our communities but we must take it one day at a time now and not try to do too much too soon. It has been a combination of testing, vaccines and following guidance which has got us this far and will, hopefully, get us to step three of the roadmap. Our message is to 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.

It is also worth remembering that - with these new freedoms, many people, particularly those who have been shielding, may be feeling more anxious as restrictions are eased. Support is available for anyone who might need it – you can find some good advice here:

[COVID-19: How to stay healthy, happy and safe – Healthy Somerset](#)

[From lockdown to relaxation of covid rules: tips on looking after your mental health | Mental Health Foundation.](#)

On Friday 9 April the Universal Testing Plan was launched. Testing continues to be one of our greatest defences against Covid-19 and everybody can now access regular LFD testing kits from a range of different sources - more detail can be found in the Testing section later in the update. With increased testing there will naturally be an increase in the number of positive results but this testing is vital in helping us break the chains of transmission and quickly identify and isolate those with Covid-19 who may not necessarily show symptoms.

If you or your family are currently taking part in regular testing, please continue to take your tests during the last week of the Easter holidays prior to the reopening of schools.

We have also produced a great Testing Covid Catch-up video which can be watched here: [SCC Covid Catch Up - Testing.](#)

Vaccinations are now being offered to all over 45's and we politely urge everyone in this age group to book their appointments online or by calling 119. Despite the recent media discussions regarding the safety of the AstraZeneca vaccine our message remains that the benefits of being vaccinated far outweigh the very low risks.

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'.



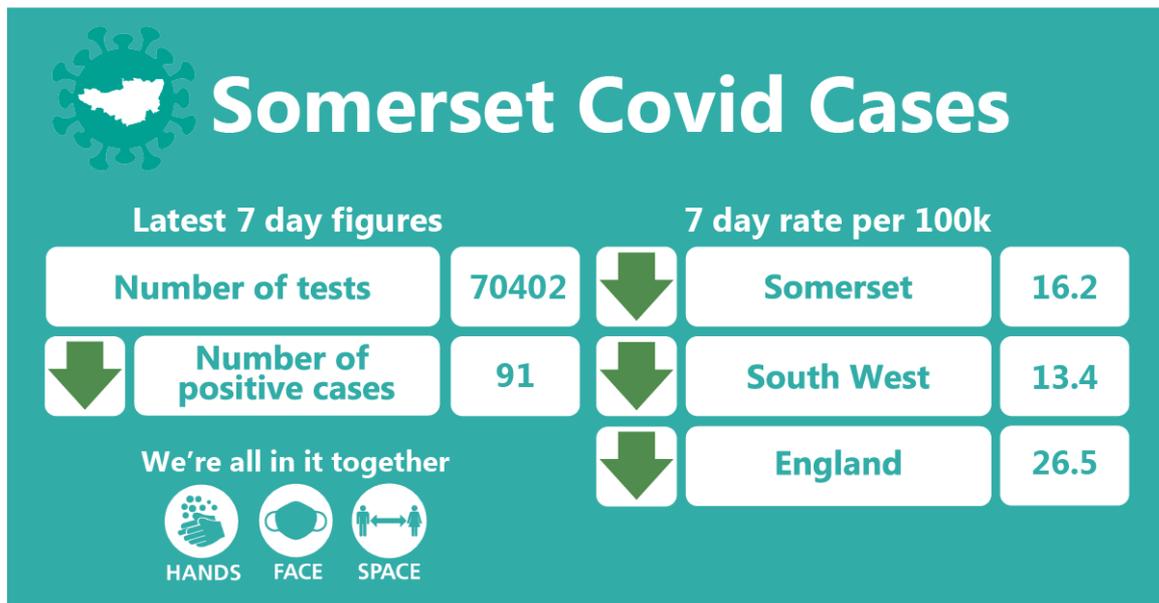
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In the week up to 10 April, approximately 70402 tests were carried out across the county and there have been 91 new confirmed cases. Our rate remains higher than the South West rate of 13.4 so now, more than ever, we must continue all the protection measures such as hands face space and fresh air.

We have had minimal new cases at educational and social care settings in the week up to 10 April.

THIS WEEK'S HEADLINES:

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

- Workplace, care and school settings
- Continued easing of lockdown rules
- Vaccination update
- Vaccination buddies
- Testing update
- Testing survey
- Accessible resources

Workplaces: Although we are broadly seeing a reduction in workplace outbreaks, we are still receiving reports about people who do not understand the isolation rules. Individuals have reported their understanding as being - because they can now get easily tested, they don't need to isolate when in contact with a case or someone with symptoms.

If you have been identified as a contact of someone who has tested positive for Covid-19, you must self-isolate for ten days even if you have received one or more doses of Covid-19 vaccine. This will reduce the risk of spreading infection and help to protect other people.

If you live in the same household as a person who has symptoms of coronavirus (Covid-19) or who has received a positive test result, follow the [Stay at Home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed COVID-19](#).

If you have been in close contact with, but do not live with, a person who has tested positive for Covid-19, follow the guidance below. This may include contact with people in your support bubble. A close contact is defined at the minimum as being within two metres of someone infected with Covid-19 for more than 15 minutes (either as a one-off contact, or added up together over one day)

For more guidance if you are concerned about being a close contact of someone that has tested positive for Covid-19, please visit:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person>

In workplaces we are seeing clear evidence of transmission through car sharing and in households, notably shared housing, with onward transmission in

workplaces. Some very useful information and advice regarding this can be found here: [Coronavirus and Indoor Spaces](#)

Care Sector: In the seven days to 10 April there have been seven new cases at seven care homes. 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.

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. Please don't visit if you have any symptoms, make sure you do a test before entering the setting and even if it is negative, take all preventative measures, handwashing, physical distancing and letting in as much fresh air as possible.

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: Schools and Colleges across Somerset will return from their Easter break next week. It is very important that anyone who would usually take part in the twice weekly lateral flow testing programme continues to do so and ensure they conduct at least one test before they return to the school or College setting. This applies to all educational staff and students of secondary school age.

Guidance on how to use a home lateral flow test kit is available in other languages on this link to the Government website: [COVID-19 PCR home test kit instructions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

It is important that if you or anyone in your household is displaying the symptoms of coronavirus, you obtain a PCR test and isolate while awaiting the test results.

Continued Easing of Lockdown Rules: We are encouraging people to continue to enjoy their new freedoms and to take advantage of the lifting of restrictions but we are still urging people to not be tempted to meet indoors as the risk of spreading the virus is significantly higher inside. The current planned date for allowing households or groups of up to six people to mix indoors is 17 May at the earliest.

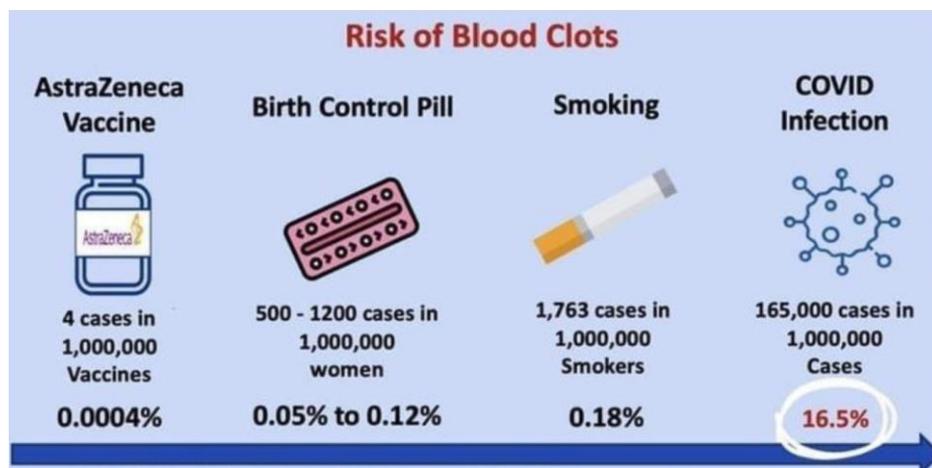
Full details can be found here: [\(COVID-19\) Coronavirus restrictions: what you can and cannot do - GOV.UK](#)

Always remember, the closer you are to people, the higher the risk of breathing in infected particles, particularly when indoors, as the space will not be as well ventilated. Outside there is more room to distance, reducing the risk of breathing in particles from an infected person. When indoors, smaller droplets and aerosols containing the virus can remain suspended in the air for some time, especially if there is no ventilation and therefore build ups are more likely to be inhaled by others, but when outside in fresh air, the virus disperses more easily.

It is important to reiterate this easing goes ahead with **no changes to social contact rules** and many restrictions are still in place. Outdoor gatherings must still be limited to six people or two households, and you must not socialise indoors with anyone you do not live with nor have formed a support bubble with.

Vaccination Update: All people over the age of 45 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.

You will probably have noticed the recent media response regarding the very low risks of side effects with the AstraZeneca vaccine and our message remains the huge benefits far outweigh the very low risks.



Covid-19 Vaccine buddy scheme: As we move down through the age groups, we are seeing the uptake of the offer of a vaccine reducing. Concerns over the vaccines means our vaccine buddies will be a key part of ensuring that people get the right information from official sources and are reassured and informed about the vaccination process and its importance.

Spark Somerset has been working with Somerset County Council to help local people access information about Covid-19 in a way that makes sense to them through the [Covid Community Champion](#) Network.

To build on this success, we are offering Vaccination Myth Buster Training to *anyone* who is in a position to have conversations about the vaccine.

The training will be on Zoom on Wednesday 21st April, 7-8.30pm.

To find out more, and to book your place click [HERE](#).

People attending this training will also be offered the opportunity to become Vaccination Buddies: specially trained volunteers who have supportive telephone calls with people who have questions and concerns about the Covid-19 vaccine.

Testing: Everybody taking part in LFD testing on a regular basis will be very important as we move forward especially as society starts to open up again. Regular testing helps break the chain of transmission which might otherwise have gone unidentified. A percentage of positive PCR tests are sent to labs to be “sequenced”. This is really important in terms of identifying variants of the virus which may be of concern. Recent guidance has changed to ask all those who have a positive LFD test result to have a follow up PCR test within two days.

Since Friday 9 April, people can now be tested by the following routes:

- **Book a test at local Community Test Site** - Please [check this map of test site locations, dates and times](#) for the nearest service to you. You can also find the test site locations listed in the section below.
- **Collect a home test kit from a local Community Test Site** - You do not need to book to collect a test, but the tests will only be available for collection at specific times. [Check this map of test site locations, dates and times](#) for the nearest service to you.
- **Get a test kit sent to your home** - If you are unable to get to a test centre to collect a test kit you can order a home testing kit to be sent to your home. You can order a test online here from 9 April: [Order a test kit online](#). Please only do this if you cannot collect as it reduces the postal costs for the NHS.
- **Get a test at your workplace** – You may be able to get a test from your workplace or they may be able to send one to your home. Check with your employer for details, if this isn't available you can use one of the other options.
- **Collect a test from a pharmacy** – A new pharmacy collect service is now available in Somerset with around 100 pharmacies signed up and more to come online soon. You will be able to use this if you are over the age of 18 without symptoms. Participating pharmacies will provide a box of seven rapid tests to use

twice a week at home. [Find a pharmacy where you can collect tests \(type 'Somerset' in the search bar to view available sites\)](#)

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 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). 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.

As part of the roadmap, and as we mix more with people, it is important we test more to find cases who may be asymptomatic and pass on the infection. Just like brushing our teeth, taking 10,000 steps a day or eating at least five portions of fresh fruit and vegetables a day. Testing for Covid-19 twice a week will be the new routine for us all.

We are encouraging everyone who needs to work away from home, those who are parents or support bubbles of nursery or school and college age children to participate too and anyone else who wants to get a test.

This week's Covid Catch-up video sees Clinton Rogers highlighting the importance of testing: [Somerset Covid Catch up - Week 19, 13 April 2021 - YouTube](#)

What is most important to remember as well is that whilst having a positive Covid-19 result is a definite red light, having a negative result is not a green light. If you receive a positive test result you must isolate accordingly but a negative result does not mean that you can stop carrying out the vital hands face, space and fresh air measures. This continues to be a really important part in stopping the spread of Covid-19, there is a chance that you could still be infected even if you test as negative and you must still protect yourself from others who may be harbouring the virus.

Vaccine and Testing Survey: To support people's ability to access testing we are keen to hear your views and have launched a community survey to seek the views of as many people across Somerset as possible. We have had a great response to this survey and, as it will directly influence our plans going forward, we are **extending the deadline until Monday 19 April.**

As we continue the cautious journey out of national lockdown, we are keen to hear from you about three key areas:

1. testing
2. vaccination
3. self-isolating

Please help us by responding to our survey to help us get a better understanding of **any barriers that may prevent people from doing these tested or having the vaccine when it is offered.**

Please [click here](#) to take part.

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](#).