

Somerset's Covid-19 Weekly Update

Friday 15 October 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.

In recent weeks there have been concerns around a number of people receiving negative PCR test results after they have previously tested positive on a Lateral Flow Device. UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), formerly Public Health England, today released a statement to announce that [testing of PCR samples at Immensa Health Clinic Ltd in Wolverhampton has been suspended following NHS Test and Trace investigation](#).

While investigations are underway into the precise cause, NHS Test and Trace estimate that around 400,000 samples have been processed through the lab, the vast majority of which will have been negative results. An estimated 43,000 people may have been given incorrect negative PCR test results between 8th September and 12th October, mostly in the South-West of England. We do not yet know how many Somerset cases this has affected and understand that investigations are still underway.

This is an isolated incident attributed to one laboratory. All samples taken after 12 October are now being redirected to other laboratories. The number of tests carried out at the Immensa laboratory are small in the context of the wider network and testing availability is unaffected around the country.

NHS Test and Trace will contact the people that could still be infectious to advise them to take another test. Close contacts who are symptomatic will also be advised to take a PCR test in line with normal practice. Anyone with Covid-19 symptoms should book a PCR test. Those with a positive LFD test should get a follow up PCR test to confirm they have Covid-19.

There are no technical issues with the LFD or PCR test kits themselves and people should continue to test as normal. Other labs are working normally.

Latest Covid-19 Dashboard: The following link will take you to our website: [Somerset Coronavirus \(Covid-19\)](#) Scroll down the page until you get to **'Covid-19 Dashboard'** in the list. Click on this and the dashboard will open. Please note the data reported in this document may differ slightly from the data showing on the dashboard because of discrepancies in reporting periods.

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



David Fothergill
Leader Somerset County Council

Twitter: @DJAFothergill



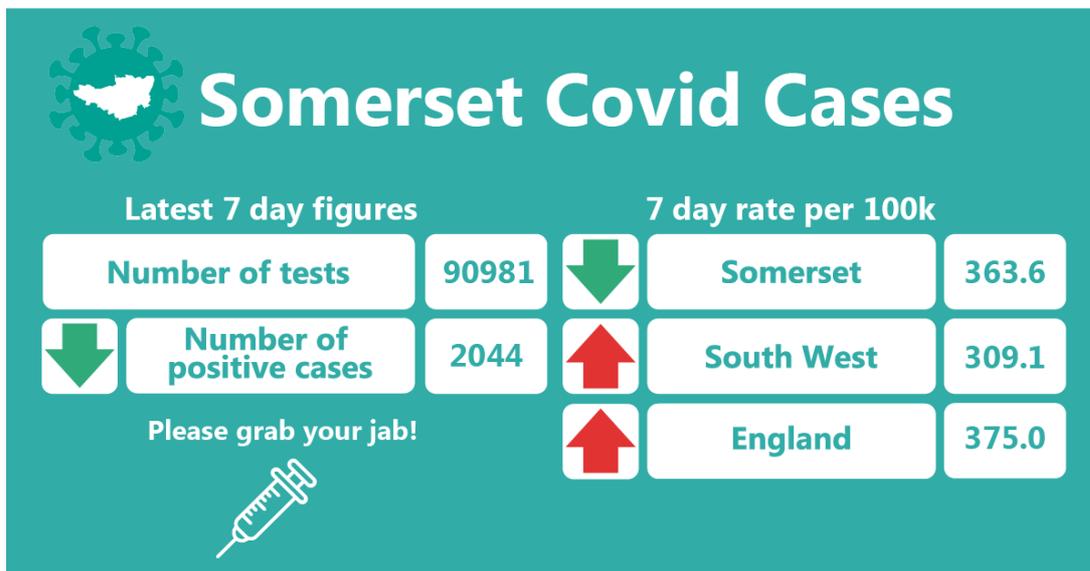
Professor Trudi Grant
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Cabinet Member for Education and
Public Health

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In the week up to 9 October, approximately 90,981 tests were carried out across the county with 2,044 new confirmed cases. The rates have slightly decreased to 363.6 per 100,000, which is above the South-West but below the national average. **However, due to the recent lab testing issue, these figures are likely to be an underestimate.**

Hospitalisation data for Somerset has risen since last week with just over 50 Covid-19 in-patients in Somerset hospitals.

This Week's Headlines

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

- Workplace, Care and School settings
- Vaccination and Covid Booster update
- Resources and further information

Workplaces: Once again, with so many cases being seen in our education settings, it's worth reminding staff who have a child in education to do a twice weekly lateral flow test.

Find out more about what you can do to keep [working safely to reduce the risk of transmission](#).

One of the best ways to help stop the spread of the virus in workspaces is to ensure they are well ventilated. The Health and Safety Executive's website gives guidance for workplace ventilation. [Ventilation and air conditioning during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#)

Adequate ventilation reduces how much virus is in the air and therefore helps reduce the risk from aerosol transmission. Aerosol transmission can happen when someone breathes in small particles in the air (aerosols) after a person with the virus has been in the same enclosed area. The risk from aerosols is greater in areas that are [poorly ventilated](#).

Although ventilation reduces the risk from aerosols, it has minimal impact on:

- droplet transmission (from people being in close contact)
- contact transmission (touching surfaces)

You can reduce the risk of aerosol transmission by:

- making sure infected workers (or anyone with Covid-19 symptoms) do not come into the workplace
- providing adequate ventilation with fresh air

There are some simple ways to identify poorly ventilated areas:

www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/equipment-and-machinery/air-conditioning-and-ventilation/identifying-poorly-ventilated-areas.htm

- Look for areas where people work and where there is no [mechanical ventilation](#) or [natural ventilation](#) such as open windows, doors, or vents
- Check that mechanical systems provide outdoor air, temperature control, or both. If a system only [recirculates air](#) and has no outdoor air supply, the area is likely to be poorly ventilated
- Identify areas that feel stuffy or smell bad
- Using Carbon Dioxide monitors (see HSE advice in link)

Deciding what adequate ventilation looks like in your workplace should be part of a [risk assessment](#).

When you have completed an assessment, here are examples of [improving ventilation to reduce transmission](#).

You should also make sure any control measures you identify by your risk assessment take account of the national public health regulations and guidance.

Care Sector: We continue to see cases and outbreaks of Covid 19 in social care settings across Somerset. Now we are into Autumn, and have Winter approaching, it is essential to reduce the risk of Covid-19 as well as other infections.

It becomes ever more important to maintain Infection Prevention Control measures, regular testing, vaccination promotion, ventilation, monitoring and prompt action where infection is suspected, as well as promotion of health and wellbeing in our care sector.

Winter vaccinations

- Both Covid-19 booster vaccinations and flu vaccinations are available
- The Covid-19 vaccination national booking service can be accessed by frontline health and social care staff who had their 2nd dose at least 6 months ago, looking to book their booster jab

- Book online via [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) vaccination - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk) or phone 119
- Winter vaccinations communications assets are available, including posters, social media graphics [CARE: Winter vaccinations campaign assets | Campaign Resource Centre](#)

Schools and Early Years settings: Covid-19 case rates in educational settings continue to rise across Somerset and the South-West; there were 1471 cases at 183 school settings and 28 cases at 25 nursery settings in the week to 9 October 2021.

As stated in the introduction, following the investigation by the UK Health Security Agency into false negative PCR results from one lab in Wolverhampton, we have amended advice, particularly for school or college aged children, their parents and those working in education. **If you tested positive on LFD and subsequently tested negative on PCR, prior to the 13th of October, we strongly recommend you isolate and get a further PCR test to ensure you have not got Covid-19.**

DfE has now updated the [contingency framework](#) to reflect the position for children and young people previously considered clinically extremely vulnerable [no longer needing to shield](#) and details on when increased Covid-19 testing can be recommended by Directors of Public Health.

On October 11, the Secretary of State for Education and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care published a [joint letter to parents](#) about the vaccination of children aged 12 - 15 years and the importance of continuing with twice-weekly Covid-19 LFD testing and reporting.

The letter advises, in response to potential outbreaks, local health teams may advise additional testing and isolation protocols at schools or colleges. For example, if a student or pupil is identified as a close contact by NHS Test and Trace, they may be asked to take daily lateral flow device (LFD) tests, while they wait for their PCR test result. In this scenario, the student or pupil should continue to attend school or college as long as their LFD test results remain negative and they feel well.

As the new Secretary of State for Education has made clear, young people regularly attending school is a national priority and is important for their education, wellbeing, and long-term development.

According to the graduated response based on the case threshold, as of October 8, there are currently 20 educational settings in Somerset at amber level with enhanced measures in place, 34 at blue level, with additional control measures in place and no settings at red level, although some schools have needed to move some year groups to remote learning as a result of operational issues. This is across all ages and stages and all funded sectors.

Symptomatic and Asymptomatic Testing:

Parents or carers of a school or college age child, health, care or education staff are requested to undertake twice weekly asymptomatic testing using LFDs, so those you meet or work with are kept safe from infection. Parents are reminded to take up the offer of free tests and record the results on [NHS Test and Trace](#).

Anyone who has Covid-19 symptoms, should book a PCR and not attend school. Do not take an LFD if symptomatic. We advise all parents, staff and pupils to take the supervised PCR testing route where available. Ask for this when you arrive at the test centre and someone will take the swab for you to maximise the quality of the test.

Please continue to use LFD and PCR tests as you normally would, the SCC PH advice remains, if you are showing any symptoms of Covid-19, or have a positive LFD test get a PCR test and if this is positive stay at home and self-isolate for ten days to avoid infecting others.

SCC PH advice remains consistent with national guidance:

- Only use twice weekly LFD testing for asymptomatic cases
- Make sure you do an LFD **according to the instructions and at least 30 minutes after eating or drinking**
- If you get a positive LFD or have symptoms, self isolate and get a PCR and **use the supervised PCR testing route at test centre to get the best quality test**

- Encourage secondary school age children to wear face coverings in crowded or enclosed places, for example on school transport
- Take up the offer of vaccination

School Covid-19 Vaccine Programme:

If [SAINT](#) have not already been in touch they will make contact with you in the coming weeks to diarise a vaccination date for your school.

The vaccine is not mandatory; the decision to have the vaccine is a personal decision. The role of schools is to facilitate access for those who wish to receive the vaccine.

Covid Catch Up Film with Clinton Rogers:

In last weeks' [film](#), Clinton discussed the national vaccination programme for 12-15 year olds and the importance it plays in protecting young people and keeping their education moving forwards.

In this week's Film, Clinton interviews parents doing their bit to support their child's education by taking regular lateral flow tests and wearing face coverings in crowded areas. Watch the film [here](#).

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

95% of adults in Somerset have now had at least one vaccine dose. If you have missed out so far, don't worry, you can still have a vaccine. The offer to those who have not had their first vaccine dose remains as does the offer for a second dose for the 4% of people who have not taken up their second dose. [Covid-19 vaccinations in Somerset - Somerset CCG](#)

Vaccination uptake in 16-17 year olds has levelled off at about 65%. Whilst this is in line with the national picture, we are working with the multi-partnership Communications Teams along with the newly formed SCC Behavioural Science Unit to encourage further uptake.

Rollout of Covid Booster Vaccination in Somerset:

Please do not contact your GP about this, you will be contacted when you become eligible for the jab, which is six months after your second dose. You will get a call, text or letter from your local GP led site to get the jab, or will be invited by the National Booking Service.

Those who are eligible for the Covid booster jabs include:

- those living in residential care homes for older adults
- all adults aged 50 years or over
- frontline health and social care workers
- all those aged 16 to 49 years with underlying health conditions that put them at higher risk of severe COVID-19 (as set out in the green book), and adult carers
- adult household contacts of immunosuppressed individuals

Also, we will be repeating the outreach work in Somerset for the hard-to-access groups for their boosters – this will start in November

Visit [Somerset CCG Covid vaccination programme](#) for more information on the Somerset Covid Vaccination programme.

It remains very important for anyone who has not had their first or second dose of the Covid-19 vaccine, to do so as soon as possible. While the first dose starts to provide some immunity, it is only two weeks after the second dose when you are considered to be 'fully vaccinated'.

Training Session for youth workers and others supporting young people in Somerset – spaces remaining:

The vaccination programme in Somerset has been a considerable success, with around 90% of adults having received both jabs. But in some parts of the county, many young people have been hesitant to join the queue.

Vaccination uptake has been lower amongst 16–18-year-olds in some areas across Somerset, so it's important for young people to have someone they can turn to if they have questions or concerns.

This training session is designed to help you understand some of the causes for vaccine hesitancy, talk to young people about their concerns and answer any non-medical questions they may have.

The session will cover:

- Common myths and misconceptions about the vaccine among young people.
- The latest information about how the vaccines work, how they're made and possible side effects.
- What might prevent young people from accessing their vaccination?
- How to have open, supportive conversations about health-related issues.
- Where to signpost people to if they have more questions.
- Opportunity to learn about Spark's Vaccine and Health Inequalities Small Grants Fund.

This training is for youth workers and others supporting young people in Somerset.

Date: Thursday 21st October 2021

Time: 10am-12pm

Venue: Zoom

For more information and to book, please click [here](#)

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 [LinkedIn](#) and share our posts with your networks to help us communicate these important messages.

Follow our Director of Public Health account [here](#).