

Covid-19 Outbreak Management CORE SCRIPT – 16 December 2021

“Spread Cheer not Covid-19 this Christmas!”

Omicron is spreading rapidly and is in the community so use your common sense to help protect your family and friends. Get your booster vaccination, get tested before you get together, and follow national rules on face coverings, etc.

- Case numbers across Devon are still above the national average for England but have fallen slightly. However, national cases of the Omicron variant which appears far more transmissible are rising rapidly and are expected to impact Devon significantly over the coming weeks.
- Cases in Devon are still highest in the school and college-age population, which has been driving cases.
- However, higher than average case levels are not currently reflected in hospital admissions or deaths which remain relatively stable but are predicted to rise rapidly.
- The vaccine booster programme is seen as key to helping to offset the impact of a new wave of Omicron and is now being offered to all adults with the NHS and partners working flat out to deliver to all that want it over before the end of December.
- Overall vaccine take-up in Devon has been high, with 90% of eligible people having had their first and second doses; and around 56% of all eligible people having already had their booster (higher rate in over 50s and those with underlying health conditions).
- Concerns remain about ongoing pressure across whole health and social care system in terms of both managing a new wave of hospitalisation and the wider impact of positive cases and self-isolation on staffing.
- Close contacts of people testing positive are now instructed to conduct daily lateral flow test for a period of 7 days rather than self-isolate for 10 days.
- LRF emergency called to ensure all partners can assist NHS to deliver on booster programme.

Key Public health messages:

People should continue to be cautious, use their common sense and follow basic public health advice on hand washing, the use of face masks in public spaces, regular testing and/or testing before meeting up, self-isolating if symptomatic and regular testing if a close contact with someone with a positive Covid case, etc.

People should avoid unnecessary close contact indoors where possible but where people do meet up over Christmas they should test before-hand, be mindful of basic hygiene, and ensure good ventilation.

Vaccination (for both Covid and Flu) and getting a Booster as soon as possible is seen as key to helping to manage the expected wave of Omicron and limiting pressure on already stretched health and care services.

Across our hospitals some of the sickest patients in intensive care are not vaccinated. You stand the greatest chance against Covid if you are triple vaccinated, and if you haven't had any yet, it's not too late. The more you do to progress your vaccination status the better protected you are against Covid.

Coronavirus vaccination take up in Devon has been high and this needs to be the same for the booster programme.

People should observe national guidance as it changes to help keep their families and loved ones safe and help protect the NHS and social care system from being swamped.

Other key messages

Hospitals and health service

- Hospitals admissions for Covid have so far remained stable across Devon Plymouth and Torbay but are predicted to rise.
- Hospitals are already experiencing extreme pressures with the Ambulance Service and Emergency Departments very busy.
- NHS and other frontline staff will need to be redeployed to support the booster programme leading to likely cancellation of some non-urgent work.
- Primary care services will focus on urgent clinical need as well as supporting the vaccination programme. Patients should continue to contact their GP practice for urgent health advice but are urged to consider calling in the new year if it can wait, or if they can get help from another service such as a pharmacy.
- Cancer checks will continue to be prioritised. People who are concerned about symptoms which could be cancer should continue to contact their GP.

Mass vaccination

- Numbers double vaccinated across Devon is high (90%+) but targeted work ongoing to promote where uptake has been lower.
- Third doses for people with underlying conditions are progressing and the housebound and vulnerable are being prioritised with plans in place to deliver the required 10,000 vaccinations to people who are housebound by Christmas day.
- **Booster vaccinations are now available to all eligible adults, and demand is high.**
- Around 56% of all eligible people have already had their booster (with higher rate in over 50s and those with underlying health conditions).
- **A major acceleration in the booster programme will take place over the next few weeks.** Meeting the national target of ensuring everyone can have a booster jab by the end of January means doubling the weekly rate in Devon from 55,000 to 112,000 doses.
- Extra capacity is being put into the national booking system (people should not ring their GP for a vaccination appointment)
- Large vaccination centres will scale-up to operate 7-days per week with extended opening hours. Vaccinations will be offered at the majority of sites on the Bank Holidays of Monday 27, and Tuesday 28 December (but staff will be given a well-earned break on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day).
- Additional local drop-in and pop-up clinics are being planned alongside more GP-led Primary Care Network centres and additional Community Pharmacy capacity. Drop-in/pop-up clinics will be advertised through media and social media when they are available and when sites have availability.
- **Local people are asked to be patient with staff and volunteers, who are continuing to work tirelessly.**
- **People should book their vaccines wherever possible**
- Extra volunteers not currently needed due to existing offers of support but this under constant review.

Care Homes and vulnerable people

- Rates among older people are relatively low generally, with some isolated instances of outbreak. However, the whole care sector continues to be under pressure.
- Previous vaccination programme highly effective with high take up among older people and care staff but concerns over long term effectiveness mean winter booster programme now being rolled out,
- Concerns remain over the impact of Covid leading to further staff shortages

Schools and education

- Despite higher case rates among school-age population, school attendance has been higher than the England average

- Increase in positive cases in many schools with cases in Primary schools age children now exceeding that in secondary schools
- All schools remain open but ongoing concerns over teacher absence through Covid.
- Schools already using additional measures to try and reduce the risk of transmission including enhanced testing.
- Additional plans in place for return in January
- Vaccinations continue to be offered to all healthy 12-15 years olds, to be administered through schools or via a local vaccinations centre.
- 16 and 17 year olds are eligible to receive a second dose 12 weeks after their first.

Local Community Testing and Contact Tracing

- The programme of targeted mobile community testing and vaccination is continuing, jointly with NHS Devon colleagues.
- Testing capacity will be extended to help meet demand
- Reassurance has been given over the over the future availability of LF testing kits and PCR tests via national booking system despite some issues caused by high demand

Community support for vulnerable people

- £5m Household support fund in place to deliver support to end of March
- Includes free school meals over school holidays and extra at Christmas
- Also £1m through district council welfare schemes and funding via Childrens Centres and Early Help Teams
- Funding via Devon Community Foundation and Citizens Advice plus specific funding for BME groups

Economy and Businesses

- Public already being very cautious, self-policing and cancelling events.
- Related impact on the hospitality sector and on the high street already being seen.
- Impact also being seen in the tourism sector and at Exeter airport
- Businesses are suffering and additional business support is likely to be needed to avoid business failure.