

## **MEDWAY HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD**

**18 NOVEMBER 2021**

### **COVID-19 LOCAL OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT PLAN BRIEFING**

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#### Summary

This report will provide an update on the Local Outbreak Management Plan (LOMP) including top-level outcomes of recent stress tests made since the last update was presented to the Board on 2 September 2021.

#### 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 Management Plan (LOMP) to reduce the spread of the virus within the community.
- 1.2. On 25 February 2021, Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) requested that the LOMP be updated to reflect the changed landscape of the pandemic and to consolidate the best practice that has emerged locally in its first year through the creation of a Best Practice Document. The objectives of these updates are outlined below:
  - To ensure that updated fit for purpose local outbreak management plans is in place across England
  - To identify any additional support Local Authorities may need from national or regional teams, particularly in relation to surge activity to detect new variants
  - To identify good practice and local and regional level– most particularly in respect to Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs) that can be used to reduce/prevent transmission of the virus and use this learning to inform regional and national policy

- To ensure there is effective governance and clarity on roles/responsibilities at all levels of response
- To ensure Local Outbreak Management Plans reflect cross-cutting considerations, such as inequalities
- To provide ongoing assurance and justification of the need for financial support from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) and self-isolation fund

1.3. The Medway [Local Outbreak Management Plan](#) is currently being revised following recent updates to the [COVID-19 Contain Framework](#) on 7 October 2021. The contain framework sets out how national, regional, and local partners will work with each other, the public, businesses, institutions, and other local partners in the community to prevent, contain and manage COVID-19 outbreaks.

1.4. Local authorities receive additional funding from central government through the COMF. This funding is directly allocated to support delivery of the objectives set out in the Contain Framework.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. *Responding to the Rise in Cases Nationally and Locally*

2.1.1. Rates of COVID-19 in the UK and Medway have increased since the Medway Health and Wellbeing Board last convened. This increase in cases is predominantly due to higher number of cases detected among unvaccinated children of secondary school age. However, with a sufficiently high proportion of the population vaccinated and evidence to suggest that vaccination reduces the risk of acquiring infection, getting as many people vaccinated as possible will enable the country to return to a level of normality. There will however be a need to still be conscious of the potential risks posed by COVID-19 and have the capability to provide a proportionate response if required.

2.1.2. The Government published a [Covid 19 Autumn and Winter Plan](#) on 14 September 2021- a comprehensive approach designed to steer the country through autumn and winter 2021-21. The plan aims to sustain the progress made and prepare the country for future challenges, while ensuring the National Health Service NHS does not come under unsustainable pressure. The Government plans to achieve this by:

- Building our defences through pharmaceutical interventions: vaccines, antivirals and disease modifying therapeutics
- Identifying and isolating positive cases to limit transmission: Test, Trace and Isolate
- Supporting the NHS and social care: managing pressures and recovering services
- Advising people on how to protect themselves and others: clear guidance and communications

- Pursuing an international approach: helping to vaccinate the world and managing risks at the border.

2.1.3. In case the above Plan A is not sufficient to keep the virus at manageable levels, the Government has taken the responsible step of undertaking contingency planning known as Plan B which would only be enacted if the data suggests further measures are necessary to protect the NHS. Measures which can help control transmission of the virus while seeking to minimise economic and social impacts will be prioritised. This includes:

- Communicating clearly and urgently to the public that the level of risk has increased, and with it the need to behave more cautiously
- Introducing mandatory vaccine-only COVID-status certification in certain settings where large crowds gather
- Legally mandating face coverings in certain settings

The Government would also consider asking people once again to work from home if they can, for a limited period.

2.1.4. The Delta variant (B.1.617.2) remains to be the most dominate circulating VOC in the UK. However, no new VOCs have been detected in the UK and in Medway since the detection of the Delta variant in April 2021. No surge testing for new variants has been required or undertaken in Medway. Detailed information on all variants and variants under investigation can be found on the Government website under [Technical Briefing 26](#) published by UKHSA and recently updated on 22 October 2021.

## **2.2. *Asymptomatic Testing***

2.2.1 In addition to current Autumn and Winter Plan, the Director of Public Health (DPH) continues to take several other measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 in Medway including Asymptomatic Testing.

2.2.2 Medway Council continues to provide a flexible and dynamic mode of testing comprising a hybrid model of outreach, a static testing site, community collect sites, home direct online testing, and community pharmacy access. These alternative, more holistic models have enabled Medway to better serve the needs of its community. All Medway Residents are able to access testing through a wide variety of convenient modes including community collect sites, pop-up sites, pharmacy collect options, and online home test kits. Three community collect sites are structured to deliver home test kits to the Medway populace. The pop-up/agile sites provide onsite testing and distribution of home test kits in different locations around Medway. The static site also contributes to asymptomatic testing and delivering home test kits. The exact address of this permanent testing site is:

- University of Greenwich Sports Hall, North Chatham Maritime, Chatham, ME4 4GW

2.2.3 This initiative is operating in accordance with a framework provided by the Department of Health and Social Care. A critical part of asymptomatic testing is Targeted Community Testing (TCT) which aims to reach disproportionately Impacted Groups. TCT has now been extended till the end of December 2021 and continues to be a part of the government's response to the pandemic. Across Medway the focus of TCT has been on the homeless; Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic groups; people with dependencies on drugs and alcohol; population dense areas, people of low socioeconomic status; pregnant women; men; people in high-risk occupations and sex workers. However, all Medway residents are encouraged to undertake symptom-free testing twice per week in line with government guidelines.

### **2.3 The Vaccination Programme**

- 2.3.1 The management and roll-out of the vaccination programme is the responsibility of the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC). Medway Council is working closely with stakeholders from the DHSC to support them in meeting their vaccination targets for the local area. To date, this programme has offered vaccination to all those 16 years of age and older, residents of care homes, frontline health and social care workers, clinically extremely vulnerable individuals, and those with underlying health conditions. In line with the programme rollout, coverage is highest in the oldest age groups. Anyone who, for whatever reason, was missed in priority groups is also being offered the vaccine.
- 2.3.2 Based on the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and the four UK Chief Medical Officers, the COVID-19 vaccination programme for children aged 12-15 years started in October 2021 and has seen thousands of young people around the country, including Medway, getting their first dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. Healthy school-aged children aged 12 to 15 primarily receive their COVID-19 vaccination in their school. The vaccine programme is being administered by healthcare staff from the School Age Immunisation Service teams. There are alternative provisions for those who are home-schooled, in secure services or specialist mental health settings.
- 2.3.3 New data shows that nearly 20 per cent of the most critically ill COVID patients are pregnant women who have not been vaccinated, therefore pregnant women are encouraged to get the COVID-19 vaccine.
- 2.3.4 The JCVI was asked by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to consider the options for and timing of a booster programme to revaccinate adults in order to reduce mortality, morbidity, and hospitalisations from COVID-19 over the 2021 to 2022 winter period and through 2022. The recommendations of the JCVI are based on latest epidemiological COVID-19 data in the UK, mathematical modelling, data on vaccine effectiveness and data from clinical trials.

2.3.5 The JCVI now advises that for the COVID-19 Booster Vaccine Programme, individuals who received vaccination in Phase 1 of the COVID-19 vaccination programme (priority groups 1 to 9) should be offered a third dose COVID-19 booster vaccine. Booster jabs have now been rolled out in the country and in Medway for those who are eligible which include:

- those living in residential care homes for older adults
- all adults aged 50 years or over
- frontline health and social care workers
- all those aged 16 to 49 years with underlying health conditions that put them at higher risk of severe COVID-19 (as set out in the green book), and adult carers
- adult household contacts (aged 16 or over) of immunosuppressed individuals.

2.3.6 Vaccines continue to be majorly delivered by two types of vaccination sites:

1. Vaccination centres – using large-scale venues such as football stadiums; accessed via a national booking service
2. 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.

2.3.7 All vaccination delivery options are available in Medway.

2.3.8 As of 25 October 2021, 49,715,228 people in the UK have been inoculated with their first dose and 45,561,445 with their second dose of the vaccine. In Medway as of 25 October 2021, around 192,691 people have received their first dose of vaccine with second doses at 176,912.

## **2.4. *Monitoring Events over the Course of the Autumn and Winter Plan***

2.4.1. Events in Medway are allowed to take place in a COVID-secure manner following a completed health and safety risk assessment that includes risks from COVID-19 and putting measures in place to reduce the risk of transmission. Mass gatherings and events will continue to be risk assessed by the Public Health Team and COVID-19 Enforcement and Restrictions Cell.

2.4.2. Mandatory vaccine-only certification will be part of the Government's Plan B if the data suggests action is required to prevent unsustainable pressure on the NHS. Mandating vaccine-only certification would be preferable to closing venues entirely or reimposing social distancing. Mandatory vaccine-only certification would be introduced for visitors to the following venues:

- All nightclubs;
- Indoor, crowded settings with 500 or more attendees where those attendees are likely to be in close proximity to people from other households, such as music venues or large receptions;

- Outdoor, crowded settings with 4,000 or more attendees where those attendees are likely to be in close proximity to people from other households, such as outdoor festivals; and
- Any settings with 10,000 or more attendees, such as large sports and music stadia.

## **2.5. Outbreak Management in Schools**

2.5.1. The contingency framework for education and childcare settings sets out the principles of managing local outbreaks of COVID-19 (including responding to variants of concern) in education and childcare settings. The Government policy objective for children and young people is to maximise school attendance with its associated educational, safeguarding and health benefits. The UKHSA- previously the National Institute for Health Protection- has stated that additional interim actions have been agreed to support COVID-19 outbreak management in schools. These are:

- Steps to increase participation in twice weekly LFD home testing for secondary aged pupils, including directly communicating with parents on the importance of regular testing
- Increased access to LFD testing for schools and colleges to be used in response to outbreaks or in areas of high prevalence. This can include daily LFD testing for students identified as close or household contacts while awaiting a PCR result
- UKHSA and Department for Education have committed to further engagement with Association of Directors of Public Health, DPHs and local health protection teams on the issues in education settings.

## **3. Risk Management**

3.1. By running stress test exercises on a variety of scenarios related to the LOMP, we aim to minimise the risks associated with similar events occurring by (i) identifying any gaps within the LOMP, (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 and (vii) identifying actions that need to be taken and when.

3.2. On 9 September 2021 a stress test exercise was conducted via MS Teams, specifically a university outbreak scenario exercise. Discussions were focused on a number of areas including; isolation, contact tracing, additional support available to students both internally in schools and externally in Medway (food parcels, mental health etc), and communication. Challenges were highlighted and solutions were provided in order to further minimise the risks and consequences of a COVID-19 outbreak at a university.

## 4. Consultation

- 4.1. Stress Testing the LOMP, as described in paragraph 3.1 of the report, has, and continues to be undertaken in consultation with partner agencies across Kent and Medway as well as stakeholders from other local authority areas where relevant. Stakeholders from national agencies are also invited where relevant.

## 5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. Initial funding was provided through the Test, Track & Trace Support Grant using 2020/21 Public Health allocations as a basis for distribution. Funding continued throughout 2020/21 through the COMF which was extended to June 2021 (to cover expenditure incurred during 2021/22) although now encompasses support for compliance and enforcement activities that were previously delivered through alternative grant funding streams. In addition, the DHSC have committed to fully fund the cost of the testing programme until the end of June 2021, with a revised mechanism for claiming the costs of the testing programme from July 2021 onwards.
- 5.2. Monitoring and oversight of expenditure is managed via the Contain Programme Regional Convenor for the South-East. There is a detailed framework that sets out the key areas that can be funded; these will evolve over time and are tailored to local need.
- 5.3. As mentioned in paragraph 1.2, the LOMP updates requested by the DHSC were made to inform how monies from the COMF should be allocated going forward on a 'greatest need' basis.

## 6. Legal Implications

- 6.1. Medway Council, under the leadership of the Director of Public Health, has 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.
- 6.2. The legal context for the council's 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
- 6.3. 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 Management Plan to reduce the viruses' spread.

- 6.4. The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restriction) (Steps) (England) (No.364) Regulations 2021 came into force on 29th March 2021, setting out the National Spring Roadmap and giving the DPH authority to apply step-by-step restrictions, 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. The DPH is 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.
- 6.5. The Government made the decision to move to Step 4 of the National Spring Roadmap on 19th July 2021, removing many of the restrictions previously in force.
- 6.6. [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restriction\) \(England\) \(No.3\) Regulations 2020](#) which came into force on 18 July 2020 continued to apply until 27 September 2021. These regulations granted powers to local authorities to make necessary and proportionate directions which respond to a serious and imminent threat to public health, in order to manage the transmission of coronavirus in the local authority's area.
- 6.7. On 14 September 2021 the government published its Covid Response: Autumn and Winter 2021 Plan and further guidance. The Government has reviewed the regulations which remained in place with the move to Step 4 of the Roadmap and has decided, subject to agreement from Parliament, that it is necessary to extend some regulations until 24 March 2022, at which point they will be reviewed. This extension includes The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 3) Regulations 2020, which enable local authorities to respond to serious and imminent public health threats.

## 7. Recommendation

- 7.1. The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to note the update presented in the report.

## Lead Officer Contact

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## Appendices

None

## Background papers

None