

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

16 FEBRUARY 2022

STATEMENT OF COUNTY COUNCILLOR ANDREW LEE

COVID-19 update

Since the last update in November, there has been a significant peak in infections caused by the Omicron variant of COVID-19. Omicron has proven to be more transmissible than previous variants, including Delta, with a great degree of vaccine escape requiring an additional booster dose to provide the best level of protection. Whilst a smaller proportion of people with Omicron have experienced severe illness, the sheer number of people infected has seen a significant increase in the number of people who have been admitted to hospital with COVID-19.

There have been several key changes in COVID-19 guidance over recent weeks. These include:

- Implementation of Plan B measures (including compulsory use of face coverings in many public indoor venues, working from home where possible and mandatory use of the NHS COVID Pass for certain settings and events) from 10th December to 26th January.
- Change from requesting close contacts who are exempt from isolation to take a single PCR test, instead moving to a system where all close contacts aged 5 and over are strongly advised to undertake daily LFD testing for 7 days
- Temporary removal of the requirement for people who test positive on a lateral flow test to undertake a confirmatory PCR test
- Changes to the self-isolation period for those who have tested positive for COVID-19, so that individuals can leave isolation from Day 6 should they receive two negative LFD results taken 24 hours apart
- Changes to testing requirements around international travel

Testing demand has also increased significantly in recent months in light of the high number of cases and the increased ways in which lateral flow tests are being used. Locally we continue to have frequent mobile test unit visits across the county in addition to our local test sites. Capacity for postal delivery of both PCR and lateral flow tests across the country has significantly increased since December. In addition, more LFD stock has also been distributed to local pharmacies.

Whilst recorded case numbers are currently in decline across most age groups, we continue to see an increase among nursery and primary school age children who are not yet eligible for vaccination and are exempt from both regular testing and use of face coverings in schools. The public health team continues to support education settings, care settings and others with management of outbreaks in line with national guidance.

With the advent of Omicron at the end of 2021, where booster doses are needed to give the best level of protection against severe disease, there was a significant push on booster vaccinations around the Christmas period. NHS colleagues worked tirelessly to ensure that vaccination appointments and drop in sessions were available across the county. North Yorkshire continues to have vaccination uptake levels higher than the national average, although anyone who is yet to come forward for first, second or booster doses is strongly advised to do so and will be welcomed by our vaccination teams.

Second doses for children aged 12-15 will be offered this term through the schools immunisation service. We also expect rollout of vaccination for at-risk 5-11 year olds to begin shortly via NHS routes.

New ten year Drugs Strategy and additional investment to expand and strengthen drug and alcohol services

The new Drugs Strategy for England was published on 6th December 2021. It is called 'from harm to hope' and sets out a ten-year vision, with an initial three-year implementation phase covering the Comprehensive Spending Review period 2022/23 to 2024/5. The strategy responds to the independent cross-sectoral two-part review into Drugs led by Dame Carol Black, concluded and published in July 2021.

The main focus of the first three year implementation phase and additional investment (£533 million nationally) will be on drug and alcohol treatment services and associated support, and improving outcomes for people experiencing substance misuse. There will also be additional funding for employment support, housing support and substance misuse offender management interventions in custody, prison and probation. The strategy commits to deliver the following nationally by 2024/25:

- 1,000 fewer deaths;
- a phased expansion to deliver at least 54,500 new high-quality drug and alcohol treatment places for adults - including for people who are rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping;
- 5,000 new treatment places for young people;
- A treatment place for everyone who is offending and drug dependent;
- Close 2,000 county lines and disrupt 6,400 organised crime group activities

The Council will be expected to lead the development of a three-year local treatment plan with partners in order to receive the additional investment, before the end of the financial year. NYCC and City of York Public Health Teams will host a joint engagement meeting with partners at the end of January to start conversations about the local drugs strategy/strategies.

Thrive at work

Thrive at work (TAW) is a £900K value partnership project across North Yorkshire, York and East Riding. The project focuses on developing and supporting inclusive workplaces that can unlock the potential of employees who are neurodiverse or experience mental health issues. TAW includes packages of support aimed at helping businesses realise the benefits of an inclusive workplace and as such, it includes a package of support across different tiers of an organisation, encompassing personalised one to one coaching and support for individuals, diversity training and organisational level support.

The programme is coordinated by Better Connect, a North Yorkshire voluntary sector organisation, and North Yorkshire County Council have a proactive role in the project design and as a strategic partner. NYCC as part of their programme delivery commitment have appointed a part-time TAW practitioner, based in the Public Health team. This officer will engage directly with local businesses and support them to adopt inclusive policies, procedures and ways of working.

Integrated Sexual health Service – Section 75

The intention to enter into a Section 75 Partnership Agreement with York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to deliver a North Yorkshire Integrated Sexual Health Service has entered the final phase of consultation. A 30-day consultation is live and closes 3 February 2022.

The consultation feedback and final decision on entering into the initial 4-year agreement is due to be presented to NYCC Executive on 8 March 2022. The Trust is aligned to achieve sign off within the same period. The go live date of the new Partnership is the 1 April 2022.

Link to consultation:

<https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/north-yorkshire-integrated-specialist-sexual-health-services-section-75-partnership-agreement>

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