

Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum Stakeholder Update 3 December 2021

A message from Genna Telfer, Assistant Chief Constable and Chair of the strategic coordination group of the LRF



Dear colleague,

You will have seen the extensive news coverage around the new 'Omicron' variant of COVID-19, which is causing concern around the world. Scientists are working quickly to find out more about how Omicron spreads, how it affects people's health and how best to tackle the new variant.

From Tuesday (November 30) temporary laws were put into place across England in response to Omicron. These include wearing face coverings in shops and on public transport, self-isolating if you come into contact with someone who has Omicron (regardless of age or vaccination status), and measures for travellers returning from both red-list and non-red list countries. From 29 November use of face coverings was also made compulsory in communal areas of all English education settings, for staff, visitors and pupils in year 7 upwards. Measures are set to be reviewed in three weeks.

All of this is about doing all that we can to contain the spread of the virus. In addition to following these new measures we need everyone in Hertfordshire to keep doing the basics:

- get vaccinated as soon as you are eligible – it's the best protection we have
- book or order a PCR test if you have a new cough, a temperature, or a loss of sense of taste or smell, and self-isolate if you are positive
- self-isolate if you are contacted by NHS Test and Trace, or when advised to by the NHS COVID-19 app, unless you are fully vaccinated, in which case you should get a PCR test
- keep washing your hands thoroughly and regularly
- wear face-coverings when you can, this is now mandatory in shops and on public transport (unless you are exempt)
- ventilate workplaces and social spaces
- take a rapid test before you head out and after you get back to make sure you don't have COVID-19 to keep yourself and everyone around you safe and give yourself peace of mind. Self-isolate and get a PCR test if your lateral flow test is positive.

By taking these simple but effective steps, you can play your part in helping everyone in our county to tackle this new challenge together.

COVID vaccination update

Booster update – preparations are underway for the next phase of the campaign

Across Hertfordshire and west Essex, more than **400,000** eligible double-jabbed people have now also had their booster jab. This represents 77% of our eligible population which currently include those aged 40 or over, as long as at least 182 days have passed since their second vaccination dose. This is a tremendous

achievement, demonstrating the enthusiasm for the booster jab amongst our residents, as well as the ongoing commitment of GPs, pharmacists, and vaccinators to protecting the population.

In light of recent announcements, over the next few weeks the vaccine programme will be accelerated all over the country, so that:

- booster vaccinations will gradually become available to people aged 18 and over – starting with older age groups first and working down the age cohorts
- the gap between second doses and boosters will reduce to three months instead of six
- a booster jab will be given to those who are severely immunocompromised, three months after their third primary dose
- second doses will be offered to children aged 12-15, 12 weeks after their first dose

Please note that these changes **have not** been enacted yet anywhere in England. While changes are made to the national booking system and new vaccinating protocols and practical arrangements to increase capacity are put in place, the NHS will continue to vaccinate those people who are already eligible for top-up jabs.

In due course, the booking service and drop-in clinics will open up to others in their 40s and older people who would previously have had to wait six months for a booster jab, before moving onto younger age groups. People will be contacted by the NHS when it is their turn to take up the offer – there is no need to take action at this point.

In order to accommodate the increasing numbers of people who will soon be eligible for vaccinations, many of our local vaccination sites will soon start to open for longer hours, and more appointments and walk-in slots will be available in a range of locations, including local pharmacies, GP practices, pop-up sites and in hubs run by hospitals. These additional measures will see an additional 15,000 vaccination slots a week phased in across Hertfordshire and West Essex over the next two weeks. Further information about these plans will be included in future editions of this update.

Meanwhile, please encourage anyone you know who is already eligible for a first, second or booster vaccine to get their jab as soon as possible, so that they have the best possible protection as we go into the winter.

Different routes to vaccination - your questions answered

Q. Why aren't all the local routes to vaccination on the national NHS website?

NHS colleagues are sometimes asked why all the vaccination options in Hertfordshire and west Essex don't appear on the national www.nhs.uk/coronavirus-vaccination website. There are several reasons for this:

- Most GP practices in our area prefer to manage their own clinic bookings, so that they can plan for and prioritise their own registered patients. If their sessions were made available on the national booking website, anyone registered with a GP anywhere in England would be able to book Hertfordshire or west Essex GP vaccination clinics.

- Our vaccination equalities teams run dedicated ‘pop-up’ clinics aimed at targeted communities where take-up is low, such as Hertfordshire residents of Black African or Black Caribbean heritage, or Eastern European communities. If these pop-ups were added to the national website, they would have to be bookable by anyone registered with a GP in England, not the targeted groups in question. In the past, when details of our pop-ups were included on the national site, local people have been ‘squeezed out’ by those able to travel from outside our area to our pop-up clinics.
- Smaller, ‘pop-up’ clinics are staffed by fewer vaccinators and held in a wide variety of venues. This provides a broader range of potential locations and can enable additional clinics to be set up at short notice. However, due to the small-scale of these teams, an unexpected eventuality such as staff sickness or an issue with a venue can result in postponements or cancellations. It is not possible to make short-notice changes to the national booking site, in the way that changes can be quickly uploaded to the Hertfordshire and west Essex microsite – www.covid.healthierfuture.nhs.net.

Q. Why aren’t lists of vaccination venues published in local newspapers?

The vaccination programme is currently very dynamic. New community pharmacies are becoming accredited as vaccination centres every week, some GP practices are choosing to either leave or join the vaccination programme, and vaccination supply or staffing issues can mean that centres have limited or no capacity on a given day or week – with plenty of capacity the week after. Any printed list would not be able to show available capacity, or to book people into a venue, and would quickly become out-of-date and misleading.

Q. What’s the best way I can help to keep people informed of all of their options?

Our Hertfordshire and west Essex COVID microsite is the best place to signpost people who want to see all of the ‘pop-up’ and roving clinics in the area, and it has direct links through to the national vaccination booking site and flu vaccination information from the front page too. The site also has a wealth of targeted information and resources designed to give people in our area the information and reassurance they need. Please direct people with web access to www.covid.healthierfuture.nhs.net. Those without web access can ring 119 for advice, information, and to book an appointment.

New ‘win winter’ campaign encourages people to play their part against COVID-19

The discovery of the Omicron variant, at a time when winter pressures and flu are already putting health and care services under additional stress, and when people are more likely to socialise more in the run up to Christmas make it all the more important for residents to take extra care.

A new ‘win winter’ campaign has been launched to ask residents to play their part in containing the spread of the virus and celebrate responsibly to help keep everyone safe and give the gift of good health to friends and family this festive season.

Hertfordshire County Council, local NHS organisations and district and borough councils across Hertfordshire have teamed up to share messages through three animated videos. These will be shared each week in the

run up to Christmas, showing different scenarios which all emphasise the importance of getting vaccinated when you are called, taking regular tests before going out and wearing face coverings when you can or as required (unless you're exempt). The first animation features parents going to their child's nativity play – you can watch it here: <https://youtu.be/vKDpYIVSkTQ>

The virus doesn't always make people feel unwell or have any symptoms, which is why taking rapid or 'lateral flow' tests before getting together is so important. We need to make sure that nobody attending a family gathering or party or event brings COVID-19 with them.

It's also now even easier for Hertfordshire residents to get home rapid test kits, for people with no symptoms to check that they are COVID-free. 17 libraries across the county offer free kits to anyone who is unable to [order online](#). Residents can also ask at their local pharmacy, speak to their employer or call 119. Those with children aged 11 and over can get home testing kits through their school.