

West Sussex County Council Covid-19 Pandemic Briefing March 2021

Priority issues

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A. National and Local Outbreak Management

West Sussex Covid-19 Data Update

Note: Data change frequently. The information provided as of 10 March 2021.

1. There is a sustained reduction in the number of cases across the county overall. In the 7 days between 26 February and 04 March there were 336 cases, a rate of 38.9 per 100,000 for West Sussex overall; this is lower than the England rate (62.8 per 100,000) and similar to the South East rate (38.2 per 100,000).
2. In the previous 7-day period (19 February to 25 February) there were 623 cases, this means there was a 46% decrease across West Sussex. Even with this fall it should be recognised that the case rate remains relatively high.
3. Within West Sussex, between 26 February to 04 March the incidence rate was highest in Arun (68.4 per 100,000) and Crawley (62.3 per 100,000), and lowest in Horsham (14.6 per 100,000).
4. For people aged 60+ years the case rate across the county (in the period 26 February to 04 March) was 27.4 per 100,000 (South East 26.4 per 100,000, England 38.8 per 100,000) with higher rates in Worthing (50.9 per 100,000), Arun (42.1 per 100,000) and Crawley (38.0 per 100,000).
5. The positivity rate (the percentage of people who are tested being found to be positive) has fallen consistently. In West Sussex between 26 February and 04 March 1.7% of residents tested were positive, this ranged from 2.8% in Crawley to 0.8% in Horsham (South East rate 1.8%, England 2.8%)
6. Hospital numbers are falling Overall the numbers of COVID-19 patients are reducing but remain (as of 09 March) 5% of all inpatients in both Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust, and Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust, and 3% of all inpatients in Western Sussex Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. There is still some activity within High Dependency Units/Intensive Therapy Units (HDU/ITU), but this has dropped considerably.
7. The number of deaths continues to fall. In week ending 26 February there were 183 deaths, of these 42 mentioned COVID-19 on the death certificate. In the previous week there were 222 deaths, with 59 having mentioned COVID-19 on the death certificate.
8. Vaccinations - The Sussex Health and Care Partnership (SHCP) West Sussex newsletter of 04 March shows that approximately 95% of 80+, 75-79 and 70-74 age groups have had their first jab, with almost 90% of clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) and over 85% of the 65-69 age group taking up the offer.

Roadmap out of lockdown

9. On Monday, 22 February 2021, the Prime Minister announced the publication of the 'COVID-19 Response – Spring 2021' which sets out the roadmap out of the current national lockdown for England and how the Government will continue to protect and support citizens across the UK.
10. Vaccines are at the heart of the Government's strategy to manage COVID-19. The UK is deploying the most ambitious vaccination programme in history. So far, over 17 million people have received a vaccine across the UK.
11. The success of the vaccine programme means the Government can begin to chart a course out of lockdown. They are taking a cautious approach to easing lockdown, guided by the data, to avoid a surge in cases which would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS and claim more lives before people have the chance to take a vaccine.
12. Increased vaccination reduces the risk of infection leading to severe disease or death. However, as with other diseases like the flu, some degree of risk will always remain.
13. Over time, scientists expect COVID-19 to become endemic, meaning the virus will reach a stable, and hopefully manageable level. Vaccinations - including revaccination - will be key to managing the transition from pandemic to endemic state. Therapeutics and antivirals will become increasingly important, replacing most non-pharmaceutical interventions over the long-term.
14. Due to the relatively uniform spread of the virus across the country, the Government plans to ease restrictions at the same time across the whole of England, rather than returning to the previous regional tier system. The steps out of lockdown will therefore apply to all regions.
15. Decisions on when to lift restrictions, and in which order, seek to strike a balance between the epidemiological evidence and advice, the impact lockdown is having on people's health (including mental health and disproportionate impacts on certain groups), wellbeing, and the economy. All steps will be led by data rather than dates.
16. Key dates set out by the Government are:

Step 1B	29 March
Step 2	No earlier than 12 April
Step 3	No earlier than 17 May
Step 4	No earlier than 21 June

Steps 2 – 4 are dependent on the Government's review of the latest data on the impact of the previous step against four key tests, ensuring a cautious approach is applied to lifting restrictions.

17. West Sussex County Council is working through the detail of the Roadmap and the impact on services – our key focus will be on working with Government and partners to:

- Fully reopening schools
- Refresh the West Sussex COVID-19 Local Outbreak Control Plan
- Economic recovery
- Clear, joined-up communication with residents, communities and businesses
- Continue to deliver existing services, COVID-19 support (including the community hub) and work with NHS colleagues to support vulnerable residents.
- Supporting the successful administration of COVID-19 secure elections, including the induction of Members

Local Tracing Partnership

18. Last November West Sussex launched the Local Tracing Partnership (LTP) operating on behalf of East Sussex and West Sussex. The programme supports the national NHS Test and Trace system contacting positive COVID-19 cases to obtain information on their contacts. Since the start of the programme the LTP team has contacted 69.6% of the cases passed to them from the national team (data as at 7 March 2021).

19. Case volumes continue to reduce steadily, in line with an encouraging steady and sustained decline in positive case rates across all age groups in West Sussex.

20. In addition to text and emails, the LTP are also contacting new cases by post. This is a further engagement tool for those who don't want to answer calls or where the LTP have an incorrect or missing phone number but have an address that they believe to be correct.

21. To support people where English is not their first language, the West Sussex LTP call handlers have access to in-call interpretation services, and work is being undertaken with the Council's communications team to translate key messages about the LTP into a range of languages to enable greater engagement with these populations.

Symptom-free Community Testing Programme

22. The pan-Sussex Symptom-free Community Testing Programme launched on Wednesday, 10 March as a partnership between West Sussex County Council, East Sussex County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council.

23. Up to 1 in 3 people with COVID-19 have no symptoms. This programme works to rapidly identify people who have COVID-19 but no symptoms, who could be passing it on to others without knowing.

24. Alongside vaccinations, symptom-free testing is an important addition to the fight against the pandemic, helping to break the chains of transmission,

protecting our friends, family, colleagues and communities, and helping us return to life as close to normal as possible.

25. Free, rapid lateral flow tests (LFTs) are available to anyone over the age of 18 who isn't showing signs of COVID-19, who can't work from home and who can't access testing via other means. For example, this could include people who are critical to supporting communities or who are responding to the pandemic (critical workers) or are at a higher risk of infection.
26. Rapid LFTs can be booked at any participating pharmacy anywhere in Sussex, or at one of two dedicated testing sites, one at the Moulsecomb Leisure Centre in Brighton, one at Hove Town Hall. Further details, including how to book and available pharmacies and test sites, can be found on the West Sussex County website www.westsussex.gov.uk/communitytesting.
27. It is important to emphasise that if individuals test negative this does not completely rule out infection with COVID-19, as there can be false negative results. People should continue to follow the preventative measures currently recommended for stopping the spread of COVID-19 ('Hands, Face, Space'), as well as wider measures implemented as part of the national lockdown restrictions.
28. Testing alone will not break the chains of transmission; if individuals test positive, they must self-isolate, and their contacts must also isolate and get tested too to stop the virus spreading further.

Community Collect Service

29. The NHS Test and Trace Service has rapidly expanded its network of testing sites and has more than 500 test sites that will provide Lateral Flow Tests (LFTs) to eligible individuals as part of a new service called Community Collect.
30. Residents will be able to find their nearest site by visiting <https://find-covid-19-rapid-test-sites.maps.test-and-trace.nhs.uk/>.

Managed Quarantine Service (Quarantine Hotels)

31. On Monday, 15 February, new requirements to quarantine when entering England came into force.
32. Managed Quarantine Services are available within West Sussex, due to the location of Gatwick Airport within the county.
33. West Sussex County Council has been asked by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to provide for any Social Care needs, and to provide 'Welcome' packs. The local NHS has organised a response to health needs.
34. The DHSC has provided reassurance to all local authorities in areas where there are Government approved Managed Quarantine Facilities. They have assured West Sussex County Council Public Health that strict infection control measures will be in place to prevent transmission to local communities. These

include mandatory testing for guests and staff, as well as the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), plastic shields and thorough cleaning practices.

35. Security will be in place in and outside accommodation, to support people staying there and ensure people do not leave until they are safe to do so. This means that those living near quarantine facilities should continue to follow COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, only going out when necessary, and remembering to wash their hands regularly, wear face coverings when required, and stay socially distanced from others outside of their household.

COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

36. The NHS (Sussex Health and Care Partnership) is leading the delivery of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme across Sussex, working with Local Resilience Forum partners. The County Council is also supporting the vaccination programme as we work across communities to encourage everyone eligible to have their vaccination.
37. Roll-out of vaccinations continues to progress at great pace via vaccination centres, GP-led vaccination services (including a roving vaccination service providing jabs to care homes and people who are housebound), pharmacy-led services, and hospital hubs (now for second doses).
38. Across Sussex, the SHCP have met the Government target to offer the vaccination to everyone in the first four priority groups, and they are now focussing on priority groups 5, 6, and 7, and offering second doses.
39. Further information about the vaccination programme is available on the SHCP website, including details of the services available in each area, latest data, stakeholder briefings, answers to frequently asked questions and links to all the national leaflets and materials.

B. Education and Skills Update

40. Schools returned to full time provision for all schools from 8 March in line with the Government's roadmap. All schools opened although, for some secondary schools, opening from the 8 March are phasing the return to allow for the mass testing prior to children coming back in full time. This is in line with Government guidance.
41. On the lead up to 8 March, school attendance remained high and above the national average overall. Overall attendance for the first half of the spring term was 17.3% compared to a national average of 14.2% and a regional average of 13.7%. In primary schools, attendance averaged at 24.4% compared to a national average of 21.4% and a regional average of 21.2%. At secondary schools, West Sussex had average attendance of 6% compared to a national average of 4.5% and a regional average of 4.3%.
42. For pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) attendance during the first half of the spring term in was on average 34.3%, compared to a national average of 36.2% and a south east average of 34.6%. Whilst schools have made decisions on attendance based on need, with some

special schools providing a blended approach of in-school and remote learning and therefore full-time provision, this is not reflected in the data capture. For pupils with a Social Worker, in all fully or partially opened schools, 41.8% attended school during the first half term, compared to a national average of 42.0% and an average of 39.7% across the South East.

43. For pupils with free school meal (FSM) eligibility, attendance for FSM eligible pupils, in all fully or partially opened schools, for the first half of the Spring Term 2021 was significantly above the national average at 19.4% compared to a national average of 13.7% and an average of 15.4% across the South East. For pupils of a Critical Worker, attendance in West Sussex schools was, on average, 72.2%, compared to national average of 69.4%, and a national average South East, 69.8%.
44. Special schools remained open but unable to offer face to face for all pupils. RAG rating individual pupils has continued to ensure the most in need are receiving face to face. However, the vaccination of special school staff and those in Specialist Support Centres (SSCs) are advanced and most special school staff have now been vaccinated and are increasing the numbers of children in school.
45. The council managed the distribution of FSM vouchers to those eligible during the February half term at a value of £20 compared to the national scheme of £15.
46. Whilst the school-based staff unions are continuing to exert pressure nationally the Department for Education regarding the full return, locally there appears to be an acceptance that schools will be returning.
47. Home to school transport is working well overall and the transport team are working with our special schools to provide flexibility, based on each school's plans and needs.
48. School Effectiveness Link Advisers are organising a timeline of focused calls with schools over the term to pick up on vulnerable children not in school, on home-based learning provision, and on provision and learning progress for disadvantaged pupils. They are also a key contact for school leaders to raise issues.

C. Care Homes - update

Care homes

49. There are 231 care homes for older people in West Sussex. The care homes provide around 8,540 beds. A third of these are commissioned by the County Council with the remainder commissioned through other local authorities, health or funded directly by residents.
50. For the week commencing 8 March 2021, 32 care homes for older people had a confirmed case among staff and/or residents. In the same period, one learning disability and no mental health services had confirmed cases.

51. For the same week, local data on care homes reports admissions are currently restricted in:
- 26 care homes for older people,
 - 2 extra care settings,
 - 7 care homes for mental health/learning disability,
 - 1 domiciliary care provider, and
 - 3 supported living settings.
52. The Council, working with Public Health and the Clinical Commissioning Group, continues to provide daily support for care services with confirmed outbreaks or identified cases of Covid-19.
53. As part of the roadmap out of lockdown, the Government announced a new single named visitor scheme to begin from 8 March 2021. A recent West Sussex Provider Forum meeting discussed support, advice and guidance for care providers in offering visiting to people living in care homes.
54. By 1 March 2021, 90% of West Sussex care home residents had received their first Covid-19 vaccination. Work is underway to deliver the remaining first doses and prepare for the second doses.
55. By 1 March 2021, West Sussex care homes reported that 75.9% of their employed staff and 40.8% of their agency staff had received their first vaccination. The disparity in take up could in part be a reflection of the challenge for care homes in collecting and submitting data for a diverse workforce. The Council will continue to work with care providers and the vaccination programme to deliver a comprehensive communication plan to promote take up of the vaccination and tackle vaccination hesitancy and myths.

Commissioning

56. Through commissioning activity, alternative solutions and additional capacity has been provided throughout the winter to support additional demand for health and social care support at this time of significant pressure. This has included, for example, interim care settings, block contracting residential and nursing beds and additional 'Home First' care for people being discharged home from hospital. The Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group are working closely together on planning for what provision may be required as we move into 2021/22.

People with learning disabilities

57. In February the national Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation issued updated advice to prioritise people who are on a GP register for learning disabilities. Adults with severe and profound learning disabilities, and those with learning disabilities in long-stay nursing and residential care settings, are now being offered the vaccine as part of priority group 6. In West Sussex around 60% of adults with learning disabilities in this group have received their first vaccination by early March 2021.

Hospital capacity

58. There has been a reduction to Covid-19 related admissions to hospitals. However, usual seasonal demands continue and so there remains pressure on hospital bed capacity. This is anticipated to continue through to the other side of Easter as the NHS begins restoration activity, as lockdown eases, and while a significant number of care homes are still closed due to Covid-19 outbreaks. The Council is working with the hospitals to support timely discharge pathways.
59. Hospital discharge hubs and a combined placement and sourcing team (CPST) continue to operate. Due to continued demand and the number of care homes with restricted admissions, the discharge hubs and the CPST remain under considerable pressure.

D. Reopening the economy

Government Roadmap

60. The West Sussex economy will 'open-up' in accordance with the Government Roadmap, with the indicative date of the 12 April the first major step. Non-essential retail, personal care premises such as hairdressers and nail salons, most outdoor attractions and settings, indoor leisure facilities, and hospitality venues serving people outdoors only are due to reopen. People can also start staying in self-contained accommodation, such as holiday lets, where indoor facilities are not shared with other households.
61. No earlier than 17 May the next stage in reopening the economy will take place with outdoor performances, indoor hospitality and entertainment venues, and the rest of the accommodation sector due to reopen.
62. Many businesses and venues will receive 'Restart Grants' from April 2021 to help them reopen.
63. Further detail is awaited on some aspects of the roadmap, for example on how larger events will be able to operate, and around international travel. This is particularly significant to the county's economy due to the significant impact the pandemic has had on Gatwick Airport, its workforce and businesses.

Impact on the economy

64. The impact of the pandemic on the West Sussex economy continues to be widespread, reflecting the national picture. Whilst some businesses have seen growth such as supermarkets, logistics and home delivery companies, and some health and life sciences companies, overall:
- There has been a significant rise in the numbers of residents claiming Universal Credit, up 160% since January 2020 from 24,760 to 63,680 in January 2021. Crawley has seen the highest percentage increase (188%).

- West Sussex has seen an increase of 10,500 people furloughed since December to 65,000 supported by the Government Job Retention Scheme (provisional date to 31 January 2021).
- Many businesses are experiencing financial challenges, with more than £183 million Government grants and discretionary funding provided to West Sussex businesses affected by lockdown restrictions by local authorities (to 18 January 2021).

Economy Reset Plan

65. In response to the impact of COVID-19 on the West Sussex economy, the Council adopted an [Economy Reset Plan](#) 2020 – 2024 in November 2020 setting out where the Council will focus its resources and seek to work in partnership to support economic recovery.

66. In the last four months the Council has been prioritising:

- Support for enterprises and businesses affected by the pandemic, including through the Recover and Rise support programme with more than 650 participating, and through selecting the development partner for Horsham Enterprise Park to provide new commercial space to meet future business demand.
- The impact on employment and skills to inform the Council's response, and by taking action now e.g. by promoting to businesses the opportunity to secure funding for apprenticeship training through transfer of the Council's apprenticeship levy.
- Initiating a new West Sussex Digital Support Programme working with the District and Borough Councils and the Coast to Capital LEP, to further support business resilience and recovery through digital technologies and skills.
- Supporting the hard-hit tourism sector through the work of the countywide Experience West Sussex Destination Partnership, including the Shop Sussex campaign during the festive season, and the Summer in West Sussex campaign launched on Boxing Day. Collaborative working across Sussex has also been initiated to support sector recovery and future growth. Experience West Sussex is working with partners to ensure appropriate messaging for potential visitors in accordance with public health guidance, and with businesses to plan ways to attract visitors during the autumn and winter to help recover some lost business.
- Working with the District and Borough Councils on refreshing and maintaining the Growth Deals, assessing the impact of COVID-19 and emerging needs. We have continued to progress key schemes during the pandemic, including highway improvements in Crawley to eastern gateway and Manor Royal Business District, public realm in Worthing, and the `place and connectivity` schemes in Burgess Hill.

- Taking a formal decision to invest in the regeneration of Broadbridge Heath Depot through the development of a retail park on the site. Subject to planning, this project will utilise a County Council owned asset to support the economic regeneration of the site for the benefit of the community, generating a return on investment and creating over 130 jobs.
- Supporting rural communities to achieve gigabit-capable broadband by delivering central Government's rural vouchers scheme and 'topping up' the value for West Sussex premises. We are also working with the Department for Education to continue to identify more rural eligible schools for gigabit broadband. Across the county we continue to support businesses to apply for local funding schemes to develop digital services to support growth.
- Developing our regional digital connectivity plans further to create the technology conditions to support West Sussex's development as an innovation zone within the wider region. We are actively working with the telecoms market, public sector and private partners to bring together joint ventures enabled by scalable technology platforms.

67. The Council is working closely with the West Sussex MPs to represent the county regionally and nationally. We will also be working with partners to maximise any potential funding opportunities from Government and other sources to support economic recovery in the county, including the Government's Plan for Jobs, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and any tourism recovery funds.

E. Clinically Extremely Vulnerable and the Community Hub

Clinically Extremely Vulnerable

68. As part of the national lockdown, the Government has advised all Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) people to take extra measures to protect themselves during this period. This has now been extended until the end of March to coincide with the newly announced Roadmap time frame.

69. The County Council receives regular updates to the Shielded Patient List which identifies those who are Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV). As at 10 March 2021 there were 58,485 residents in this CEV group across West Sussex. Since this data first became available in the first wave of the pandemic 3,390 individuals have been removed as their condition no longer classifies them in the most at risk and 3,288 have died.

70. Clinically Extremely Vulnerable individuals, or their friends and family are encouraged to contact the Community Hub or use the online registration service. This service can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-shielding-support>, Individuals registering on this platform and indicating they require support will be telephoned directly by the Community Hub.

Community Hub

71. The Community Hub, launched in late March 2020, remains available to provide a range of support and practical assistance for all residents of West Sussex. The Community Hub telephone lines remain open from 8am to 8pm, 7 days a week supported by website content and a series of e-forms to provide digital access.
72. Since 26th December 2020 the Community Hub has received 4,955 contacts, with 27% of all contact being received from residents in the Arun District. The primary reason for contact was to request support with food (72%), this equates to 1,296 food deliveries and support to 7,268 individuals across West Sussex during this 10-week period.
73. Library Service colleagues are leading work to make outbound contact with the 80+ segment of the CEV cohort. Following contact with over 5400 individuals, 32 referrals have been made to the Prevention and Assessment Team for more complex support needs.
74. The Prevention and Assessment Team are also supporting the 225 individuals who are under 70 and were recently identified via the national Population Risk Assessment and are currently open to Adult Social Care.
75. It is anticipated that Government will formally ask Local Authorities to provide a support offer for individuals self-isolating as a result of a positive test. This is expected to be along the same lines as that currently provided for the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable and can be accommodated within the existing Community Hub model. Confirmation is expected before the end of March 2021.

Libraries

76. Libraries continue to operate a Select & Collect service at the front door, with additional services to reach those CEV and otherwise vulnerable. The Roadmap guidance makes clear that library buildings can be considered for re-opening from 12 April. Ahead of this date we have reviewed our IT access which is permitted under current regulations but was suspended at the point infections were increasing locally. We have reinstated pre booked IT sessions for essential IT access. We have an agile plan in place to deliver the Census 2021 customer support we have been contracted to provide.