

LS/JL

Tel: 01603 638 407

27 January 2021

Dear Colleagues

Next Steps on Covid-19:

This briefing is for members of the Norfolk Covid-19 Engagement Board and the Norfolk Health Protection Board and concerns the ongoing management of Covid-19 beyond 19th July 2021.

What has government announced for 19th July?

Government has announced that Step 4 of the Roadmap to ease Coronavirus restrictions will take place on 19th July. This lifts most of the remaining legal restrictions but not all of them. Both the Secretary of State for Health during his statement in the House of Commons and the Prime Minister in his press conference said there was no easy date for unlocking and this step is not guaranteed to be irreversible.

We need to continue with caution to keep the numbers of infections down in order to keep moving out of restrictions. The Prime Minister's statement as delivered can be found here: [Prime Minister confirms move to Step 4 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-minister-confirms-move-to-step-4).

Government says the numbers of infections and deaths are currently well within modelled expectations but are clearly concerned at rises in infections and the fact we are, as stated in the press conference, in a third wave. However, there are also concerns that opening in September would risk a major Autumn wave as schools return and the weather is colder.

It stated: *"It is absolutely vital that we proceed now with caution.... this pandemic is not over...this disease continues to carry risks for you and your family. We cannot simply revert instantly on Monday 19th July to life as it was before Covid."*

The key measures announced are:

- Social distancing rules have been lifted, with
 - no limits on how many people can meet indoors or outdoors
 - the 1m plus rule has been removed except in some high-risk settings
 - face coverings are no longer required by law
 - school bubbles end
- Events and gatherings
 - Nightclubs can reopen
 - Capacity restrictions on pubs are lifted

- No limits on guest numbers at wedding, funerals etc
- No legal requirement to display test and trace QR code
- Travel
 - Guidance recommending against travel to amber countries removed
 - No quarantine requirement for fully vaccinated adults returning from amber list countries
 - Under-18s won't need to quarantine
- Other changes
 - Guidance on working from home will end
 - Limits on visitors to care homes will be removed

Government ask individuals and businesses to act carefully and remain cautious

Government advises while cases are high and rising that individuals and businesses need to remain cautious. It is encouraging the public to make informed decisions through guidance, rather than laws.

Specifically it advises:

- The return to work is a gradual one over the summer, even though the instruction to work from home has been lifted
- Businesses to use NHS COVID Pass in high risk settings, such as nightclubs or at large events such as festivals
- People should, and are expected, to continue to wear face coverings in crowded areas such as public transport
- Socialising should happen outside, letting fresh air in and minimising the number, proximity and duration of social contacts
- Individuals should test when they have symptoms
- Continuation of asymptomatic testing in education, high risk workplaces and to help people manage their personal risk

Does this mean all Covid-19 measures end?

No. A number of measures will continue because we are still in a third wave of infections, with infections rising rapidly. As Sir Patrick Vallance said: *"Thanks to vaccination, the risk of hospitalisation is four times lower and the risk of death ten times lower but it still exists."*

Remaining restrictions are:

- Travel controls to and from other countries, including duties to test and quarantine. The Government will manage risks at the border to reduce the risk of variants entering the UK. Border quarantine will remain for those arriving from red list countries and those not fully vaccinated from amber list countries.
- The duty to self-isolate when required continues
- The Health and Safety Executive guidance on safe workplaces and safe businesses continues and can be enforced
- Some measures in care homes will remain
- The Test, Trace and Isolate System will be kept in place

What does the new government guidance say?

Government has stated that existing guidance and legal measures continue until July 19th and thereafter new guidance will come into force. The new guidance can be found at the following link. [Coronavirus: how to stay safe and help prevent the spread from 19 July - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/coronavirus-how-to-stay-safe-and-help-prevent-the-spread-from-19-july)

Implementation in Norfolk

The objective of keeping cases of Covid-19 as low as possible whilst moving closer to normality is a pragmatic approach. Nobody wants endless cycles of restrictions and lockdowns but the idea of being relaxed about rising case numbers is wrong and damaging to public health. We should proceed carefully.

We should continue to draw from our toolbox of public health measures and messages that work with a particular focus on:

- handwashing
- working from home where appropriate
- face coverings in crowded and high-risk situations such as on public transport and in health settings
- self-isolating when necessary
- getting vaccinated
- encouraging outdoor socialising.

Living with Covid-19 is not the same thing as letting infections happen uncontrollably and government has made clear local outbreak plans and health protection arrangements should remain in place and that we need to be cautious in our next stages.

We need to challenge the unhelpful assumption that public health measures are a roadblock to recovery. Instead they are an enabler of recovery. Public health interventions can boost public confidence and create safe public spaces for everyone. Many older and more vulnerable groups will understandably be anxious about the easing of restrictions and they deserve guidance and support. Polling shows strong support for keeping some of our tried and tested approaches in place for the time being.

Extract from Government Guidance

“This guidance will come into effect when England moves to step 4 of the roadmap. Read the current step 3 guidance on what you can and cannot do. While cases are high and rising, everybody needs to continue to act carefully and remain cautious. This is why we are keeping in place key protections:

- *testing when you have symptoms and targeted asymptomatic testing in education, high risk workplaces and to help people manage their personal risk.*
- *isolating when positive or when contacted by NHS Test and Trace.*
- *border quarantine: for all arriving from red list countries and for those people not fully vaccinated arriving from amber list countries.*
- *cautious guidance for individuals, businesses and the vulnerable whilst prevalence is high including:*
- *whilst Government is no longer instructing people to work from home if they can, Government would expect and recommend a gradual return over the summer*
- *Government expects and recommends that people wear face coverings in crowded areas such as public transport;*
- *being outside or letting fresh air in*
- *minimising the number, proximity and duration of social contacts.*
- *encouraging and supporting businesses and large events to use the NHS COVID Pass in high risk settings.*

The Government will work with organisations where people are likely to be in close proximity to others outside their household to encourage the use of this. If sufficient measures are not taken to limit infection, the Government will consider

What work will be done locally?

There is still much work to be done locally. This is set out in our Outbreak Plan which can be found at: [Outbreak Control Plan for Norfolk - Norfolk County Council](#)

The key tasks for the next few months are to:

- Continue our local Test & Trace services: testing, contact tracing and supporting self-isolation
- Continue to promote uptake of vaccinations especially in areas with low take up
- Continue to work to identify and manage outbreaks
- Support local businesses to enable them to offer Covid-19-safe venues. This will include supporting them when asking the public to comply with safety precautions including handwashing, physical distancing, good ventilation and wearing facemasks when businesses ask this of customers
- Continue to support care homes, social care and public venues in being Covid-secure
- Support schools and further education to prepare for the new academic year in September
- Ensure the monitoring and modelling of infections is undertaken to enable the NHS to plan for increased demand
- Refresh our communications campaigns

- Continue to plan for new variants emerging including surge testing when this is recommended

Consequently, the headline short- and medium-term tasks for the Health Protection Board are to continue to keep infections as low as possible so we can continue to ease restrictions and eventually move out of them. The longer-term task of eradicating the virus is one which will be more difficult.

As government has said, we need every person and every workplace to continue to do the basic things they need to in order to keep up the progress which has been made over the last months.

Our new public campaign “*IChoose*” emphasises this. Materials and resources, once finalised, will be available here: [Coronavirus communications toolkits - Norfolk County Council](#)

Yours sincerely

Dr Louise Smith
Director of Public Health

Appendix: Scenarios from July to December 2021

The key next goals are to get to September and to December without major surges in infection which result in hospitalisations and deaths increasing beyond a level we can cope with.

Public Health model scenarios regularly, including infections, spread and NHS service demand, and have been doing this throughout the pandemic. This modelling work will continue, but there are three scenarios broadly, outlined below. Authorities are planning for each of these, but doing everything possible to avoid the Scenario C. The aim is to avoid restrictions and infections. Overviews of the potential scenarios are provided in the table overleaf.

There are four major risks associated with high numbers of infections identified by SAGE. These are:

- an increase in hospitalisations and deaths
- more 'Long-Covid'
- workforce absences (including in the NHS)
- increased risk of new variants emerging

The combination of high prevalence and high levels of vaccination creates the conditions in which an immune escape variant is most likely to emerge. The likelihood of this happening is unknown, but such a variant would present a significant risk both in the UK and internationally.

High level overview of scenarios

Scenario	Example elements
Summer 2021 Current Third Wave	<p>All current models conclude that new infections could continue rising into and through August before peaking in mid to late August</p> <p>Sub-scenarios</p> <p>A) Wave ends in late August (currently unlikely)</p> <p>B) Wave continues to early September with rise in NHS demand but remains manageable (most likely but needs people to take steps to help reduce infection and vaccination take up)</p> <p>C) Wave continues to mid / late September (potentially avoidable if we continue to be cautious)</p>
Winter 2021 Possible scenarios Not possible to predict	<p>Scenario A: Lowest impact Endemic Plateau with multiple variants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued endemic transmission at a plateau of infection, at low numbers but with periodic spikes, and variants circulating • THIS IS DEPENDENT ON everyone taking measures to control spread, and very high uptake of vaccination and booster
	<p>Scenario B: medium impact Growing infections with more symptomatic people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large numbers of outbreaks and cases caused by new variants short of a fourth wave
	<p>Scenario C: Unlikely, highest impact Fourth wave of Infections caused by new variant or failure of control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large surge wave of new infections with hospital admissions increasing and vaccine failure.