

## **Covid-19 Outbreak Management CORE SCRIPT – 18 November 2021**

**“High numbers of people are testing positive in Devon but this is not translating into severe illness. It’s important to continue to do all we can to keep each other safe – get a jab or a booster as soon as you can”**

- Case numbers across Devon are continuing to rise with the county’s case levels above the national average for England.
- Most authority areas in the South West are currently above the England average.
- Case levels are highest in Northern Devon, with Torridge in particular, currently having the highest case rates in England.
- This may be because there have previously been lower case levels in Devon, which means less infection-induced immunity within the communities. We also have higher than average levels of testing (37% higher than national), meaning we’re identifying more positive cases.
- Most cases are within the 0 to 19 year old, 40 to 59 and 20 to 39 year old age groups.
- Cases are highest in the late teen, school and college-age population, which is currently driving cases.
- However, despite higher than average case levels, we are not seeing this reflected in hospitalisations or deaths.
- Coronavirus-related hospital admissions have risen in the past week, but only a little (see below)
- Coronavirus vaccinations for healthy 12- to 15-year-old are available, with young people offered a choice between receiving their vaccination at school, or at a walk-in vaccination centre.
- The vaccination programme for older groups continues, with third jabs for immune-suppressed and booster jabs for eligible groups.
- Vaccine take up in Devon is high, with 90% of eligible people having had their first and second doses; and around 60% (of over 50s and people with underlying health conditions) having had their booster jabs.

- The eligible groups for booster jabs, (previously aged 50 plus) has been extended to now include people aged 40 plus.
- 16 and 17 year olds are now eligible to receive a second dose 12 weeks after their first.
- Some GP practices are coordinating booster clinics with flu vaccine clinics, for eligible public's convenience.
- Concerns remain about ongoing pressure across whole health and social care system. Recent media reports refer to increased demand for care services arising, not from the virus itself, but the impact of the pandemic as some support services became unavailable during periods of lockdown.
- There remains concerns over likely impact of flu and other respiratory illnesses during autumn/winter

### **Key Public health messages:**

Higher than average case levels show that coronavirus is still very much in our communities. People should continue to be cautious and follow basic public health advice on regular testing, self-isolation if symptomatic, and hands, face, space, etc. and avoid close contact indoors where possible.

There is an emphasis on the importance of fresh air and good ventilation.

Vaccination (for both Covid and Flu) is seen as key to the continued return to normality and limiting pressure on health and care services. Other actions will be considered if a rise in case numbers or the impact of cases in an area becomes significant or of concern.

Coronavirus vaccination take up in Devon is high, and uptake among unvaccinated groups is being encouraged, with targeted work to encourage residential home care workers in particular.

On testing, people are now encouraged to take a lateral flow test (assuming they have no symptoms) before a 'period of high risk'. That means when they know they're going to be in a crowded and enclosed space, where there are more people who may be infectious, and where there is limited fresh air.

### **Other key messages**

#### **Hospitals and health service**

- Hospitals admissions for Covid are stable with 134 patients this week across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay. But within the context of higher case levels, hospitalisations for COVID-19 are low. Hospitals are however experiencing extreme pressures otherwise.

- The Ambulance Service and Emergency Departments continue to be under pressure
- 93% of SW NHS staff are currently double-vaccinated

### **Mass vaccination**

- Numbers of eligible people across Devon who are vaccinated is high (90%+) but work ongoing to promote where uptake is lower.
- Third doses for people with underlying conditions are progressing, with booster vaccinations available to eligible people aged 40 plus, and demand is high
- All healthy 12-15 year olds are being offered a first dose of the Pfizer vaccine, to be given at school or via a local vaccinations centre.
- Parents, guardians or carers will be asked for consent in line with existing school-based vaccination programmes

### **Care Homes and vulnerable people**

- The date by which all residential care workers must be double vaccinated has been and gone.
- 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 staff but concerns over long term effectiveness mean winter booster programme now being rolled out

### **Schools and education**

- Despite higher case rates among school-age population, school attendance is higher than the England average
- Increase in positive cases amongst secondary school-age pupils, in particular the 10- to 15-year-old age group.
- Schools are putting in place additional measures to try and reduce the risk of transmission within school including enhanced testing.
- Vaccination programme now being offered to all healthy 12-15 years olds, to be administered through schools or via a local vaccinations centre.
- Some concern remains over schools being a target for anti-vax activity

### **Local Community Testing and Contact Tracing**

- The programme of targeted mobile community testing and vaccination is continuing, jointly with NHS Devon colleagues.