

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

21 July 2021

STATEMENT OF COUNCILOR CAROLINE DICKINSON

Outbreak Management

Over recent weeks, cases have increased across the County, reflecting the picture we are seeing across the rest of the country. The majority of cases are in younger people, especially those aged between 10 and 34. The dominant strain across North Yorkshire and the rest of the UK is now the delta variant, which is more transmissible than the alpha (or Kent) variant. We are now seeing sustained community transmission of COVID across all districts, although there is some fluctuation of the individual district rates themselves with around half of the districts above and half below the national average. We are also seeing spread within individual households, which reflects the increased infectiousness of the delta variant.

For the last few weeks outbreak management has predominantly focused on educational settings. The public health team continues to work collaboratively with school leaders and Public Health England to ensure people with the virus and their contacts isolate and are tested to reduce the risk of further spread.

The key messages for preventing the spread of infection remain the same for delta variant as they were for alpha: washing hands regularly, keeping socially distanced from people not in your household or bubble, wearing face coverings in public indoor areas and crowded outdoor spaces, socialising outside wherever possible or in well-ventilated areas. If you must be inside, make sure you receive your two doses of vaccine. These measures still apply even if you have had both vaccine doses – vaccinated individuals may have better protection but we are still seeing occasional cases even in those who are fully vaccinated, and even though they may be less unwell they can still pass on to others who may not have been vaccinated or may be more clinically vulnerable.

Testing

In line with the increasing rates across the County, we have seen an increasing number of people access local PCR testing. To support with this, from 30th June all our Local Test Sites reverted back to just doing PCR tests from 8am-8pm, rather than doing PCR testing in the morning and lateral flow test collection in the afternoons. PCR tests can also be accessed through our local Mobile Testing Units, for which we have maintained very good provision across the whole of the County even when rates were low, or can also be ordered online.

A targeted communications campaign has been launched locally to encourage everyone to take part in routine lateral flow testing twice a week. In recent weeks this has been particularly important in relation to schools testing, given the burden on new cases has largely been in younger people. The vast majority of pharmacies across North Yorkshire are now collection points for lateral flow testing kits, which can also be ordered online or by calling 119.

In addition, the next phase of local authority supported testing will focus on trying to increase uptake of lateral flow tests among those demographic groups and communities who have been less likely to engage so far but who would potentially benefit the most.

Vaccination

All adults in the UK are now eligible for COVID vaccination. Vaccination is the most effective means we currently have to prevent the spread of COVID infection, so a significant amount of work has gone into ensuring that everyone eligible gets both doses of vaccine. This is particularly important in light of the delta variant, where the protection after a single dose is decreased and both doses are needed to provide the maximum benefit.

The public health-led COVID Vaccination Assurance Group continues to monitor uptake of COVID vaccination across the county. Targeted work has been undertaken through NHS colleagues with key groups, including homeless individuals, carers, and targeted workplaces. Walk in clinics have also been organised in line with the national 'Grab a Jab' campaign, particularly targeted at young people and any others that have not yet received their first dose.

Adult Weight Management Service Government Grant Fund

North Yorkshire County Council have been allocated one-off Government Grant Funding, via Public Health England, to expand the service offer. We will be utilising this funding through additional one-to one provision for those who require further support to the universal group activity. The funding will also be used to pilot bespoke/outreach programmes for specific target groups to understand better specific needs of our local residents who may not have historically accessed the service.

Our providers will be working hard to understand particular needs of people with learning disabilities, long-term conditions, people living with challenges associated with mental health, ethnic minority communities, men and younger adults. The learning from this work will ensure we make the necessary service improvements within the universal offer.

Adult Weight Management Service Communications campaign

To support increased referrals into the service, particularly from those who may not have chosen the service option previously, we have launched an exciting communications campaign. The campaign includes a media release, radio adverts during the month of June, social media activity, and countywide branded assets including posters for display. The North Yorkshire County Council webpage has also been refreshed and updated www.northyorks.gov.uk/stepup and a video has been compiled to tell the stories of some of the clients who have benefited from the service <https://youtu.be/TX2yIE-yEJs>

Mental health and Neurodiversity in Workplace Settings

North Yorkshire was successful in receiving European funding for "Thrive at Work" a programme focusing on Neurodiversity and mental health in workplace settings. The project has two aims:

1. Equip managers to positively and effectively manage staff where it concerns mental and physical health, disabilities and neurodiversity and support those with disabilities to aim higher and progress within the workplace.

2. Support for small and medium businesses to understand the health, wellbeing and disability landscape of their organisations and create a positive workplace culture towards mental and physical health, disabilities and neurodiversity.

NYCC is a key partner in a local consortium at both a strategic and delivery level. We have been able to capitalize on our role as a large anchor institution to match fund the bid (which was an application condition). Consequently, £900,000 of European funding has been brought into the county, with beneficiaries including the community and voluntary sector. We are currently working with the legal team to ensure robust due diligence.

Green homes funding

North Yorkshire County Council has been successful, on behalf of a consortium with four District and Borough Councils in North Yorkshire, in securing £2.4m to upgrade energy inefficient homes and reduce fuel poverty and seasonal ill health. This includes insulation to improve their energy efficiency and installing air source heat pumps. We are also hoping to bid for further funding to extend this work in the future.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR CAROLINE DICKINSON