

PUBLIC HEALTH UPDATE ON INITIATIVES BROUGHT IN AS A RESULT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Committee name	Families, Health and Wellbeing Select Committee
Officer reporting	Dan Kennedy - Corporate Director, Planning, Environment, Education and Community Services Sharon Daye – Consultant in Public Health / Deputy Director of Public Health
Papers with report	N/A
Ward	All

HEADLINES

The purpose of this report is to provide a public health update on initiatives introduced as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Hillingdon Council is committed to Putting Residents First. From the start of the COVID-19 public health pandemic in 2020, the Council has worked closely with the NHS, the voluntary sector and other partners to proactively provide advice, support and assistance to residents, businesses, care homes and schools to help keep residents safe and minimise the disruption to everyday life from the restrictions that had to be put in place to help protect our health.

The Council has delivered food parcels to vulnerable residents who need them, administered grants to support local businesses and worked with a wide range of commercial, voluntary and charitable organisations to put in place measures to protect health, such as the provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to care providers and schools, contact tracing, testing, support for self-isolation and more recently support to rollout the COVID-19 vaccine

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Committee note the contents of the report.

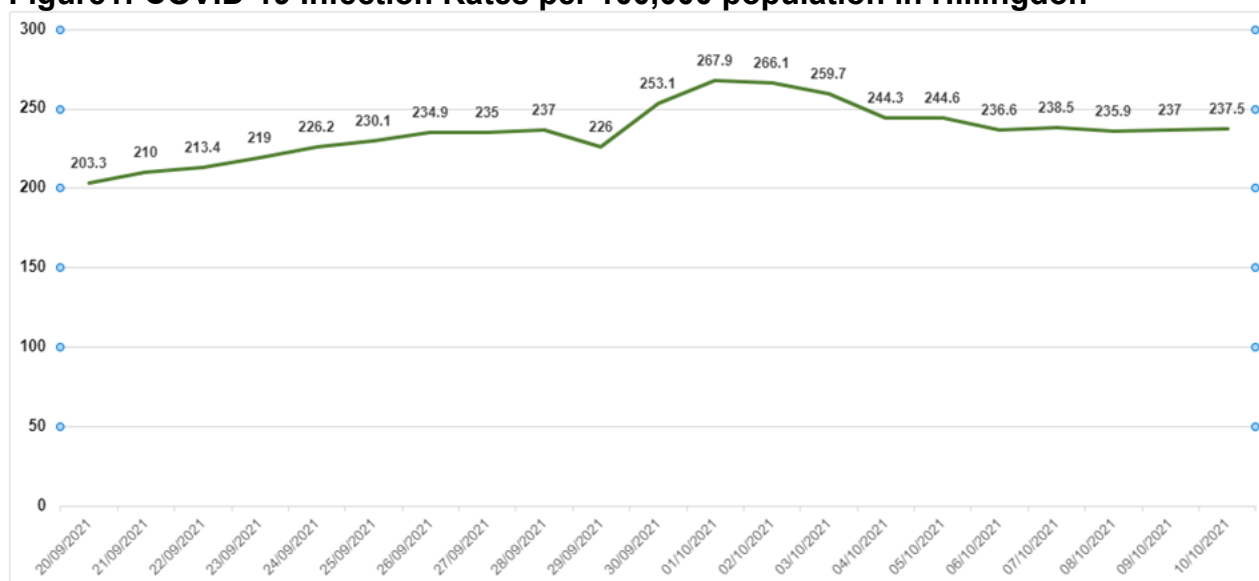
SUPPORTING INFORMATION

COVID-19 – The Current Position in the London Borough of Hillingdon

1. As at 10th October 2021, the COVID-19 infection rate in Hillingdon was 237.5 per 100,000 population (down from 250.8 seven days previously). This is higher than the rate for London (205 per 100,000 population) and 7th highest in London. The top three boroughs in London are Kingston Upon Thames - 338.8, Hounslow - 327.5 and Richmond - 309.9 per 100,000. Overall, the trend line in infection rates in Hillingdon has risen gradually, as the graph

(covering the period 20th September to 10th October 2021) in **Figure 1** illustrates, but with some fluctuation – peaking at the beginning of October and levelling of over the past 5 days:

Figure1: COVID-19 Infection Rates per 100,000 population in Hillingdon



2. Currently those aged between 4-18 years of age are recording higher levels of infection. Of the 829 cases recorded over the last 7 days (4th October – 10th October):

- 338 were associated with schools (219 secondary and 119 primary)
- 6 cases at MQS Facilities
- 1 social care case

Settings

3. In general, infection rates remain low in care settings due to most residents and staff being vaccinated and robust adherence to infection control practices. Care homes continue to have multi-agency 'wrap around' support to enable them to continue to provide safe services to the residents of Hillingdon, prevent the spread of infection and ensure that safe visiting takes place (where this has been agreed).

In line with latest guidance, the Council and CCG manage the discharge of patients who have tested positive for COVID-19 from hospital to designated beds for isolation. All patients who are discharged from hospital to a care setting are tested and their COVID-19 status known. For those who test negative, are discharged to 'step down' facilities, or to their original care home placement, to enable a further period of isolation at home to continue.

4. Schools: All schools have access to a council link officer who acts as a central point of contact for COVID-19 queries to ensure they can follow the latest government guidance to help keep their schools safe. Education advisors are also on hand to support headteachers with maintaining education provision and provide additional support and guidance, should this be required. Schools returned to the classroom setting before the end of the school term in July 2021, and prepared for the return of pupils from the start of the term in September 2021.

5. Housing: Housing providers in the Borough have been contacted and provided with nationally published information to share with tenants living in shared housing. This sets out what they can do to keep safe and to help prevent the spread of the virus. Landlords of shared accommodation and their tenants have been written to by the Council setting out practical advice and guidance to prevent the spread of the infection.
6. Helping Residents to Shop Safely: The Council has undertaken a proactive programme of providing advice and inspections to support business to re-open to keep residents safe. Since the start of the pandemic, licensing and environmental health and regulatory officers have:
 - Completed over 10,000 business compliance visits
 - Issued over 250 written warnings
 - Issued 40 Fixed Penalty Notices for breaches

Council teams have been supporting businesses and venues to safely reopen:

- 108 free pavement licences issued to Hillingdon businesses
- 1600 advice and support visits from specially trained officers
- COVID-19 marshal patrols in all shopping areas
- Support to hospitality sector for the Euro Tournament
- Licensing visits and advice to beauty and personal care businesses

Testing

7. A key element of the national strategy to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus is to establish a robust testing strategy, targeting specific occupations, such as care staff. Working jointly with the Clinical Commissioning Group, the Council has put in place regular testing arrangements for care settings. In terms of the broader approach to testing, in Hillingdon this has involved:
 - Mobile testing units visiting on a regular basis;
 - Access to home testing kits, available to all residents;
 - Pop-up testing sites as required;
 - Local testing sites (walk through).

Testing will continue to be kept under review and targeted where this is needed and arranged at the convenience for residents (e.g., promoting home testing kits).

Local Contact Tracing

9. The Council is continuing to support contact tracing by using its local knowledge to successfully trace hard-to-reach individuals. The team makes contact with these residents either by text, phone or email to enable them to capture information about their activities in the days prior to their positive result. Home visits are arranged where necessary.

COVID-19 Vaccinations

10. The NHS is continuing to offer the COVID-19 vaccine to people most at risk, in priority order. The vaccine, like all vaccines in the UK, has been approved for use after meeting the strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness set out by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency. So far, reports of serious side effects, such as allergic reactions, have been very rare. No long-term complications have been reported.
11. COVID-19 vaccinations are making a real difference to the population of Hillingdon - preventing residents from becoming seriously ill from COVID-19 and preventing deaths from COVID-19. As of 6th October 2021 COVID-19 cases in North West London continue to be high and many of the people who are the most unwell in hospitals are unvaccinated - including pregnant women and young people.

It is imperative that we continue to encourage residents to come forward for vaccination, whether that is for their first, second or booster vaccine. Our community engagement team continue to work with communities, faith groups and residents to increase the number of people who come forward for the vaccine.

12. Phase 3 of the national vaccination programme: has commenced, with particular focus on providing first vaccination to 12-15 year olds and boosters within care homes. 12-15 year olds are being offered their vaccination at their schools and all schools in NWL will have a vaccination team visit before November 5th. The Booster vaccination program has also started with those eligible now able to book through the NHS. The NHS are also continuing to encourage residents to come forward for their first or second vaccination.

Teenagers aged 16-17 are eligible for vaccination. 'Sixth Formers' will be offered the opportunity for vaccination when the vaccination teams visit their school to vaccinate younger pupils.

13. Performance: In terms of overall performance Hillingdon remains top in delivery of vaccines in North West London. In relation to the average for London and England - as at 3rd October 2021 **73.2%** of our residents had received their first dose (London average 67.1%, England average 79.3%) and 67.0% their second dose (London average 61.0% and England average 73.6%).
14. COVID-19 Vaccination & Care Home Staff: Operational guidance was issued in August 2021 to all care homes by the Care Quality Commission regarding the requirement for COVID-19 vaccination of staff deployed in care homes. All relevant Council staff have been issued with a letter advising them of the requirements. A vaccination webinar for Hillingdon Care Home staff took place in August to promote uptake of the vaccine.

Monitoring / Surveillance

- 15.** COVID-19 infection rates are closely monitored by the Council daily, so that any patterns in infection rates are swiftly identified and responded to, in order to limit the spread of the virus. Monitoring includes the following:
- The rate of infection for Hillingdon per 100,000 population (the standard measure used by the UK Health Security Agency (formerly Public Health England) which allows for comparison across local authorities).
 - The number of new infections registered for Hillingdon in the last 24 hours.
 - Cumulative demographic information on gender, age, and ethnicity.
 - Number of tests completed and the positive infection rate.
 - Incidence of infection, broken down at ward level.
 - Comparative information from geographic neighbours (North West London and Home Counties);
 - Vaccination uptake.
- 16.** In addition, officers of the Council are working closely with colleagues in the Clinical Commissioning Group and health partners to exchange information to help track changes in infection rates. Analysis and interrogation of COVID-19 related data continues to evolve and develop as the understanding of patterns of infection becomes more sophisticated and the data available to the Council improves.
- 17.** The take up of the vaccine is being closely monitored by the NHS and the Council.

Supporting businesses

- 18.** The Council has provided a range of targeted support and guidance to businesses throughout the pandemic, ensuring that financial assistance is given to those who are eligible. The Council has paid out grant funding as follows:
- Local Restrictions Support Grant (£16.6 million)
 - Additional Restrictions Grant (£9 million)
 - Restart grant (£11 million)

Supporting Vulnerable Residents

- 19.** The Council is putting its residents first during the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to coordinate support, working with partners for vulnerable residents who need to self-isolate. This helps to keep residents safe by helping to prevent the spread of the virus, particularly important for those that are clinically extremely vulnerable.
- 20.** Hillingdon's approach to protecting and supporting residents is centred on:
- Practising social distancing and hand and respiratory hygiene and wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) where required, in line with Government guidance;
 - NHS testing for the presence of coronavirus if residents display symptoms;
 - Supporting the tracing system if residents have tested positive and have been in close contact with others; and
 - Supporting self-isolation, in line with NHS guidance.

21. During the pandemic the Council has maintained a COVID-19 Community Hub within the Council's Contact Centre to respond to COVID-19 enquiries. It is open from Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. The Council has a dedicated contact centre which responds to resident queries. The Council is supporting local foodbanks to provide food parcels where required and signposting residents to Hillingdon 4 All and other charities to provide support.

Communications and Engagement

22. The Council, together with partners, has been and continues to be proactive in delivering health protection messages to residents using a range of communication channels.

23. Since the start of the pandemic, the Council and partners have publicised key guidance to residents and businesses, ensuring that they are aware of:

- Important health, testing and any restriction/lockdown messages.
- The impact on Council events and services.
- The Council support available i.e. community hub.
- Various government campaigns.
- The easing of restrictions and subsequent recovery of Council services.
- Maintaining infection control practices – promoting government messaging.
- The benefits of the COVID-19 vaccine and how to get vaccinated.

24. Coronavirus messaging has been widely communicated using all available Council channels, including the Council's website, social media platforms, media relations, regular e-newsletters, GP texting, Hillingdon People, JC Decaux boards, refuse lorries, lamp post banners, posters and signage, and internal communications.

25. Communications plans and localised assets for raising awareness of coronavirus, local outbreaks and promoting the take up of the vaccine have been produced.

26. The team is also working with a range of services to support their messaging, ensure consistency and amplify/target messages to their audiences. This has included services working with schools and universities, businesses, and community and faith groups.

27. Corporate Communications has also linked up with a variety of communications colleagues from neighbouring, pan-London, and outer London local authorities, UK Health Security Agency and partner agencies to share best practice and resources, and in the case of partners amplify messages via each other's channels.

28. The Council is supporting health partners and the rollout by sharing NHS information and messaging to ensure that residents are well informed about the COVID-19 vaccine. The Council is encouraging residents to have the vaccine when they are informed that it is their turn, so that they can protect themselves, their friends, families and local community – and help to keep Hillingdon safe. The Council is also working with H4All (a collaboration of local charities) to deliver the Community Champions scheme to support those most at risk from COVID19 and booster vaccine take-up by providing advice as well as tackling misinformation.

29. The Council has already built a strong network of community, faith and voluntary sector groups since the start of the pandemic, working closely with health partners. The Community Champions scheme will further strengthen this by working with trusted local champions from faith and community groups to help reach older people, disabled residents, and people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Targeted Actions

30. Whilst there is a degree of confidence that the action taken to date has helped to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus in the Borough, there is no room for complacency. It is recognised, therefore, that there will be a need for a range of ongoing proactive actions to keep COVID-19 infection rates as low as possible.

Local Outbreak Management Plan

31. As part of the national effort to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus, every local authority has a Local Outbreak Management Plan (LOMP) which sets out how the local authority and partners are working together to help reduce the likelihood of further outbreaks of COVID-19, particularly for some of the most vulnerable residents, such as those living in care homes. The plan presents preventative action as well as what the approach will be in the event of an outbreak. The plan has been recently updated in line with national guidance and will be updated again for the winter.

Implications on related Council policies

The Covid-19 Local Outbreak Management Plan contributes to Hillingdon's Health and Wellbeing Strategy by helping to protect the health of residents.

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

Preventing and controlling the spread of the COVID-19 virus will help to keep Hillingdon's residents safe.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial costs arising from the recommendations set out within this report.

Legal Implications

The Borough Solicitor confirms that there are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil.