

NORTH SOMERSET: LIVING WELL WITH COVID

October 2022

Prevention • Protection • Treatment • Response

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Background

The United Kingdom (UK) Government published a range of guidance in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. First was the Coronavirus: Action Plan on March 3rd 2020¹. The UK experienced restrictions on normal life including three lockdowns over the two years that followed². On February 22nd 2021 the Government began a phased reduction of restrictions³ and published their document known as the 'Roadmap out of Lockdown'⁴.

In parallel to this, the COVID-19 vaccination programme was underway. Starting with the most vulnerable, the UK population was offered protection from the virus. The majority of the public were also willing to test for the virus and self-isolate if they tested positive, limiting transmission while the NHS worked to vaccinate and protect as many people as possible. While the risk from COVID-19 has not gone away, it has reduced over time and the proportion of people becoming seriously ill with COVID-19 has fallen.

In February 2022, the COVID-19 Response: Living with COVID-19⁵ national plan was published. This document outlined the removal of the remaining legal domestic restrictions and set out how the country will live with COVID-19 while maintaining population resilience and protection for those most at risk.

It is against this background that North Somerset Council has developed the North Somerset Living Well with COVID -19 strategy. This replaces the previous North Somerset COVID-19 Local Outbreak Management Plan and sets a framework for how we will continue to prevent, protect, treat and respond to COVID-19 in North Somerset.

Our aim is to continue to manage the transmission of the virus while reducing the risk that it continues to present. To achieve this, our strategy has set out four key areas of focus; prevention, protection, treatment and response all of which are underpinned by surveillance, communication and engagement. We will maintain population resilience and protect those most at risk; while prioritising response to enquiries about changing guidance, support for outbreak management in high-risk settings and support to the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

Measures outlined will be supported by the Contain Outbreak Management Fund that has been carried forward from financial year 2021 to 2022 and will be reviewed when this funding ends in March 2023.

¹ [Coronavirus action plan: a guide to what you can expect across the UK \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/441206/coronavirus-action-plan-a-guide-to-what-you-can-expect-across-the-uk.pdf)

² [Timeline of UK government coronavirus lockdowns and restrictions | The Institute for Government](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/news/timeline-of-uk-government-coronavirus-lockdowns-and-restrictions)

³ The Devolved Administrations set out separate plans for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

⁴ [COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021 \(Summary\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021-summary)

⁵ [COVID-19 Response: Living with COVID-19 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-living-with-covid-19)

Surveillance, Communication and Engagement

Surveillance

Routine population testing systems have been stood down. We therefore have a more limited view of data than we did during the height of the pandemic response. National surveillance systems remain in place and we will continue to monitor national, regional and local data sources to inform our response over time. Sources include:

- Office for National Statistics COVID-19 Infection Survey
- national genomic sequencing programme
- national prevalence studies
- care home and NHS testing prevalence
- death registration data
- waste-water analysis
- treatment for COVID-19 in the community and in hospital
- vaccination uptake data

The North Somerset COVID-19 Data Dashboard will continue to summarise and be updated with the latest local data. It can be accessed via the [North Somerset Council website](#).

Communication:

Effective communication with various stakeholders is critical to the success of our strategy and our response to how to live with COVID-19. We will continue to listen to insights from local communities and other key stakeholders, to publish regular briefings and key messages, to meet with local groups to answer questions and support an appropriate local response.

Our messages will reflect national messaging and focus on the areas of prevention, protection, treatment, and response. Communications will include press releases, updates in council emails and printed publications, policy briefings, signposting, new guidance, surveillance data, progress reports and key partnership messages. We will use various platforms, modes, and media to communicate, so that key messages are accessible to all residents and businesses in North Somerset. The North Somerset Council website [pages on COVID-19](#) were simplified in September 2023 and will continue to be monitored to remove out of date information and point to latest national guidance.

We will maintain regular communication and dialogue with our businesses, care sector and education providers, providing them with appropriate support and advice. We will maintain conversations and good information flow to support our joint work to live safely with COVID-19 in North Somerset.

Engagement

Our NSC Public Health team will also work with relevant partners and stakeholders, using a pool of expertise, resources, skills and expertise to coordinate COVID-19 activities across North Somerset. Partners will include:

- Schools
- Care homes
- Businesses
- Voluntary sector organisations
- UK Health Security Agency
- Health and Social care teams
- NHS England
- Resident groups across North Somerset
- North Somerset Council departments
- External regulatory bodies
- Other Local authorities

Prevention

COVID-19 control measures placing specific restrictions on society have been removed but individual behaviours and general measures in workplaces and public places continue to reduce the spread of infection and prevent harm. There are still many actions that if undertaken collectively will have a significant impact on reducing COVID-19 transmission across North Somerset. These actions include:

- getting vaccinated
- having good hand hygiene
- letting fresh air in when meeting others indoors
- wearing a face covering in busy and enclosed areas
- not mixing with others if unwell

We will continue to promote these messages to the population and encourage local organisations to support residents and visitors to prevent the spread of COVID-19. These actions are common with many infections that we have always had to live with so will also help limit the spread of other diseases.

Protection

Vaccination is the best defence against COVID-19. As well as helping to prevent the spread of COVID-19, vaccines also safeguard against the worst health outcomes including death. They have proven to be safe and highly effective at protecting people against coronavirus. They also protect against COVID-19 variants.⁶

Despite the effectiveness of vaccination, it is known that the vaccine effectiveness is lowered over time, which is why booster vaccines are vital in protection against COVID-19. We will continue to work with our local NHS to monitor uptake and promote vaccination for first, second and booster doses, across North Somerset.

Living safely with COVID-19 is highly reliant on vaccination. Those who remain unvaccinated will be at higher risk from COVID-19. We will work with the local NHS to promote general vaccination uptake and use targeted approaches in areas or

⁶ [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) vaccine - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

populations where uptake has been lower, using vaccination initiatives to address inequalities in health outcomes and promote health for all.

Treatment

As part of the wider efforts to minimise the physical and long-term impact of COVID-19, hospitalisation and death; scientists have developed various antiviral treatments for those that are vulnerable and immunocompromised⁷. Therapies fall into two broad categories: treatment aimed at preventing progression of disease and need for hospital admission, and treatment for those unwell enough to need oxygen and hospital-based care.

Testing for COVID-19 continues to be available to those with specific medical conditions that place them at the highest risk of severe disease and are eligible for COVID-19 treatment in the community. Treatments are not available from GPs or pharmacies and must be issued by the local COVID Medicines Delivery Unit (CMDU).

We will promote the offer of COVID-19 testing and community treatment to those who are eligible and work with local NHS partners to support the highest possible standard of clinical care for all.

Response

Our focus is to enhance public health mechanisms in response to outbreaks and new variants of COVID-19. To do this for 2022/2023 we will maintain a limited COVID -19 outbreak team within the Public Health Team of North Somerset Council. The team will continue to work with UK Health Security Agency, NHS Infection Prevention and Management (IPM) teams and other partners to continue to undertake effective outbreak management and response within a host of environments including but not limited to health care settings, educational settings, and other business environments in North Somerset.

The team will embrace a targeted approach to address the impact of the virus upon the health of different population. The needs of underserved communities continues to be central to our COVID -19 workstreams and are working in partnership with NHS England and other stakeholders to develop targeted interventions to limit the health inequalities that disproportionately affect this subgroup. We will continue to provide residents across North Somerset with an equal opportunity to attain positive health outcomes.

The team's work is underpinned by the knowledge that sound Infection Prevention and Management (IPM) is crucial in preventing and responding to infections in high risk settings. IPM support (training, access to specialist advice and PPE) has helped to keep COVID-19 transmission rates low. IPM will remain a key priority for control of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases, being crucial in protecting those most at risk. We will work with our local NHS and care colleagues to promote and support high quality infection prevention and management in health and care settings.

As evidenced by the emergence of COVID -19 and subsequent variants of concern (VOC) we recognise the need for resilience and emergency planning to be able to

⁷ [Treatments for coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

respond, timely, effectively, and appropriately to these variants. The team undertake enhanced COVID -19 control work in response not only to outbreaks but also variants of concern (VOC). They are always kept abreast of new guidelines and have regular meetings to plan, undertake and evaluate practice as guided by emerging evidence/guidelines. Their mandate will include but not limited to:

- Developing and activating resilience and emergency plans
- Swift adoption of new guidelines to suit local needs and enhance local response
- Reconstituting and deploying enhanced COVID -19 response team
- Implementing local COVID -19 response
- Arranging and leading outbreak control meetings
- Supporting targeted surge testing and IPC
- Support procurement of testing kits/PPE through partnership collaborative working
- Arranging surge and targeted vaccination
- Working collaboratively with NHS England and other providers to make sure treatments/anti-viral are available to those most at risk
- Working with businesses and EHO to implement safe working environments

The pandemic has led to the development of many local neighbourhood level support networks, linked through the North Somerset Together Workstream. This development has strengthened community resilience by harnessing the assets of individuals and groups. We will continue to work in partnership with volunteer networks to in response to any escalation in COVID-19 risk.

Looking forward

As a result of our experience of the pandemic, we are better prepared for a future where we live with COVID-19. We all now understand how the virus spreads and can take action to minimise the risk of transmission and maximise our response to outbreaks. We have an effective vaccination programme which is reducing the impact of the disease and there are a range of new treatments for COVID-19.

The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of social contact and physical exercise for our mental and physical health, as well as the impact of social inequality on patterns of disease and their outcomes. North Somerset Council are committed to working with our partners across North Somerset to learn from the pandemic, including contributing into the upcoming national enquiry.

The framework set out in this document outlines how we will continue to use the resources we have to manage ongoing risks from COVID-19 as we adapt to living with it, and make sure that we are well prepared and ready to adapt should we need to respond to any new escalation of the COVID-19 threat.

We thank all local residents and organisations for their contributions to keep North Somerset safe.