

Covid-19 Outbreak Management CORE SCRIPT – 15 February 2022

“Case levels have fallen, but we are not out of the woods, and we should not allow ourselves to become complacent.”

We should remain cautious as we approach these next few weeks and months. Ending the obligation for people to self-isolate does not mean that coronavirus is now any less a risk to our population. It’s vital that people continue to use their common sense and do everything they can to protect themselves, their families and friends. Get your booster vaccination, test regularly, and follow national rules.

- Case rates are slowly reducing across Devon but continue to remain high and above the England average.
- High rates of testing – testing rates in Devon are 35% higher than the national average – partly explain the high number of cases in Devon.
- Highest rates across the county are seen among our younger age groups, followed by working age groups, however rates have continued to reduce.
- Cases within primary and secondary schools are reducing but continue to be high, and we are working individually with schools where there are outbreaks to reduce the risk of spread.
- We are also monitoring any impact of high case levels in schools, within their local communities.
- Hospital admissions across Devon have fallen steadily since the beginning of February, (with the exception of RD&E. This reflects the current high number of cases within Exeter). The severity of illness appears to be less with fewer people needing intensive care.
- Deaths linked to Covid remain relatively low and overall death rates remain at the seasonal average.
- There is a volume of concern among those that represent vulnerable groups, that the removal of self-isolation legislation will increase risk to those groups.

- Concerns also remain about ongoing pressure across the health and social care in terms of both managing hospital numbers and the wider impact of staff illness and self-isolation on the whole system.
- Vaccine take-up is good in Devon, although additional effort is being made to encourage certain groups to take up the vaccine, e.g., care workers, unpaid carers, and other specific groups with lower take-up.

Key Public health messages:

The prospect of removing the current legislation around the need to self-isolate, after a positive test or with symptoms, has highlighted concerns among vulnerable groups who are more at risk from coronavirus.

It is vital that people continue to look out for each other, and do all they can to reduce risk, especially to those who are more vulnerable.

That means being respectful of other people's concerns and personal situations.

The removal of legislation is likely to also impact on businesses, as employees and their employers will have to decide for themselves whether they are well enough to work.

The public health advice is that anyone who shows symptoms of infection, e.g. sore throat, cough, high temperature, vomiting or diarrhoea, should not attend the workplace or school.

People should continue to be cautious, use their common sense and follow basic public health advice, and it is very important people continue to conduct regular testing, and for now, self-isolate if symptomatic or positive.

Other key messages

Hospitals and health service

- Hospitals admissions for COVID have fallen steadily since the beginning of February and remain stable across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay.
- Numbers in ITU have fallen and we are not seeing the severity of illness as in previous waves.
- Hospitals and SW Ambulance Trust are however continuing to experience extreme pressure.

- Currently 2.6% of NHS staff are off with COVID-19 but sickness levels are stable.

Mass vaccination

- Numbers double vaccinated across Devon is high (90%+) but targeted work ongoing to promote where uptake has been lower.
- At least 85% of all eligible people have already had their booster as a result of the winter push (with higher rate in over 50s and those with underlying health conditions).
- Vulnerable young people, aged 5 to 11 years old, are now being encouraged to come forward for their vaccination.
- The [latest data from UK Health Security Agency](#) shows that boosters significantly reduce the risk of death with Omicron.
- A new vaccine (Novavax) has been given approval by the Medicines and [Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency](#). The JCVI will consider its use.

Care Homes and vulnerable people

- Rates among older people remain relatively low, however around half of the total number of care homes in Devon are currently experiencing outbreaks (2 or more linked cases among residents and/or staff)
- The whole care sector continues to be under pressure and concerns remain over the impact of COVID-19 leading to further staff shortages
- Vaccination programme highly effective with high take up among older people and care staff
- [The Government has now launched a consultation](#) with health and care workers, re the mandatory vaccination for frontline health and care staff.

Schools and education

- School attendance in Devon (currently around 91.5%) remains above the national average, but still below pre-COVID levels. Schools are working hard with young people to help those who have been off school unwell, or learning remotely, to re-engage them in the classroom.
- Case levels in Devon schools are stabilising and have fallen.
- Devon currently has an above average number of teaching staff off work with illness (not exclusively coronavirus)
- Schools, and Devon County Council, are awaiting further national guidance concerning testing and self-isolation, to understand the impact (that removing the legislation will have) on schools.

Local Community Testing and Contact Tracing

- Outreach testing and vaccination programme is expanding, and is now working closely specifically with harder to reach and vulnerable groups, as well as the general population.

Economy and Businesses

- The impact of coronavirus on the Devon and south west economy is likely to be seen for some time to come, especially within the hospitality sector.