

Cheshire West and Chester COVID-19 Outbreak Board Position Statement: Advice to Residents post 19th July 2021

As we approach 19th July and Step 4 of the national COVID road map out of lockdown, many of the existing control measures will no longer be a legal requirement for us to follow.

Our infection rates are still very high in the area and continuing to increase. Currently, Cheshire West and Chester has an infection rate of 334 per 100,000 up to 7th July, a 25% increase from the previous week, and the rates are continuing to rise. The rates are highest in the 20-29 age range and we are now seeing more people (currently over 60 admissions) requiring treatment for COVID in our local hospitals.

In the light of rising COVID-19 infections locally and changes to the national COVID-19 restrictions, we are asking those living, working and visiting Cheshire West and Chester, to go above and beyond the minimum guidance required.

Our advice will also support the recovery of our local businesses and the wider economy, as increased transmission of the virus will result in major disruptions if staff are unable to work due to being unwell with COVID-19 and legally required to self-isolate.

We are asking everyone not to see the 19th July as a reason to stop all the good practices that have helped to reduce the spread of the virus and which have protected our communities and loved ones over the past 16 months, especially when in close contact with others.

The hugely successful mass vaccination programme has weakened the link between infection, the risk of hospitalisation and loss of life. This is incredibly encouraging, but unfortunately it is not the end of the story. It is clear that a massive rise in infections will impact on our unvaccinated children and teenagers and those who have not been vaccinated, either due to personal choice or another medical reason.

We have seen a tremendous uptake of our local vaccine programme so far, with 84% of eligible adults now having their first dose, and 66% having their second dose. We will continue to make getting your vaccine as easy as possible, taking it to areas of the lowest uptake and encouraging people to have their vital second dose.

A very real danger of significant continued transmission is the risk of yet another mutation of the virus that is both easier to catch and could render our current vaccines powerless, essentially taking us back to square one. This is something that is constantly being monitored and makes it doubly important that we continue the good behaviours.

The people of west Cheshire have pulled together through all stages of the pandemic to look after and protect each other. It is vital that we keep this up as we go forward.

People living, visiting and working in Cheshire West and Chester are advised to:

- **Get fully vaccinated** – it's shown to be safe and effective against the virus, including new variants and is the best way to keep yourself from getting seriously ill. It also reduces the risk of passing the virus on to someone else

- **Be kind and considerate of** others who may be feeling extremely nervous about the further lifting of restrictions
- **Continue wearing face coverings** in crowded indoor areas where social distancing cannot be followed, such as supermarkets and on public transport, in health and social care settings, such as hospitals, care homes and GP surgeries, and where it would make others feel more comfortable
- **Continue social distancing** by not unnecessarily being in crowded areas and continuing to work from home if possible
- **Try to meet others outside where possible**
- **Continue to practice good hand hygiene, in particular hand washing**
- **Keep getting tested** – everyone should undertake twice weekly rapid symptom free testing using Lateral Flow Tests (LFT). If people experience generally associated symptoms such as a headache, a stuffed or runny nose, tiredness or weakness, aches and pains, sore throat or diarrhoea, they should take an LFT and follow up with a PCR test if the LFT test is positive. If people have any of the main symptoms of COVID-19 such as a high temperature, a new continuous cough or loss or change to their sense of smell or taste they must stay at home and book a PCR test.
- **Self-isolate** if you have been in contact with someone who has COVID-19, especially if you work in a high-risk setting

Businesses and workplaces in Cheshire West and Chester are also asked to:

- **Continue to adhere to COVID-19 working safely guidance**, including provision of washing facilities and proper ventilation with external fresh air.
- **Continue to engage with the Test, Trace and Isolate process**, and increase testing if your workplace has had an outbreak.
- Encourage your employees to **get tested** if they suspect they have COVID-19 symptoms and self-isolate if positive.
- Encourage your employees to have **both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine** when it is offered.

It is difficult to say when this way of living will come to an end, but we know that we are likely to have a very difficult winter ahead of us. After months of isolated lives, other infectious diseases are likely to increase. But, by maintaining our good practices in hand hygiene, face coverings and social distancing, our behaviours will all have a positive effect on reducing their impact in west Cheshire.

We are advising that these good practices continue after the 19th July, and caution where people feel uncomfortable. All of this will help in reducing the spread of the virus, protecting communities and loved ones as we have done since the start of the pandemic.

Thank you once again to all of our residents and businesses. We've done so much by all working together and playing our part. We are asking that we all continue to look after each other and turn this around.

ENDS