

Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum Stakeholder Update – 5 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,

Across the board, colleagues have been working hard to ensure a COVID-safe return to school from Monday 8 March and I thank everyone involved in this huge logistical endeavour.

As we move carefully through the four-stage roadmap to ease restrictions, I know you will support our efforts to limit the spread of coronavirus.

Thankfully case numbers continue to fall as the impact of lockdown is felt but the virus is still circulating and it is key that we all continue to social distance, wear face coverings as required and play our part.

Vaccine take up has been impressive across the county and the vast majority of vulnerable and older people in our communities have received their first vaccination. As we roll-out the vaccination programme to younger cohorts I hope the response rate remains as impressive. Certainly, our COVID information champions will be working to reassure anyone hesitating and you can find some great [frequently asked questions here](#).

COVID-19 vaccination programme

The vaccination programme has been rapidly progressing through the priority groups, with 414,930 people across Hertfordshire and west Essex having received their first dose, according to the [latest figures](#).

Within the priority age groups, the percentages of people having received their first vaccine in our area are:

- **94% of people aged 80 and over**
- **100%* of 75-79 year olds** (*the actual number of people in this age group who have been vaccinated with their first dose exceeds the latest official estimate of the population from the Office of National Statistics for this group)
- **96.4% of 70-74 year olds**
- **89.7% of 65-69 year olds**

Over the coming days, people aged **55 and over** will start to receive national invitations to get their vaccine, at the same time as work continues to reach people in other priority groups who have not yet had their first dose. This will include revisiting care homes and people who are housebound if they were unable to have their vaccine previously because of illness or any other reason. Eligible carers who support an adult who is at high risk of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19, or a child who has serious neuro-disabilities and other complications, are also being vaccinated.

Protecting people with learning disabilities

We know that people with learning disabilities are at particular risk from COVID-19, which is why in Hertfordshire the NHS has been vaccinating learning disabled residents for some time.

Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust has released [this film](#) featuring Gavin Howcroft, a learning disability ambassador, receiving his vaccine at Robertson House in Stevenage. HCT staff were able to help Gavin overcome his fear of needles and he is now urging others with learning disabilities to come forward for the vaccine.

New vaccination centre at Ware Priory

Next week (10 March) a new vaccination centre, with appointments bookable through the national booking service, is due to open at Ware Priory. The coordinators of the vaccination centre are working with Hertfordshire Highways to try to ensure that the overnight roadworks scheduled to take place in Ware between 10th - 21st March do not impede access to the vaccination centre.

Vaccine availability and booking appointments

The supply of COVID-19 vaccines currently remains constrained across the UK, but it's expected there will be a significant increase in supply in mid-March. Anyone currently trying to book an appointment through the National Booking Service may find limited availability for a short period, but appointments are constantly updated in line with supply. Anyone who is offered an appointment a long way away should check back online regularly as a more local appointment might become available.

People who book their first vaccine through the National Booking Service can also book their second dose online. Anyone who has had their first vaccine at a GP-led site will be contacted nearer the time to arrange their second dose, when supply information is available.

Over the coming weeks, a new texting service is planned to invite people to book their vaccine. More details will be available soon. Meanwhile, it's important to continue to remind people to watch out for potential scams - the NHS will never ask for payment or bank details for the vaccine.

Getting vital messages out to faith groups

Earlier this week, members of NHS staff, including a practicing GP, took the opportunity to speak to members of the Herts Interfaith Forum at their quarterly meeting.

Information and available resources were shared with representatives of the Interfaith Forum on COVID vaccinations and support services for people affected by Long COVID. The session focused on the different ways people can get their vaccinations, tackling some of the common misconceptions about the vaccine and where people can get further information in a variety of formats and languages, to share with their networks.

COVID testing for people without symptoms

Testing in Hertfordshire is changing, with new processes in place to support the safe return to school by most pupils from 8 March.

Secondary school pupils and school staff (primary and secondary) will need to take twice-weekly tests using home test kits provided by their school. Primary school pupils are not currently being tested.

People living in the same household or childcare or support bubble of a pupil or someone working at a school (infant, primary or secondary school) can get a twice-weekly test:

- at a local test site
- by collecting a home test kit from a local test site
- by ordering a home test kit online
- through their employer if they offer testing to employees

Some local testing sites in Hertfordshire will now supply home testing kits for collection during their afternoon opening hours, usually from 1.30pm to 7pm. The following sites are providing this service:

- Primett Road South Car Park, Stevenage
- Hertford County Hall car park
- University of Hertfordshire De Havilland car park, Hatfield
- Westminster Lodge car park, St Albans
- King George V Park, Watford
- Civic Centre car park, Borehamwood

You can turn up to request a home test kit at one of these sites without an appointment. You can [check online](#) to find your nearest collection point and to find if it is open for collections or busy before you go. These sites are providing PCR tests for people with Covid-19 symptoms during their morning opening hours and people should not turn up for home test kit collections during those hours. Alternatively, you can order home test kits via the gov.uk website, [here](#).

Anyone who tests positive or gets coronavirus symptoms, should tell the school and:

- self-isolate immediately
- get a PCR test to confirm the result
- follow the [stay at home guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection](#)

A negative result means the test did not find signs of coronavirus but doesn't guarantee you do not have coronavirus, so you should continue to follow rules around regular handwashing, social distancing and wearing a face covering where recommended.

More information on testing is available on the gov.uk website

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rapid-lateral-flow-testing-for-households-and-bubbles-of-school-pupils-and-staff>

Care Homes

There continues to be an improved picture in Hertfordshire's care homes, with the number of COVID cases and deaths reducing again this week. The government has issued two new sets of guidance for care homes this week, [Restricting workforce movements](#) as well as [Guidance on care home visiting](#). The Adult Care Services team has issued updated guidance and sent a letter from the Director of Adult Care Services Chris Badger and the Director of Public Health, Jim McManus, to care homes which is available here: www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/serviceupdates.

Although a significant number of friend and family Carers are now eligible to be vaccinated in order to protect the person they care for (see the Q&A [here](#) for more information), Government guidance on the vaccination of unpaid friend and family Carers who are neither registered with a GP or eligible for Carer's Allowance is still to be received. The Council is working to provide data for the NHS regarding these carers. Vaccination for the whole social care workforce is now at 70%, with work ongoing to ensure the process for second doses and areas with lower take-up, such as home care and supported living settings, are targeted with easy access to the vaccine and resources to support those who are concerned about taking up their vaccination.

'Virtual Ward' for COVID patients

Over 60 patients in east and north Hertfordshire have now benefitted from being cared for on a 'virtual ward'. Hertfordshire Community Trust has given suitable patients a kit with which to take their blood pressure, temperature and oxygen saturation levels at regular intervals during the day, supported by routine calls from members of staff.

Patient's information is transmitted to a team and evaluated by clinicians. Any abnormal readings are flagged and the patient is contacted to determine if any additional intervention is needed. The system is suitable both for patients with COVID-19 who have been discharged home from hospital and also those who can be monitored without admission to hospital. Plans are now in place to roll this successful service out to more people.

End of Life survey launched

Across East and North Hertfordshire, a survey has been launched to gain vital feedback on end of life care, to help improve services for patients and their loved ones. Feedback from the survey will help inform care providers what is currently working well and any areas for improvement in end of life care, from a carer's perspective.

Please help by sharing the survey link with others to ensure a good response. Please visit www.healthierfuture.org.uk/eol-survey for further information or to complete the online survey by 31 March 2021.

Supporting our communities

Hertfordshire Volunteering and People Assistance Cell: A new cohort of residents has now been asked to shield, based on a risk assessment. Approximately 26,000 additional people have now joined the 41,000 already shielding in our county. Everyone who has been asked to shield by the NHS has now received a follow up letter and leaflet from Hertfordshire County Council to promote the support which HertsHelp can provide to anyone in need. Demand has increased in response, but remains manageable within the voluntary sector.

An additional £59.1m has now been confirmed nationally for Local Authorities to receive as an extension to the COVID Winter Grant support scheme from 31 March to 16 April. Hertfordshire will receive an additional £866,869, following all the same criteria as per the original funding, so is anticipated to cover the free school meals support offer over the Easter holiday period.

COVID Information Champions: More than 100 residents have signed up so far to provide clear coronavirus messaging to all people across Hertfordshire as COVID Information Champions. The project was launched earlier this year to help to improve residents' understanding of lockdown rules and guidance, and to support as many people as possible to have the vaccine.

The COVID Information Champions are actively working with established community groups and Facebook groups across the county to share key messages and address concerns around the COVID vaccination programme. The key focus at the moment is around vaccine hesitancy, with plans in place to produce videos addressing concerns in a number of different languages.

More information is available on [Hertfordshire County Council's website](#).

Communities 1st: Communities 1st and partners have continued to recruit volunteers to provide crucial support with both the vaccination centres and school COVID testing. Almost 4,000 volunteers have now signed up, and have provided 34,204 hours of support for vaccination sites in a variety of roles, from stewarding to administration.

Policing update

As lockdown restrictions begin to ease from Monday 8 March, it is anticipating that policing coronavirus regulations will become more challenging.

Hertfordshire Constabulary will continue to use the well-established four Es approach, engaging, explaining and encouraging people to comply with the rules at each stage and using enforcement as a last resort.

Additional targeted police patrols continue and officers are investigating and responding to reported breaches as necessary, working with council COVID marshals, environmental health and trading standards officers.

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

Economic Recovery

Volunteer Business Support Scheme: To date, the Volunteer Business Support Scheme has supported 279 businesses, 196 of which are actively receiving mentoring advice and to date, 710 hours of support has been delivered. An extension to the scheme has also now been agreed, with the scheme set to continue until November 2021, with the aim of supporting an additional 150 Hertfordshire small and medium sized enterprises.

Hertfordshire Skills and Employment Strategy: Over 170 stakeholders from across business, local government and education took part in a second webinar to help re-shape the Hertfordshire Skills and Employment Strategy to provide a route-map for recovery and growth up to 2024. Read the full release [here](#).

Thank you, Darryl.