

North Somerset Council

Report to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date of Meeting: 12 October 2023

Subject of Report: Health Protection update

Town or Parish: All

Officer/Member Presenting: Matt Lenny, Director of Public Health and Regulatory Services

Key Decision: No

Reason: National policy

Recommendations

The Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel note the content of the report.

1. Summary of Report

The winter season is always challenging for health and care services because of the additional demand for services. This is often driven by an increased prevalence of communicable disease which impacts on previously well individuals but particularly those with existing conditions and vulnerability. Effective prevention of this harm is based on vaccination and infection prevention and control strategies implemented across our health and care system. Plans are in place to implement these approaches and effectively monitor trends and impacts of the winter period.

2. Policy

Health Protection is a shared responsibility across our health and care system. Under the Health and Social Care Act (2012) the local authority (through the Director of Public Health) has a role in being assured that all appropriate action to protect the health of the local population is being taken.

3. Details

Vaccines remain our best defence against severe disease and hospitalisation from flu and COVID-19. That is why over-65s, anyone in a clinical risk group, and anyone living in a household with someone who is in a clinical risk group is being asked to come forward for their vaccination. Their protection since their last vaccination will have waned and they remain at increased risk from a respiratory infection this winter. COVID-19 is not a special case; respiratory infections can be unpredictable, and we're asking similar groups to get vaccinated against flu.

The government decided to bring forward the COVID-19 autumn vaccination campaign, as a precautionary measure to ensure those people who are most vulnerable and at higher risk of severe disease have the best available protection. It can take a few weeks for protection to build after a vaccine, so getting vaccinated ahead of the winter season, when respiratory viruses tend to peak, is important.

The UKHSA data dashboard shows public health data across England. It builds on the success and is an iteration of the COVID-19 in the UK dashboard. Initially, the dashboard presents data on respiratory viruses. In the future, it will grow to present a wider range of data on public health topics in line with the remit of the UKHSA.

Vital data continues to be collated from those who are admitted to hospital with symptoms, and scientists are utilising genome sequencing to understand which variants people are most vulnerable to. There are also specific surveillance programmes in place, where small sample groups are tested regularly. These allow us to monitor trends in the wider community.

Hospital is where we will see the more severe cases, and scientists will be monitoring the numbers of people attending with COVID-19 symptoms very carefully. This will help us understand the growth rate and transmission potential of the new variant.

There continues to be collaboration with health organisations in other countries, the World Health Organisation and initiatives such as the Global Influenza Surveillance & Response System (GISAI) to share access to the most current data.

At the time of writing (02/10/23) the level of infection – Covid-19 and influenza – is relatively low both nationally and locally but this will be kept under control. Coverage of the vaccination programmes will build over time and reported on with any gaps for localities or population groups monitored and responded to through local multi-agency forums.

Sources of data: [Interactive map of cases | Coronavirus in the UK \(data.gov.uk\)](#)
[UKHSA data dashboard](#)

4. Consultation

Not applicable. For information item only.

5. Financial Implications

Not applicable. For information item only.

Costs

Not applicable. For information item only.

Funding

Not applicable. For information item only.

6. Legal Powers and Implications

No legal powers required as assurance role around health protection activities.

7. Climate Change and Environmental Implications

None identified through this report.

8. Risk Management

The actions described in this report relate to managing risk for our local population and service delivery.

9. Equality Implications

The vaccination programme includes workstreams to meet the needs of different population groups taking account of barriers to access.

10. Corporate Implications

Protecting the health of the local population supports the health and wellbeing aims of the Council's Corporate Plan.

11. Options Considered

National vaccination programmes and infection monitoring are provided by the government with local health and care commissioners and providers following national guidance as needed.

Author:

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Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

None