

# Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Thursday 3 June 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 shows small variations daily. The seven-day rate is now 4.1 per 100,000 which is a reduction on last week. On a national level, cases, hospitalisations and deaths are still at a low level however there has been a slight rise in the last week.

We are hoping everybody enjoyed the sunny Bank Holiday and now we have finally entered meteorological Summer everything certainly seems to have been busy. While this is great news for local businesses and for local Somerset people it is vital for people to know we still have to adhere to [the guidance](#), in particular when travelling and socialising indoors.

The message of hands, face, space and fresh air is especially important when mixing indoors. We know Covid-19 is easily transmissible in badly ventilated indoor spaces. Outside is best, but if you are letting friends or family into your house then please open windows to let fresh air in.

The vaccination programme continues to progress rapidly – with 50% of all adults now having received two doses. It is of particular importance to accept if you are offered your second dose as the second dose has been found to be vital in ensuring improved protection against all variants of Covid-19.

As a result of all the hard work by the people in Somerset in adhering to Covid-19 guidance, taking up the offer of a vaccination, testing when required and self-isolating when symptomatic or when asked to do so, case rates in the area are currently low. This is great news, and something we all want to continue.

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'.***



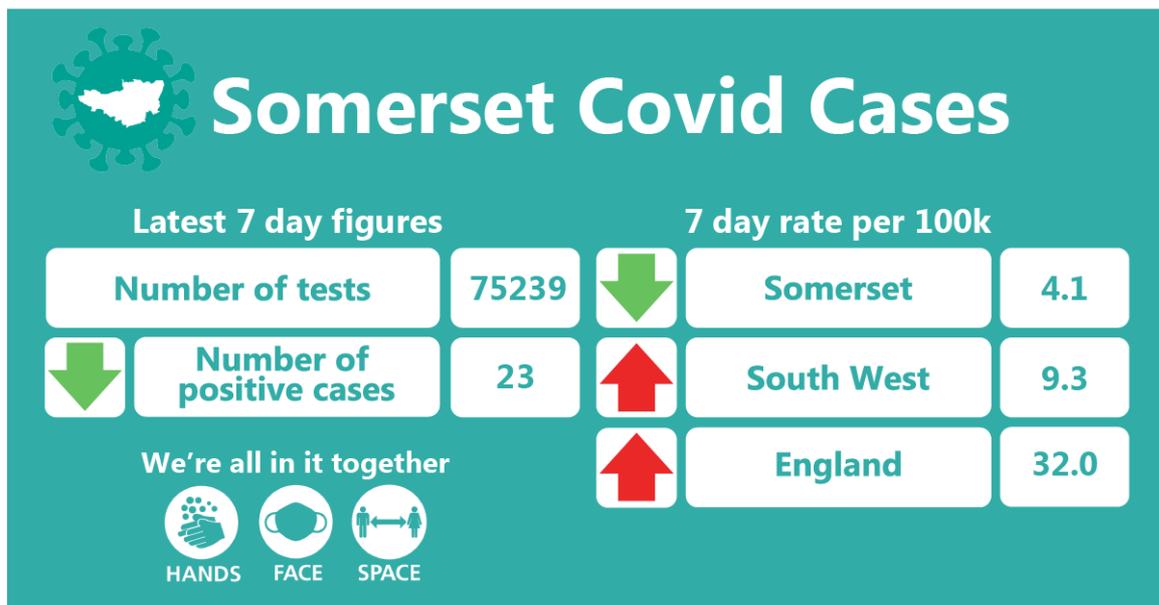
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In the week up to 29 May approximately 75239 tests were carried out across the county and there have been 23 new confirmed cases. The rates have decreased since last week and our rate of 4.1 is now lower than the South West rate of 9.3.

## THIS WEEK'S HEADLINES:

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

- Workplace, care and school settings
- Vaccination update
- Vaccination Myth Buster Training
- Testing Update
- Communications Focus
- Travel
- Self-Isolation guidance
- Access to GP Services
- New Naming Convention
- Accessible resources

**Workplaces:** All workplaces need to be very aware of the need for good ventilation, and it is also important for the required workplaces to make it clear and easy to customers about using QR codes when visiting premises, and each person needs to register not just one for the group.

It is important for all business to be Covid-19 secure and there is some excellent guidance here: [Working-safely-during-covid-19](#)

And please remember - businesses can give confidence to customers by testing staff regularly or having staff test themselves regularly. There are some very useful posters which can be downloaded from here which can show people your staff are testing regularly: [Posters - Coronavirus Resource centre](#)

**Care Sector:** We are pleased to report cases of Covid-19 remain low in care settings across Somerset.

Emotional support for social care staff is available in our new hub, which includes a wellbeing podcast: [Somerset Emotional Wellbeing](#)

Information and guidance related to Covid-19 within adult social care settings is updated regularly, including guidance on PPE, testing, visiting and working safely within care homes, home care and day care – please visit [Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board](#)

**Schools and Early Years settings:** We continue to see very little activity in terms of positive cases, however the number of tests being carried out has dropped considerably. As society slowly opens up everybody is encouraged to test twice a week to ensure they aren't passing on the virus to friends, family or their neighbours. It is therefore very important for us all, including students and parents/carers, to take a test before schools reopen after the half term.

**Vaccination Update:** All people aged **30 and over** 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.

And if you are offered your second dose – please do accept it at your earliest convenient date, or book it online if offered the chance whilst booking your first vaccine. The second dose has been found to be particularly important in ensuring improved protection.

The vaccine is our best defence against the virus and returning to a more normal way of life. And while the first dose gives some level of immunity against coronavirus, it is vital everyone goes on to receive a second dose – regardless which vaccine you receive.

A single jab will not give the maximum protection against the virus – the best protection comes after the second. All three vaccines, Pfizer, Oxford AstraZeneca and Moderna are up to 90 per cent effective after two doses.

Getting the second dose will send a powerful reminder for your immune system to attack when necessary.

Full information regarding the vaccination program can be found here:

[Covid-19 vaccinations in Somerset - Somerset CCG](#)

**Vaccination Myth Buster Training:** 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. This will be on Zoom on

**Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> June, 7-9pm.**

The training is delivered by the Public Health team and Spark Somerset and covers the following:

- The latest information about how the vaccines work, how they're made and possible side effects.
- Common myths and misconceptions about the vaccine.
- The basics of how to have open, supportive conversations.
- Where to signpost people to if they have more questions.

To find out more, and to book your place click follow this link: [Vaccine Myth Buster Training Booking](#)

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.

If you would like more information, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

**The importance of testing to help contain the spread of Covid-19:** Case rates of Covid-19 in Somerset are currently low at the moment, and, for this to continue, we need to be testing ourselves by lateral flow devices (LFD) twice a week if we have no symptoms of Covid-19. This will help us identify asymptomatic cases of the infection and stop transmission into the community.

We also need to be continuing to order PCR tests if we experience symptoms of Covid-19. Now everyone has the ability to access both symptomatic PCR testing and asymptomatic LFD testing through various routes, there is a focus on identifying groups which may face barriers or difficulties in being able to test themselves with or without symptoms of the infection.

Work has begun within the Public Health team at Somerset County Council to try and limit or overcome these barriers which may be influencing people's ability to regularly test themselves. We are currently participating in a pilot study, commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) which is looking at reaching members of the public in some rural areas of Somerset, by attending workplaces for example, and teaching individuals how to correctly perform lateral flow testing.

There are also discussions with some of the individuals to get an understanding of their knowledge of Covid-19 testing, if they are likely to regularly test themselves, and identify if there are any reasons why they are unlikely to regularly test in the future. This information will be used to try and encourage uptake of regular testing for people in

Somerset and is also fed back to DHSC, to be used on a national level going forwards in the pandemic, and for any future pandemics.

To find out more information on when and how to get a PCR test, visit: [Coronavirus – Get a test if you have symptoms](#)

To find out more information on when and how to get lateral flow tests, visit: [Coronavirus – Get a test if you do not have symptoms](#)

**Communications Focus:** This week we will be focusing our communications on reinforcing safety messages whilst travelling, self-isolation guidance, access to GP services, and the new Covid-19 naming convention for variants of concern.

**Travel:** If you are heading off for a break in the UK, remember to travel safely and plan ahead – things like insurance, checking with your accommodation, what to do should you develop symptoms or test positive during your stay and ensuring you have your testing kits.

There is no longer a legal restriction on travelling abroad, but a traffic light system with strict testing and quarantine rules depending on whether you return to England from a red, amber or green list country [Red, amber and green list rules for entering England](#) We advise against travel to countries on the amber list for leisure purposes, including holidays – and it is very important to refer to the list of Green countries as it changes regularly.

If you are meeting friends in a park or an outside setting, ensure you keep your distance as our message remains - 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.

And this week's Clinton Covid Catch-up film focusses on safe travel and meeting up and can be watched here: [Clinton Covid Catch-up Week 26](#)

**Self Isolation guidance:** If an individual has tested positive for Covid-19 it is vital they self-isolate to prevent the spread. By doing this as quickly as possible it helps to protect friends, family and the local community.

Those isolating may be eligible to access the test and trace support payment scheme, which provides a £500 payment to help during their isolation.

If they do not meet the eligibility criteria for the test and trace support payment, there are other local organisations such as the [Village Agents](#) who will explore what other support options are available based on the individual needs.

Full information, including how to apply for the £500 grant can be found here: [Self Isolating Guidance](#)

**Access to GP Services:** GP practices have been experiencing a very busy period over the last few weeks and as a result there are a very high number of patients trying to contact them. This means there are currently longer waits for routine appointments than usual at some practices. The NHS in Somerset is doing all it can to reduce waiting times but know there are many people needing healthcare help.

We are hoping the people of Somerset will continue to be patient and perhaps consider one of the alternatives to using a GP. These include:

**Pharmacy** - As lockdown eases, don't forget your local high-street [pharmacist](#) can provide health advice and help with minor illnesses like coughs and colds, sunburn, hay fever and diarrhoea. You don't need an appointment and they can even provide you with the right medicines at the same time.

**Mindline** - if you, or someone you know, is struggling with their mental wellbeing, our 24/7 [Mindline](#) is open to people of all ages. Just ring 01823 276 892.

**111 First** - The 111 service is available 24/7 to provide advice, treatment and care. Just ring 111 or visit <https://111.nhs.uk/> and the service will provide advice and refer you to another service if you need it; if you need to be seen in person they can book you a time slot.

**Minor injury units** - Don't forget - A&E is for life-threatening emergencies. There's also a network of [Minor Injury Units](#) to provide the treatment you need – often they'll see you quicker and closer to home.

You can read an open letter from the NHS regarding this by following this link: [Please support our GP practices - open letter to everyone in Somerset - Somerset CCG](#)

**Variant Naming Convention Change:** This week the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced a new naming system for the Covid-19 variants of concern which were first identified in various regions of the world to be based on the Greek alphabet.

This is because people often resort to calling the variants by the places where they are detected, which is stigmatizing and discriminatory. To avoid this and to simplify public communications, we encourage everyone to adopt these new labels.

More information can be found at this website: [Tracking SARS-CoV-2 variants](#)

**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](#).