

Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum Stakeholder Update – 19 March 2021

**A message from Darryl Keen, Director of Community Protection,
Chief Fire Officer and Chair of the strategic coordination group of the LRF**



Dear stakeholders,

I am happy to report that the county is in an ever-improving position as the number of coronavirus cases continues to fall. But I must sound a note of caution and, on behalf of all public sector organisations in Hertfordshire, I appeal to everyone not to fast-forward through the roadmap stages.

One in three people with coronavirus has no symptoms, so regular rapid testing to pick up cases of the virus which are still circulating in our communities is vital. Parents and carers of school-age children have been asked to carry out rapid tests at home twice a week, to help identify cases quickly and effectively. You can pick up a home testing kit at a [local site or order online](#). We're also encouraging businesses to [register to order free test kits for staff](#) ahead of non-essential shops and other businesses reopening.

Even as the impressive vaccination programme rolls out at pace, we must remember it is not a magic bullet. It is still possible to catch and pass on COVID-19 after being vaccinated, so please remain vigilant; keep up thorough handwashing, social distancing and other measures to prevent the spread of the virus.

COVID-19 vaccination programme

This week, we reached a very significant milestone in the vaccine programme in our area, with more than half a million people having received their first dose of the vaccine in Hertfordshire and west Essex. Amongst the 507,012 people who have had their first jab, the [latest figures](#) show great progress across the newest cohorts.

Alongside our vaccination sites, which have now all opened, health colleagues are continuing to do outreach work, including working with faith leaders and community groups to reach people who may otherwise not come forward for their vaccine and might not be known to health services.

Vaccine supplies

From the start of the programme, the NHS has successfully matched appointments in line with the availability of the vaccine. Between now and 29 March, there is a good supply of the vaccine. Vaccination centres continue to vaccinate anyone in the top nine [priority groups](#) while GP practices are focusing on vaccinating those in cohort six (including adults with underlying health conditions, people with learning disabilities and Carers).

Anyone aged 50 and over, eligible Carers and those in vulnerable groups who have not yet had their first dose, are being urged to book their vaccination now, either online through the [National Booking System](#), or by calling 119.

From 29 March for an expected four-week period, there will be a reduction in the weekly supply available from manufacturers but we will still receive considerable volumes of the vaccine during April. Previously booked appointments for first doses, and those people due their second dose will still receive their vaccine and should attend their appointments as planned.

Everyone who booked their first appointment at a pharmacy or large vaccination centre either using the National Booking System website or by calling 119, should already have a second dose appointment. Anyone who had their first vaccination at a GP-led vaccination centre will be contacted by their GP practice and given a date for their second appointment.

Update on vaccine safety

After a rigorous scientific review of all the available data, the UK's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) said there is no evidence to suggest that blood clots in veins are caused by the AstraZeneca vaccine. This follows a detailed review of reported cases as well as data from hospital admissions and GP records. This has been confirmed by the Government's independent advisory group, the Commission on Human Medicines, whose expert scientists and clinicians have also reviewed the available data.

The advice from the MHRA is that the public should continue to get their vaccine when invited to do so. They are continuing to closely monitor vaccine safety and review any concerns reported to them. You can read their statement [here](#).

Free rapid tests are available for workplaces through DHSC testing scheme

Free rapid tests for asymptomatic staff are available through the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) workplace testing scheme until the end of June 2021. The scheme will allow you to setup a testing facility for staff in your workplace, allowing them to be tested for COVID-19 twice a week.

You must express an interest in the workplace testing scheme by [registering online](#) by 31 March 2021, even if your organisation is not planning for staff returning until after this date.

At the moment, private organisations are being prioritised for the DHSC scheme. However, all organisations can express an interest in the scheme. For some public and statutory organisations, Hertfordshire County Council is planning to supply some workplace testing through a pilot local authority scheme. More information will follow on this soon.

Rapid testing for people with no symptoms is still available through HCC testing sites. If you or your staff need to access a rapid test, HCC has a number of test centres open across the county every day. Visit www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/rapidtest to book an appointment online.

Supporting our communities

Self-isolation Support Day: The county's 10 district and borough councils, supported by Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, had teams out and about on Thursday 18 March as part of Self-Isolation Support Day. The teams visited homes to provide help and advice to people who were self-isolating, either after having tested positive for Covid-19 or after being told they must do so by NHS Test and Trace.

The purpose of the focused activity was to check on people's health and wellbeing while self-isolating, and to make sure they are aware of the support available through HertsHelp, which can assist with practical support such as collecting shopping and vital medical supplies as well as money and debt concerns.

HertsHelp can be reached by phoning 0300 123 4044, or emailing info@hertshelp.net and at www.hertshelp.net. Other agencies are also on hand to help anyone self-isolating, such as the Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Helpline on 08 088 088 088 and Drug and Alcohol Recovery Services on 0800 652 3169.

Hertfordshire Volunteering and People Assistance Cell (VPAC): The Government has now announced that clinically extremely vulnerable people can stop shielding from Thursday 1 April, as virus infection rates continue to fall. Letters to patients with guidance on extra precautions they can take should arrive over the next two weeks. The letters set out practical steps people can follow to reduce their risk of catching the virus, including continuing to maintain strict social distancing, and working from home where possible. VPAC will continue to provide support for those shielding until 31 March and then will use April as a transition period to support residents with finding alternative help where needed.

The COVID Information Project, led by Communities Help Hertfordshire (CHH) is continuing to recruit, train and embed key messages around COVID within local and harder to reach communities. To date, a total of approximately 200 champions have signed up and are actively reaching thousands of residents through established channels. The project was originally funded between January-March and has now been extended for a further three months to support the ongoing COVID response.

VPAC is now working in partnership with providers to establish recovery plans. This includes revising the governance and structure of the programme as well as establishing the principles, priorities and a timeline for how best to build on some of the positives and opportunities which have emerged as a result of the pandemic.

Communities 1st: Communities 1st and partners have continued to recruit volunteers to provide crucial support with both the vaccination centres and school COVID testing. Over 4,000 volunteers have now signed up, and have committed to providing over 50,000 hours of support for vaccination sites in a variety of roles, from stewarding to administration.

Policing update

Officers are still out on patrol policing coronavirus regulations using the well-established four Es approach of engaging, explaining and encouraging people to comply with the rules and using the final E of enforcement as a last resort.

Our additional hot spot patrols will continue as we move out of lockdown, with officers investigating and responding to reported breaches as necessary and liaising with council COVID marshals, environmental health and trading standards officers.

If you believe someone may be breaching the COVID-19 regulations, you can [report information online](#), speak to an operator in our Force Communications Room via our [online web chat](#) or call the non-emergency number 101.

Economic Recovery

New River Bridge: Following a 15 month build during COVID-19, the New River Bridge has opened on time and on budget, providing a greatly improved and resilient road link to Hoddesdon Business Park - one of Hertfordshire's largest employment areas. This vital infrastructure project would not have been possible without £8.9m 'Local Growth Fund' investment secured by the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). Read the full release [here](#).

Stevenage Town Deal: Stevenage has been awarded £37.5m under the Government's Town Deal programme to deliver a suite of regeneration and employment growth projects in the town. The LEP has worked with Stevenage Development Board, Stevenage Borough Council, Herts County Council and other local partners to help secure this funding. It comes on top of the £34m the LEP has invested in Stevenage over the past five years.

Hertfordshire Growth Board: You can find out how Hertfordshire Growth Board partners are delivering the homes, infrastructure and growth needed, now and in the future by listening [here](#).

Helping our businesses to bounce back

The Volunteer Business Support Scheme launched in June 2020 has supported more than 190 businesses, providing over 600 hours of 1-2-1 support. Due to its success and excellent feedback, the scheme has been extended until November 2021 to help even more businesses in Hertfordshire. Read this [blog](#) to find out more.

Economic Recovery Plan Update

Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership will be publishing the next iteration of the Economic Recovery Plan in the summer focusing on post COVID and Brexit growth. Key components include a revised Skills and Employment Strategy, Enterprise Strategy, sector action plans and thematic digital, low carbon and inclusive growth strategies.

Thank you, Darryl.