

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Thursday 5 August 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.

We have seen a reduction in our rates over the last week, but it remains too early to be sure of the reasons why our cases are falling. It may not mean there is less virus within our communities therefore, to keep yourself and others safe, we continue to strongly recommend you should get vaccinated, participate in testing and self-isolate when required. Although it's no longer a legal requirement, we would also recommend you continue to wear a face covering, keep your distance, meet outdoors and let plenty of fresh air into indoor spaces.

The county's vaccination programme continues; 93.7 percent of adults aged over 18 have now had their first dose, and 77.4 percent have had both. This is great news, but please remember, even if you have received both doses of the vaccine, you can still catch and spread the virus. And if you know anyone who has yet to take up the offer, please do encourage them to do so. Anyone with concerns about the vaccine can contact our vaccination buddies scheme to talk things through – see page 5 for details. Yesterday at a Downing Street press conference it was announced that 16 and 17 year olds will soon be invited to have their first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine. We will update you when we have more details about this.

As you may also have seen in the national media, we are unfortunately seeing a rise in the number of pregnant women with Covid-19, and nationally some pregnant women are being hospitalised. In part this is because vaccination rates in pregnancy remain low. In the vaccination section of this update we've included one of the images produced by Public Health England to encourage uptake in pregnant women. If you follow us on social media, please do share this important information with your followers. We also share the thoughts of England's Chief Midwifery Officer which we hope will be reassuring.

Latest Covid-19 Dashboard: The following link will take you to our website: [Somerset Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#). Then scroll down the page until you get to '**Covid-19 Dashboard**' in the list. Click on this and the dashboard will open.

'Remember, everyone can catch it, anyone can spread it.'



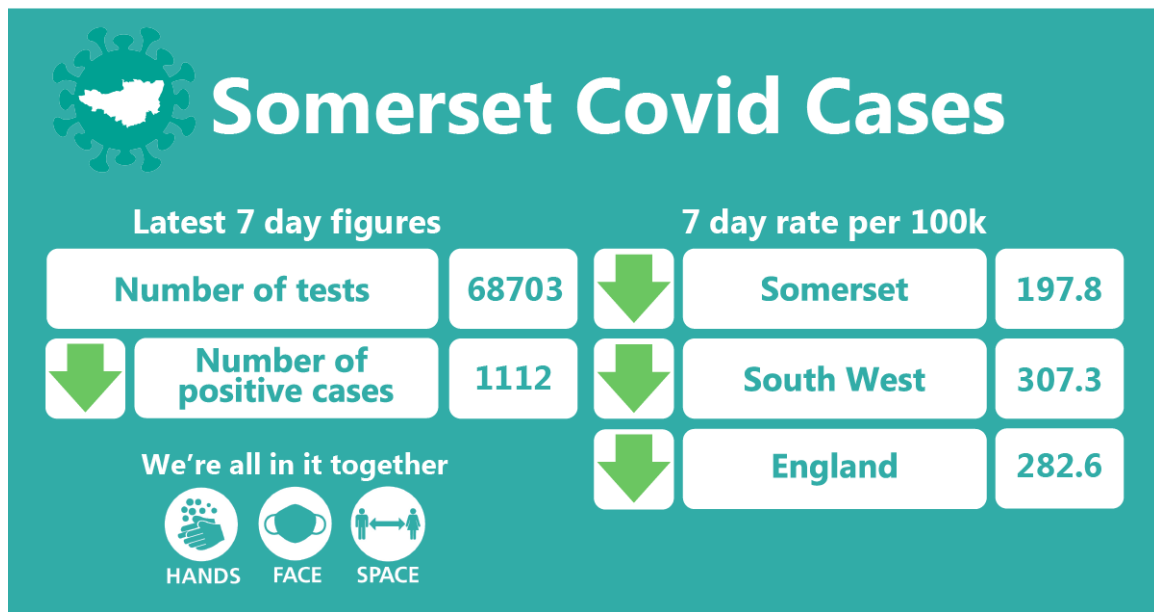
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In the week up to 31 July approximately 68703 tests were carried out across the county and there have been 1112 new confirmed cases. The rates have decreased to 197.8 per 100,000 and we still remain below both the South West and England rates.

THIS WEEK'S HEADLINES:

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

- Using local healthcare services
- Workplace, care and school settings
- Vaccination update
- Vaccination – fertility, pregnancy and breastfeeding
- Vaccination scams
- Testing Update
- Resources and further information

Using local healthcare services: The NHS in Somerset is continuing to experience a high demand across all healthcare services, meaning GP surgeries, hospitals, community health services and mental health services are all very busy. Additionally, our social care teams are also very busy.

Our A&E departments have seen very high numbers of people who are acutely unwell who require specialist hospital care, but people are also coming in with minor illnesses such as sunburn, insect bites and ticks that don't require emergency treatment. By choosing the right healthcare service, people with minor illnesses will be able to be seen more quickly by using more local services such as Minor Injury Units or pharmacies.

Dr Alex Murray, Clinical Director at Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group said "The NHS is here for everyone and we're working hard to ensure we can help people when they need us – but to do this, we need everyone's support. If you need medical advice or treatment and are not sure where to go – call NHS 111 first, or go to www.111.nhs.uk for immediate advice, 24 hours a day – 7 days a week."

Frontline ambulance crews, 999 and 111 call handlers are also working extremely hard after seeing a sharp increase demand for their services.

A spokesperson said, "We are prioritising those patients who are most sick and severely injured and everyone who needs an ambulance will get one, however there are other and often better options for people to get the care they need.

"as has been the case throughout the pandemic, the public can play their part by using 111 online for urgent advice, calling 999 in life-threatening cases – and only calling back if their condition worsens – and by getting the Covid jab."

The public is still being encouraged to contact 999 if they experience;

- signs of a heart attack like a pain like a heavy weight in the centre of your chest
- signs of stroke such as your face dropping on one side
- difficulty breathing
- Heavy bleeding that won't stop
- Seizures
- or sudden and rapid swelling of the eyes, lips, throat or tongue

Workplaces: The latest guidance on working safely by sector is available now:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-covid-19>

We anticipate an announcement about the changes which will take effect on 16 August next Monday (9 August) so please do keep checking the government webpages when the announcement is made, and we will include the relevant information in next week's update.

Care Sector: In the week ending 4 August, there have been 52 cases of Covid-19 at 48 social care settings across Somerset, which is an increase from last week's figures. The majority of these cases are single staff cases which occur in a range of residential, nursing and home care settings or providers. But there are some small outbreaks at some care homes. This requires staff and visitors to be vigilant and support the care staff to keep our residents safe and well.

Vaccination for pregnant care workers: We are aware that a number of care staff have declined vaccination on the basis of concerns around pregnancy, England's top midwife is urging expectant mums to get the Covid-19 vaccine after new data shows the overwhelming majority of pregnant women hospitalised with the virus have not had a jab. Please read the vaccination section of this update on page 5 for more information about this important subject.

Vaccination for care workers: It will be mandatory for care home workers to have Covid 19 vaccinations later this year with the following timescales:

- 22 July 2021 – 16 week grace period starts
- 16 September 2021 – last date for care home workers to get their first dose to be fully vaccinated when regulations come into force
- 11 November 2021 – regulations come into force

Further information: For information related to Covid 19 for adult care providers please visit Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board

<https://ssab.safeguardingsomerset.org.uk/covid19/>

Schools and Early Years settings: As schools have now broken up, we are no longer managing outbreaks linked to school settings, as this is not where the transmission has

occurred. There have been 10 cases at 10 nursery settings and as nurseries and early years providers are still operating, we continue to provide support to these settings

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

For the latest information about vaccination clinics and walk-in centres across the county, please look here: [Covid-19 vaccinations in Somerset - Somerset CCG](#)

Vaccines and Pregnancy: England's top midwife is urging expectant mums to get the Covid-19 vaccine after new data shows the overwhelming majority of pregnant women hospitalised with the virus have not been vaccinated. The same data also shows that no pregnant women who have received both doses of the vaccine have been admitted to hospital.

Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent, Chief Midwifery Officer for England, has written to fellow midwives and GP practices across the country stressing the need to encourage pregnant women to get the jab to protect them and their baby. She says, "Vaccines save lives, and this is another stark reminder that the Covid-19 jab can keep you, your baby and your loved ones, safe and out of hospital." [Real-world data from the United States](#) shows that more than 130,000 pregnant women have been vaccinated without any safety concerns being raised and more than 55,000 pregnant women in the UK have also received at least one dose of the vaccine. Based on this data, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advised earlier this year that pregnant women should be offered the Pfizer and Moderna Covid-19 vaccines.

Any pregnant women who have questions or concerns about the vaccine can speak to their GP, midwife or obstetrician to get more information and advice. Locally, you can talk to our Vaccine Buddies (see below) Even if you have previously declined the vaccine, you can change your mind and book an appointment to get it on the [NHS National Booking Service website](#) or call 119 between 7am and 11pm.

And what about fertility and breastfeeding? The advice is that there is no need to avoid pregnancy after the vaccination. There is no evidence that the vaccines have any effect on fertility or your chances of becoming pregnant. The JCVI has recommended that the vaccines can be received whilst breastfeeding, and this is in line with recommendations from the USA and the World Health Organization. You can read more about this here:

[COVID-19 vaccination: a guide for all women of childbearing age, pregnant or breastfeeding](#)

Locally, please look out for and share updates such as the one below on your social media channels as we try to assist with the effort to encourage more pregnant women to have their vaccination.



Public Health
England

Pregnant?

Have your COVID-19 vaccines!

It is important to have both doses of your COVID-19 vaccine to protect you and your unborn baby.

COVID-19 infection is currently circulating and can be serious for pregnant women.

Thousands of pregnant women have been safely vaccinated in the UK and worldwide.



Call 119 or go online to www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/ to register for your vaccination appointment. You can also attend walk in, mobile or pop up vaccination clinics in your area.



COVID-19 immunisation
Helping to protect you and your pregnancy

Do you have, or know someone who has concerns over receiving the Covid-19 Vaccine? We have a team of trained Vaccination buddies who are here to help! The programme enables people to be offered support via a 'buddy' who can help them to make informed decisions about having the Covid-19 vaccination.

People can be [referred \(or self-refer\)](#) to the scheme and a Vaccination Buddy will contact them by phone to discuss their concerns and offer information and reassurance. Vaccination Buddies come from all walks of life and have the necessary skills and knowledge to support people in a friendly, non-judgemental way.

Vaccination scams: We are aware of some scams relating to having the Covid-19 vaccine. You may be unfortunate to receive a scam text message, or more rarely, some people are calling door to door. Please remember that the vaccine is free of charge on the NHS, and you will NEVER be asked for:

- your bank account or card details
- your pin or banking password
- copies of personal documents to prove your identity such as your passport, driving licence, bills or pay slip

If you think you have been a victim of fraud or identify theft, report it to Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040. For more information, click on this link: [How you will be contacted for your coronavirus \(COVID-19\) vaccination](#)

Testing: Last week we told you that new lateral flow kits would be in circulation from 9 August, but this date has been brought forward and you may start receiving them now.

Please use up any NHS Innova kits you may have before moving onto the new Acon or Orient Gene kits which you can see in the images below. The advantage of the new kits is that they only require both nostrils to be swabbed, and a result will be available within 15 minutes. However, the process is slightly different so please do read the instructions provided with the kit that you receive. If you'd like to know more, a video which shows you how to use the new kit can be viewed [here](#).

If you would like to know more information about lateral flow testing, please look at our website: [Coronavirus – Get a test if you do not have symptoms](#). We would like to thank everyone who is regularly testing themselves as this is helping to reduce the spread of the infection.



You can order [lateral flow tests online to be delivered to your home](#), call 119 to have a kit home delivered through the post, or collect a kit at [a local pharmacy](#). For further information on lateral flow tests, including a video showing how to perform one, you can visit our website [here](#).

If you have symptoms of the infection you need to take a PCR test, which can be done by phoning 119 or ordering a test here: [Get a free PCR test to check if you have coronavirus](#)

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](#).