

KENT AND MEDWAY JOINT HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

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COVID-19 LOCAL OUTBREAK CONTROL PLAN

Report from: Andrew Scott-Clark, Director of Public Health for Kent
County Council

James Williams, Director of Public Health for Medway
Council

Author: Logan Manikam, Interim Public Health Consultant

Summary

This report provides an update on steps taken to mitigate rising cases of COVID-19 across both Kent and Medway as it relates to the Local Outbreak Control Plan (LOCP). It also includes a summary of LOCP-related questions received from members of the public and answers provided by Public Health Officers (located in Appendix 1).

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1. As part of the Department of Health and Social Care's COVID-19 response and recovery strategy, Upper Tier and Unitary Local Authorities in England were mandated to develop a COVID-19 Local Outbreak Control Plan to reduce the virus' spread.
- 1.2. National government has allocated a number of tranches of funding to support the Plan's delivery. An additional £400 million has recently been allocated nationally to local authorities through the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) as part of the National Road Map to restoring services in Medway. Local authorities will be notified in due course how much of this resource will be available to support outbreak management through 2021/22. The COVID-19 Local Outbreak Control Plan (LOCP) will follow national outbreak management standards and will be revised and updated in line with Contain programme requirements. This Plan was published online on 30 June 2020; its most recent iteration was published on the 24 December 2020 and is currently being revised to take account of the recent announcements related to easing restrictions in England. All LOCPs are required to be updated and resubmitted to National Contain Team by the 31 March 2021.

2. Background

2.1 Responding to a Rise in Cases and Setting Out Plans to Leave Lockdown

- 2.1.1. Transmission rates of COVID-19 in Kent and Medway rose considerably over the course of the months that followed the last convening of the Joint Health and Wellbeing Board. This was attributed to a range of factors, however the primary cause appears to have been the emergence of a new variant of the disease having originated in Kent. This new variant was significantly more transmissible, increasing rates of infection. Preliminary evidence suggests this UK variant and others now circulating across the world (South African, Brazilian) may cause more severe illness amongst those infected, leading to increased risk of hospitalisation.
- 2.1.2. More stringent restrictions were placed on the public to contain these novel variants and protect NHS capacity. There was a brief return to Tiered restrictions at the beginning of December and a subsequent full national lockdown that was implemented in January 2021. This has meant the nation has mostly remained in lockdown since the time of the last JHWB meeting.
- 2.1.3. There have been a number of successful interventions that have supported the reduction of the rates of transmission in Kent and Medway. These include the establishment of symptom free test sites in Medway and Kent and the rollout of the national vaccination programme. These 2 innovations have played a key part in the road map to exit lock down announced by the UK Prime Minister on 22 February 2021. There are 4 key elements to the road map. These are:
- 1) The continued effective deployment of the national vaccine programme,
 - 2) Evidence to show vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths amongst those vaccinated,
 - 3) No surge in infection rates and hospitalisation
 - 4) No new change in risks due to new Variants of Concern.

There will be a minimum of 5 weeks between each step with the data and evidence reviewed to enable any risks to be assessed and action taken. An overview of the key elements of the road map is set out over the next sections, however a detailed breakdown can be accessed [here](#).

- 2.1.4. Step 1, starting 8 March 2021, will prioritise returning all children and students back to face-to-face education and – from 29 March 2021 - expanding allowances for outdoor social gatherings and sports activities.
- 2.1.5. Step 2, starting no earlier than 12 April 2021, will aim to see the return of non-essential retail, public buildings, leisure facilities, hospitality venues (for outdoor service) and personal care services (hairdressers and nail salons). Most outdoor attractions and settings will also reopen although wider social contact rules will still apply to prevent indoor mixing between different

households. Self-contained accommodation, including holiday lets for those in single households, can also reopen.

- 2.1.6. Step 3, starting no earlier than 17 May 2021, will aim to see the end of most social contact rules – although gatherings of over 30 people will remain illegal. Indoor entertainment will still apply the rule of 6 or 2 household caps, though this will remain under close review.
- 2.1.7. Step 4, starting no earlier than 21 June 2021, will aim to see the end of all legal limits on social contact, the reopening of nightclubs, large events and performances and, potentially, the removal of all limits on weddings and other major life events.
- 2.1.8. MPs will vote on the regulations that will enable this roadmap in Parliament between the end of February and early March.

2.2. Updates to Local Testing and Tracing Capabilities

- 2.2.1. Changes to Testing and Tracing protocols in Kent and Medway have been made to meet the increase in demand seen over the last few months. The roll-out of rapid testing and local tracing has successfully helped to reduce community transmission levels. Door-to-door surge testing has contributed to national surveillance for novel variants of the disease.
- 2.2.2. Door-to-door testing was launched in the ME15 area of Kent on 2 February 2021 to better understand the prevalence of novel strains within the community, particularly the South African variant. At the time of this report, no cases of the South African variant have been notified to local public health teams, however sequencing of the test samples is ongoing.
- 2.2.3. Both Medway and Kent County Council have launched their own mass symptom free COVID-19 rapid testing programmes. Medway and Kent County Council have successfully launched 5 and 24 permanent sites for residents to choose from respectively. Multiple pop-up sites are also available to meet local surge requirements.
- 2.2.4. Underpinned by Lateral Flow Tests (LFTs), this rapid testing has enabled both Medway and Kent County Council to better understand levels of asymptomatic transmission in their communities. LFTs enable a test result to be obtained within 30 mins; this helps to break the chain of onward transmission as any close contacts of an identified case can be instructed to self-isolate within an hour of testing.
- 2.2.5. Both programmes have been developed in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). Using local data on disease transmission and prevalence, testing was initially prioritised for key workers and in areas with the highest disease prevalence before access was rolled out to broader swathes of the population. Invitations to take up this service have been sent out via text messaging, emails, targeted social media posts and personal letters to households identified as being of greatest need.

2.2.6. In partnership with NHS Test and Trace, both Kent and Medway have established Local Tracing Partnerships. These services verify the contact details of those whom national handlers are unable to trace using local data sources. Individuals are then followed by local test and trace staff to ensure they comply with necessary self-isolation or testing measures.

2.3. The Vaccine Programme

2.3.1. The management and roll-out of the vaccination programme is the responsibility of the DHSC. Medway Council and Kent County Council are working closely with stakeholders from the Kent and Medway CCG and DHSC to ensure all those eligible are vaccinated inline with the 9 national priority groups. To date, the UK has vaccinated nearly 18 million people in line with the key groups (1-4) identified by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). These are:

- All residents in a care home for older adults and their carers
- All those 80 years of age and over and frontline health and social care workers
- All those 75 years of age and over
- All those 70 years of age and over and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals

2.3.2. Vaccination is now being offered to groups 5 to 6, with the aim of all those eligible adults in England being vaccinated by July 2021.

2.3.3. Vaccines are currently delivered by three types of vaccination sites:

1. Vaccination centres – using large-scale venues such as football stadiums; accessed via a national booking service
2. Hospital hubs – using NHS Trusts across the country
3. Local vaccination services – made up of sites led by general practice teams collaborating via pre-established primary care networks and pharmacy teams through community pharmacies

2.4. Managing COVID-19 in the Context of Britain's Exit from the EU

2.4.1. The Brexit Transition period ended on the 1 January 2021. There were a number of COVID-19 related parallel challenges that affected Kent and Medway during this phase. The emergence of the Kent novel COVID-19 variant (VUI-202012/01) affected border control prior to the start of the new year. Travel and the transportation of goods between the UK and mainland Europe via the Dover border came to a standstill on 19 December 2020 due to the French government imposing strict border controls to prevent the transmission of the new UK variant strain. Traffic flows began to ease on 23 December 2020, however any person travelling into France needed to have a negative Lateral Flow Test before being allowed through the ports and Eurotunnel.

2.4.2. The ongoing restrictions at the border extended into the new year with new paperwork requirements causing delays to haulage times. The plans developed to cope with these challenges (stress tested through the Local Outbreak Control Plan) were brought into operation. The Kent LRF and KCC

Public Health team managed the issues and have enabled vehicle movements and goods and services to be travel freely. Ongoing oversight of this issue is in hand to manage any COVID-19 related issues.

2.5. Local Outbreak Engagement Board (LOEB) Public Engagement Strategy

- 2.5.1. In accordance with the recommendations made by the Joint Board on 17 September 2020, a form for residents to engage with the Joint Board regarding the LOCP was hosted online prior to the upcoming Joint Board meeting. This [form](#) was hosted on the Medway Council website; Kent residents were signposted to the link via Kent County Council's COVID web pages. Prior to this JHWP meeting, members of the public were able to submit questions from the close of the last JHWP meeting up until 1 March. For future JHWP meetings, questions may be submitted no earlier than 4 weeks but no later than 2 weeks before the meeting date.
- 2.5.2. Appendix 1 to the report sets out the questions falling within the agreed criteria that emerged during this process and have been answered by stakeholders from both Kent and Medway Council. The Joint Board are invited to discuss the key themes and public concerns in the upcoming meeting.

2.6. Stress Testing Local COVID-19 Outbreak Control Plan

- 2.6.1. Only one additional stress test has been conducted since the last Joint Health and Wellbeing Board meeting. Details are provided below:

EU Exit Manston Site Stress Test

In preparation for the UK's exit from the EU, Operation Fennel raised several issues relating to COVID-19 that will need to be addressed on an ongoing basis. This includes (i) access to Pillar 2 testing sites due to traffic congestion, specifically regional sites at Manston and in North Kent, local testing sites in Canterbury and any mobile testing sites and (ii) outbreaks occurring at lorry holding sites (Manston, Sevington and Waterbank). This scenario focused on how the Manston management team would respond when a driver presents as symptomatic for COVID-19 while on-site. Issues raised included where to accommodate drivers when required to self-isolate, how to track contacts effectively, how to replenish staff numbers and how to manage communications regarding the range of stakeholders involved without raising undue alarm or prematurely shutting operations. This stress test included stakeholders from Stone Hill, SEACamb, the Department for Transport (DfT), HM Revenue and Customs, the Border and Protocol Delivery Group of the Cabinet Office, Thanet District Council, Kent County Council, the KRF, Op Fennel, the Kent and Medway CCG, PHE and NHS England and NHS Improvement South East. Time was allocated at the start of this meeting to allow stakeholders present to suggest improvements to Stone Hill Park's Manston EU Exit Operations COVID-19 Policy & Procedures Document. Best practice that emerged out

of the hypothetical scenario posed was incorporated into the revised Policy and Procedures Document.

3. Risk Management

- 3.1. By running stress test exercises on a variety of scenarios related to the LOCP, as outlined in Section 2.6, we aim to minimise the risks associated with similar events occurring by (i) identifying any gaps within the LOCP (ii) creating awareness of the communication channels that exist between the agencies (iii) creating awareness of the roles of different agencies (iv) clarifying the escalation triggers and process (v) identifying areas where additional support may be required (vi) identifying any potential challenges and their solutions (vii) identifying actions that need to be taken and when.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1. As a result of recent changes made to the Contain Outbreak Management Fund, additional resources are now available for eligible councils who need support in enforcing Local COVID Alert Levels in their communities.
- 4.2. Initial funding was provided through the Test, Track & Trace Support Grant using 2020/21 Public Health allocations as a basis for distribution. Additional funding of £8 per head of population for those Local Authorities in the highest tier of national restrictions was in place up to 2 December 2020. Since then the funding has been £4 per head of population per 28 days for those Upper Tier authorities in the highest tier of restrictions. Additional funding has been made available to cover the costs of providing symptom free community testing.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1. Kent County Council (KCC) and Medway Council, under the leadership of the Directors of Public Health, have a statutory duty to protect the population's health by responding to and managing communicable disease outbreaks which requires urgent investigation and presents a public health risk.
- 5.2. The legal context for the councils' response to COVID-19 sits within the following Acts:
- The Coronavirus Act 2020
 - Health and Social Care Act 2012
 - Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984
- 5.3. The Kent and Medway Joint Health and Wellbeing Board has been established as an advisory joint sub-committee of the Kent Health and Wellbeing Board and the Medway Health and Wellbeing Board under Section 198(c) of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 for a time limited period of four years from 1 April 2020.

- 5.4. The Joint Board seeks to encourage persons who arrange for the provision of any health or social care services in the area to work in an integrated manner and ensure collective leadership to improve health and well-being outcomes across both local authority areas.
- 5.5. The Joint Board is advisory and may make recommendations to the respective Kent and Medway Health and Wellbeing Boards.
- 5.6. As part of the Department of Health and Social Care's COVID-19 response and recovery strategy, Upper Tier and Unitary Local Authorities in England were mandated to develop a COVID-19 Local Outbreak Control Plan to reduce the viruses' spread.
- 5.7. The Coronavirus Act 2020, Health Protection (Coronavirus Restriction) (England) Regulations 2020 now gives DPHs the authority to close individual premises and public outdoor places as well as restrict events with immediate effect if they conclude it is necessary and proportionate to do so without making representations to a magistrate. DPHs are required to notify the Secretary of State as soon as reasonably practicable after the direction is given and review to ensure that the basis for the direction continues to be met, at least once every 7 days.

6. Recommendation

- 6.1. The Kent and Medway Joint Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to consider and note this update report and the questions submitted by members of the public on the Local Outbreak Control Plan together with the responses provided by stakeholders from both Kent and Medway Council (Appendix 1).
- 6.2. The Kent and Medway and Joint Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to agree that the questions submitted by members of the public on the Local Outbreak Control Plan together with the responses set out at Appendix 1 to the report are published on each Council's website in accordance with the agreed engagement strategy.

Lead Officer Contact

Dr Logan Manikam, Interim Public Health Consultant
E: logan.manikam@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Public Questions Regarding the Local Outbreak Control Plan and Answers

Background papers

None

Appendix 1 – Public Questions Regarding the Local Outbreak Control Plan and Answers

1. Safety Concerns:

'What will you do to protect people that work in care, whether it's home care, day centre or anyone in direct contact with possible COVID patients. How will you protect carers from being unknowingly exposed to COVID by patients with severe mental illness or dementia who are unable to test, for example?'

The Local Outbreak Control Plan sets out the robust infection control measures in place to limit the level of risk experienced by all care workers. These measures are in keeping with current government guidance on how to support safe working in these settings; these can be found on gov.uk [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). Guidance for care staff supporting adults with learning disabilities, mental illness or severe autism specifically can be found on the [social care institute for excellence website](#) and the [Public Health England website](#). Finally, the MHRA has recently authorised the use of home-based lateral flow testing for care home staff; this will enable all care workers to access twice-weekly lateral flow test in addition to a weekly PCR test, further minimising risk of outbreak in this highly-sensitive workplace.

All patients must give their informed consent to be tested unless they are unable to do so for medical reasons; in this instance, permission must be granted from those acting as the patients' representative in accordance with the Mental Health Act (1983).

'Are there plans to have officers patrolling the main high streets in Medway to ensure that the COVID-19 rules are adhered to?'

Medway Council has its Medway Greeters, the local version of the Covid Marshalls, operating in the High Streets. They work to encourage social distancing and public safety in these areas. Where necessary they can quickly raise issues of concern to the relevant enforcement agencies.

Officers from the Trading Standards and Environmental Health teams, working in partnership with Kent Police, also make periodic inspections of the High Streets and respond to issues/complaints. Where appropriate and proportionate these officers can issue formal Prohibition Notices and Fixed Penalty Notices for failures to comply with *The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions)(All Tiers)(England) Regulations 2020*.

2. Clarifying lockdown restrictions:

'How will it work if we are lockdown in Kent but I work in London - can we still travel?'

That depends on your occupation. During national lockdown, the general public is encouraged to work from home if they are able to. If they are unable to do so, then commuting to work is permissible; however, this is only permitted in very specific circumstances. Key workers and occupations included in the [government's list of jobs that qualify for travel exemptions](#) are permitted to continue working outside of the home.

3. Return to normality:

'Will we be able to go to watch Gillingham FC play?'

The Government released its roadmap for exiting the current national lockdown on 22 February 2021. This 4-step roadmap set down key milestones for the loosening of social restrictions, including the banning of spectators from attending football matches. While each step will be dependent on the success of the former (measured against 4 key tests to check for the continued effectiveness of the vaccine programme, the reduction of hospitalisations and deaths due to COVID-19, the reduction of prevailing rates of the disease and the containment of Variants of Concern), outdoor sports such as football, golf and tennis will be allowed to resume in England from 29 March 2021. In collaboration

with the English Football League (EFL), a series of pilot events alongside will be conducted in April to assess the safety of matches for spectators. If these pilots are successful and the Government's roadmap remains on schedule, spectators will be allowed to return to the pitch after 17 May 2021. At this time, indoor sporting events will be allowed up to 1,000 people or 50% of a venue's capacity (whichever is the lower figure); outdoor events will an allowance of up to 4,000 attendees or a venue capacity of 50% (whichever is the lower figure). It is hoped that after 21 June 2021, all legal limits on social contact will be lifted and it will be safe to lift these final capacity restrictions.

4. Asymptomatic Testing:

'As resident of Medway who is a key critical worker, how do I get tested under the mass testing?'

You will be invited to participate in our Asymptomatic Rapid Testing scheme by either letter, NHS-NoReply or email. Enclosed within your invitation will be an explanation of what this process involves along with a link to register for an appointment of your choosing. Depending on your place of work, you may also be eligible for at-home Lateral Flow Testing; this is something to enquire about with your employer. You can also access information on access to symptom free testing on [Medway Council's website](#).

'Myself and my wife live in High Halstow and have received a letter stating we are eligible for a free COVID19 test. Our nearest centre would be Chattenden but we do not know where the test centre is located. Can you please help us? Thank you.'

The Chattenden Testing Center is located at the following address: Chattenden Community Centre, Swinton Avenue, Chattenden, Rochester, ME3 8PH

'I live in Medway and have had a text invite me to symptom free testing. My boyfriend has been living with me although his known address is in Sittingbourne. Would he be eligible for a test in Medway too as that is where he is currently staying with me?'

If your boyfriend is a member of your household then he would be eligible for this test within Medway. That said, he must book his test separately to your own appointment. If he is only staying with you temporarily, then he is encouraged to seek out regular rapid testing within Sittingbourne. The full list of Asymptomatic Testing Sites in Kent can be found at: <https://kcc.healthit.org.uk/covbook/home>.

'What are the arrangements for residents to have rapid 20-minute tests and who takes priority?'

Rapid Lateral Flow Tests are available for asymptomatic residents in both Kent and Medway; these resources cannot be used by those who are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 – in this instance, PCR testing must be requested. Anyone who lives within Kent and Medway are able to access this service, however, slots are currently prioritised for those who are unable to work from home. A full list of testing sites within Kent can be found on [Kent County Council's website](#), a full list of asymptomatic testing sites within Medway can be found [on Medway Council's website](#) Booking slots are available on a first-come-first-served basis.

5. Public Transparency:

'Please could you publish a transcript of this briefing?'

Medway Council does not routinely publish transcripts of Council Committee meetings including the Kent and Medway Joint Health and Wellbeing Board meetings, however minutes and recordings of these events can be found on the [Council's website](#). For the Kent and Medway Joint Board they may be found [here](#).