

## **CORE SCRIPT – 15 March 2022**

**“Case levels nationally, and in Devon, are rising. We must decide for ourselves to take the right steps to protect ourselves and others. Staying at home if unwell, wearing face coverings in public indoor spaces and testing, are all still strongly advised.”**

Case levels of coronavirus in Devon are rising, with the largest and fastest rise among the working age population. With no legal requirement to self-isolate, with symptoms or testing positive, the public health advice is still to do so. As the availability of free testing ends for most people this month (there are exceptions), Devon residents are encouraged to continue to test and to respond appropriately. The fourth jab (a second booster) for over 75s this Spring will help protect those whose earlier protection is now waning.

- Case rates in Devon are above the national average. We've had a 25% increase in cases just over the weekend, with the MSOA map indicating that Devon has seen a 63.4% increase in cases in a 7 day period
- Testing in Devon remains higher than the national average, (which partly explains higher case rates in the county)
- Case rates are highest in the working age population but are increasing in all age groups, including those aged 80 and over, both nationally and locally.
- Residential care homes are seeing high numbers of outbreaks, with the majority of Devon's care homes reporting two or more linked cases among residents and staff. We are continuing to support homes with bespoke advice for those experiencing outbreaks.
- The government has stepped back from the mandatory requirement for health and care staff to be vaccinated. Staff are therefore strongly encouraged to take up the vaccination, but not obliged to.
- The numbers of people in hospital in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay with COVID-19 have risen considerably. Case levels in hospital are reaching a similar level to when Devon had its highest peaks. Not all are admitted because they have coronavirus, but they may be in hospital and have tested positive for coronavirus. ICU levels, however, remain low and stable.
- Hospital pressures are compounded by a rise in staff absence due to illness.
- 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 public are advised to stay home if they have symptoms of coronavirus or other infectious illnesses.**

Devon residents have tended to be good at following public health advice throughout the pandemic. Public health experts are urging people to continue to behave responsibly: take up the vaccine when invited to do so, and to follow advice around staying at home when feeling unwell, wearing face coverings in public indoor spaces, and testing regularly. Washing hands regularly is still strongly advised, to protect against a wide range of illnesses.

The results of a straw poll that the council has been running are encouraging. The majority of people are indicating that they will stay home if unwell; they will continue to wear face coverings; and they feel safer meeting others outdoors. Respondeees are split equally on whether or not they will continue to test once tests stop being available free of charge to most people, this month.

Care homes are under a lot of pressure, since restrictions were dropped, to keep residents and staff protected from COVID-19. Visitors will be asked to work with care homes to help manage the rise of infection among residents and staff.

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 stay at home if symptomatic or positive.

## **Other key messages**

### **Hospitals and health service**

- Hospital admissions have risen considerably across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay. NHS Devon is asking people not to visit friends and family in hospital if they have symptoms of coronavirus or other infectious illnesses, eg flu or norovirus.
- There is high demand for emergency care, and NHS Devon is asking people to choose the right NHS service for their needs.

- Hospitals are experiencing an increase in staff absence due to sickness
- NHS Devon are reminding the public that they are still required to wear face coverings when visiting health services, eg their GP and hospital
- SW Ambulance Trust is continue to experience considerable pressure

### **Mass vaccination**

- An additional booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine will be offered to all adults over 75 years old, and to the most vulnerable over-12-year-olds in the UK this spring.
- 5–11-year-olds are to be offered the Covid-19 vaccination
- Unpaid carers are being urged to come forward for the vaccination
- In Devon, a total of 2,694,943 doses were given between 8 December 2020 and 27 February 2022. This includes 992,970 first doses, 937,460 second doses and 770,193 boosters/third doses.
- You can find your nearest walk-in clinic on NHS England's site finder here. Appointments can be booked via the National Booking System

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

- The majority of care homes in Devon are 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
- There is now no mandatory requirement for health and care staff to be vaccinated, but it is strongly encouraged

### **Schools and education**

- Devon teaching staff absent with covid 19 related absence is in line with the national average at the end of the Spring half term. Data is indicating a higher than national increase in teachers returning to work compared to national comparators.

- 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.

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

- Outreach teams are continuing to support the vaccination programme. Teams are in the process of winding down the community testing programme, which will end on the 31 March, in line with the government's 'Living with Covid' plan
- Contact tracing ended in February

### **Economy and Businesses**

- The impact of coronavirus on the Devon and south west economy is likely to be seen for some time to come