

All Councillor COVID-19 Webinar – 17.11.20

Q & A

The answers in this Q&A document were correct as of 17 November 2020. They are given 'for the record' but unless otherwise indicated they have not been updated or changed to reflect information which has changed since the time of publication.

- **With test and trace in place is there any evidence of second infections?**

Answer:

We are not aware of this locally although there are published examples of likely cases or reinfection

- **The support to prisons, particularly on PPE was welcomed by their medical team in the first lockdown. What are our arrangements for them in the current one?**

Answer:

The Prison are now in a better position to manage their own PPE needs in partnership with NHSE (the commissioners of Prison Healthcare) and there are no reported issues in relation to the provision of PPE supplies for staff. We continue to attend Prison Health and Social Care Partnership Boards and will assist should there be any issues.

- **When you measure cases are false positives included in the cases count?**

Answer: Yes, but we look at trend more than just numbers, and compare them with data from elsewhere.

- **When will T-cell tests become available, as they are the most accurate to establish immunity?**

Answer: We are unaware of plans for these.

- **Are private care homes being contacted to check they have everything that they need as well as those care homes which come under ECC?**

Answer: Yes.

- **What is the "R" number in Essex, there seems to be a difference of opinion between 1.2, 1.4 and over 2? Thank you**

Answer:

The R number varies over time, current likely just below 1 in most areas but likely 1.1 in Basildon.

- **The lateral flow test has shown more false positives than the PCR test which is also prone to errors. How will you deal with those errors?**

Answer:

Anyone receiving a positive lateral flow test result will be asked to have a PCR test to confirm. The false positive issue is recognised, but there is no reason why the rate of increase in positives would have been because of false positives.

- **How accurate are the tests and are they COVID specific?**

Answer:

Specificity is very good. Lateral flow tests are not as good but are still generally good.

- **Care Homes - We have over 500 care homes across the county - Can you please give an update with reference to the strategy for regular contact and support offered to those homes?**

Answer:

Care homes are supported via the local, multi-agency care home hubs, which provide wrap-around support, advice and guidance. There are regular webinars for providers, any extra money, from the government via an Infection Control Fund has been made available to providers to cover additional costs such as PPE.

- **What is the best guess about the next moves in lockdown changes from, say, the second week in December?**

Answer:

New tiers now announced to take effect from 2nd December.

- **Can you confirm that the figures being given are for COVID 19 infections and not for the wider corona virus which includes other illnesses.**

Answer:

Yes.

- **Have you taken into account seasonal respiratory diseases prevalent at this time of year, and have you taken into account the 5-year average of respiratory deaths?**

Answer:

Neither of those will impact on the COVID results. With the COVID restrictions in place, there should be a knock-on impact on seasonal illnesses, with fewer of them this year.

- **You show the cases in Essex based NHS Trusts. What about out county hospitals? In my area COVID cases would go to Whipps Cross?**

Answer:

We don't get the numbers for out-of-county hospitals. It would be difficult to understand the difference that Essex residents made to those numbers.

- **How can we encourage/insist that people who are told to isolate comply? The national figures indicate that the vast majority do not comply**

Answer:

We have an on-going communications campaign all about educating and encouraging. The key thing is reminding people of the incentive – following social distancing / mask-wearing etc now will enable us to get out of restrictions sooner. The use of the lateral flow tests will also help speed up the whole process for contacts, which might persuade more to isolate.

- **Age range incidences seem to point to school student - parental age range. The drop off around half term also seems to point to schools being a transmission point. Do we have evidence to back this up? Several reports of incidences in Brentwood schools, Junior and senior?**

Answer:

We have no evidence of greater outbreaks in Brentwood schools compared to elsewhere. Some recent data suggests that the impact of schools going back was greater than thought, but the position in Brentwood can't be explained by schools.

- **Aren't the Rapid testing kits proving to be only 50% accurate?**

Answer:

The tests will add value in allowing us to get hold of contacts easily and get on to their contacts. It will help people be able to isolate for a shorter period and allow people to visit nursing homes and get university students home safely.

- **What support is being provided to Universities with regards students returning home for Christmas and then coming back again in the new year?**

Answer:

They might be able to use the lateral flow tests before they go back home. In terms of coming back after Christmas, we will need to look at the national position and expectations at the time. [advice has now been issued formally]

- **Do we plan to engage anyway to repel the anti-vaxers who are gaining momentum?**

Answer:

We have no current plans to do this.

- **Why does there appear to be such a differing model in care homes regarding family visits?**

Answer:

We understand how important it is to stay in touch with loved ones. We have worked to ensure we've done all we can to enable access. All care homes are different in size and design, and each provider has to take responsibility for how they manage visits.

- **What are the guidelines re COVID free timing in care homes? To admit visitors do they need to be COVID free for 14 or 28 days?**

Answer:

As above, given the great differences in care homes across the county, each has to take responsibility for how they manage visits safely.

- **When it comes to people with a disability, how are you supporting them to be tested if required?**

Answer:

For those in a care home, that can be covered easily. Otherwise, we will be looking at postal options, or, if not, only testing them if they were at a high risk of being cases. If so, we'd arrange transport, and are looking generally at a range of options. We have also been lobbying to put people with learning disabilities to the top of the list.

- **We had a dreadful situation regarding deaths at a Harlow Care home at the start of this, we have come a long way but there are recent example of a similar situation. Why are we still seeing deaths in Care Homes and infections at scale?**

Answer:

Essentially via the staff, who mix with other people, perhaps in their household with children at school. With dementia patients, it is then harder to enforce social distancing. So very difficult to avoid completely, but we have seen far fewer serious outbreaks at this point than in wave one – and we have much clearer infection control processes in place.

- **Emerging from the national lockdown, would you assume high-incidence districts, e.g. Epping Forest and Brentwood would go to a higher tier than say Maldon?**

Answer:

No, we wouldn't assume that, it would depend on the data at the time

With a vaccine likely by early next year, can you confirm that preparations are being made to ensure the smooth distribution of vaccine and outline ECC's involvement? What steps are being taken to ensure countywide cold chain logistics will be sufficient?

Answer:

Plans are currently being worked up – we are totally joined up with the NHS on this. They are leading but we are working in a unified way.

- **BBC are reporting this morning that Clacton Hospitals are close to being 75% full. What is the position for other Essex hospitals please?**

Answer:

No Essex hospitals are under pressure. Not currently seeing high pressure in the acute hospitals (answer at the time of the Webinar).

- **If the trajectory has flattened and then reduces as a result of restrictions, presumably the expectation is that it will rise again if the restrictions are lifted over Christmas and then when schools go back afterwards. Is there an expectation that restrictions will need to be reintroduced in the New Year?**

Answer:

We will have to wait and see. Ultimately, unless the R value goes below one, cases will go up again – the issue is timing.

- **What is the current thinking about changes in R number and does this vary significantly across the county?**

Answer:

It is clear that case rates across Essex vary, with some districts showing much higher rates than others.

- **How vigorously is enforcement being undertaken and supported?**

Answer:

The Chief Constable has been working closely with Environmental Health Officers - the aim has been to seek and educate, and then, if needed, enforce. Local teams have been fantastic. Businesses have been dealt with firmly, and Environmental health officers will get further resource to help with their work.

- **Are the lateral flow tests going to be undertaken at nominated sites within a district or are they just collection sites and tests conducted back in the home? If it is the latter how will we ensure the results are recorded to allow follow up action?**

Answer:

We are working through the logistics at the moment. [Update: they are being undertaken on site]

- **Are there any extra measures being taken for the BAME community as they are twice as likely to get COVID?**

Answer:

Not specifically based on ethnic group – but the same interventions for everyone. The key is to minimise exposure through social distancing etc. Also, there is the issue of serious complications if they do get it, so important to optimise social distancing.

- **Is there any likelihood that there will be a more imaginative approach to schools which, looking at the rise in cases at the beginning of September and continuing since, are the breeding ground for the virus rather than leisure and hospitality venues. Suggestions have been made to rotate classes e.g. week on week off. From the case data from earlier in the year, fewer children in schools led to lower rates.**

Answer:

It is true that schools being open contributes to an increase in the infection rate. But ultimately, we have to make difficult decisions about balancing the control of the virus with the need to educate and reduce inequalities. These are the challenges being considered and weighed up.

- **You have spoken about staff at care homes mixing with others, but what is the situation with carers who visit residents' homes? My wife has had a care package from Social services and a variety of carers have come to our house. They are the only people who can come to us but although wearing masks/gloves etc when asked have said they are not being tested. Given they visit up to 20 homes daily is this not a high risk?**

Answer:

The domiciliary care sector will receive over £14m allocated on a per-service-user basis for infection control purposes. PPE is available to them through the Portal, regular webinars available for the sector. We have regular contacts with the main providers and use Essex Care Association as our route in – getting messages out etc. Again, there is a balance of risk – ultimately people need to have care and support.

- **How is social distancing being enforced? Residents are asking who to contact with to report gatherings?**

Answer:

We have an on-going communications campaign all about educating and encouraging. The key thing is reminding people of the incentive – following social distancing / mask-wearing etc now will enable us to get out of restrictions sooner. The use of the lateral flow tests will also help speed up the whole process for contacts, which might persuade more to isolate. Illegal gatherings should normally be reported to the police

- **If we have a no deal Brexit, will we struggle to get the vaccines into the country?**

Answer:

No.

- **Anecdotally, treatment seems to be improving what evidence do we have about that? What do we know so far about long COVID?**

Answer:

Our understanding is growing and development all the time. Long covid is certainly very real and seems to affect younger people.

- **What measures can be taken to make people comply when told to isolate in order to keep down the rate of infection? Statistics show that the majority of people do NOT comply which is not helpful**

Answer:

We have an on-going communications campaign all about educating and encouraging. The key thing is reminding people of the incentive – following social distancing / mask-wearing etc now will enable us to get out of restrictions sooner. The use of the lateral flow tests will also help speed up the whole process for contacts, which might persuade more to isolate.

- **What statistics support the continued closure of Leisure Centres and Gyms given their importance for mental health?**

Answer:

None of the restrictions are easy. But there is clear evidence that gyms and leisure centres being open has contributed to the increase in the R value, so when you are looking at things that contribute, that would be on the list.

- **Disappointed to hear that gyms/leisure centres contribute 0.1 to R. Gyms in my area have had no cases (I think) and do undertake onerous cleaning regime. Is it gyms or leisure centres and is there evidence? Isn't there a positive to opening them from a health point of view?**

Answer:

As mentioned above, yes, of course, there are benefits, but there are also downsides, and their contribution to the increase in the R rate is clear, and this is something that has to be weighed in the balance.

- **When we exit lockdown, will we be back in tier 2 or are we waiting for more clarification from the govt on steps moving forward?**

Answer:

This has now been announced by the government.

- **Does that include swimming pools? Some disabled children are missing out because pools are closed.**

Answer:

Yes, public swimming pools are closed under the national lockdown.

- **Will you consider mobile sites for vaccinations?**

Answer:

The NHS are leading on the vaccination programme, but we will work very closely with them and will support them in any way we can. Distribution of the vaccine will depend on the type of vaccine and storage required.