

COVID-19 update for councillors: 27/3/21

Welcome to the weekly bulletin for councillors, providing you with the latest COVID-19 public health data and messages for Oxfordshire, including an update on the **expansion of our symptom-free testing programme**, the latest on the **vaccination programme** and how we are **planning for agile working** as we recover from the pandemic.

In this week's edition, we also tell you of our success in receiving **green homes grant funding** from government, ask you to share important information **for visitors to household waste and recycling centres** over Easter, and introduce you to a new **mental wellbeing hub for young people**. We also provide an important update on how we are working in partnership to **support vulnerable residents** through a number of schemes and tell you about the **holiday activities and food programme for 2021** (attached).

Following on from last week's leadership update, you will also find attached our **latest leadership organisational chart**.

Latest public health data and advice

The statistics

In the seven days up to 19 March, there has been a total of 229 confirmed new COVID-19 cases in Oxfordshire. This is a decrease from 241 new cases in the previous week. This is equivalent to a weekly rate of new cases of 33.1 per 100,000 residents and a reduction of 24 per cent over the last seven days.

The figures are summarised in the table below. This includes the number of new cases for this week compared to the previous week (up to 12 March) across the county and its five districts. You can also access daily statistics using the [COVID-19 dashboard](#) on our website.

Cases of COVID-19 by district

	Cases in 7 days up to 12/03/21	Rate per 100,000 population	Cases in 7 days up to 19/03/21	Rate per 100,000 population
Cherwell	36	23.9	38	25.2
Oxford	77	50.5	46	30.2
South Oxfordshire	38	26.7	59	41.5
Vale of White Horse	53	39.0	53	39.0
West Oxfordshire	37	33.4	33	29.8
Oxfordshire	241	34.8	229	33.1

Data correct as at 5pm on 23 March.

Cases of COVID-19 in people aged 60 and over

There has been a further decrease in the number of cases in people aged 60 and over. In the seven days up to 19 March, there has been a total of 16 confirmed cases, a decrease from 21 new cases the previous week. This is equivalent to a weekly rate of 9.7 new cases per 100,000 residents in Oxfordshire.

Clinically extremely vulnerable people

Clinically extremely vulnerable individuals (CEV), including those already shielding and those recently added to the list by the government, should continue to shield **until 31 March**. This means all vulnerable people are advised to stay and work at home as much as possible, except to go outdoors for exercise or to attend health appointments. Support is still available – CEV individuals can still [register online](#) until 31 March for priority supermarket booking and for those already registered, prioritisation will continue into the summer.

After 31 March:

- All the other restrictions applying to the general population apply.
- Any CEV individual who has not received the vaccination should contact their GP.
- CEV individuals are still advised to take extra precautions and minimise social contacts, especially indoors.
- District and city councils will still offer ongoing practical support and guidance and can help address any non-medical concerns of shielding individuals.
- For those registered by 31 March, priority supermarket booking prioritisation will continue into the summer.

Health protection at the border

If you have been abroad, you must, by law, self-isolate for 10 days. This applies for all countries. When entering the UK from a country with a travel ban to the UK, you must quarantine in a government-approved hotel for 10 days. It is also mandatory for all international arrivals, regardless of whether they are quarantining at home or in a managed quarantine facility, to take a COVID test on day two and eight of their 10-day quarantine period.

Stop the spread

If you have any COVID-19 symptoms, you must self-isolate immediately and call 119 to book a test or [register online](#).

Response

Community testing crucial for roadmap milestone

The weekly COVID-19 case rate in Oxfordshire is now just below 35 per 100,000 residents, which means we are at a comparable level with early October 2020. However, while cases continue to decline, the rate at which cases are falling is now slowing and we are starting to see a plateau both locally and nationally. We must continue to follow the rules and do what we can to stop the spread.

This is particularly important as we enter the next phase of the government's roadmap out of lockdown on 29 March, when the 'stay at home' rule will be lifted and people will be able to meet outdoors in groups of up to six or two households. With Easter holidays also on the horizon, we are urging all public-facing workers, volunteers and childminders to take part in our [symptom-free testing](#) programme, including over the school break.

To help with this, from 29 March, we will be expanding the programme, working closely with our local authority partners. This includes: an additional site opening to serve the west of the county; all symptom-free sites offering twice-weekly testing; and the option of 'community collect' of lateral flow device (LFD) tests for adults with nursery, primary and secondary school and college-aged children and young people, including childcare and support bubbles, from all local sites. More on this below.

Symptom-free testing at home and community collect for parents and carers

The government is encouraging all households with nursery, primary and secondary school and college-aged children and young people, including childcare and

support bubbles, to take part in twice-weekly rapid lateral flow testing. This is mainly through a community collect scheme using home test kits.

Adults in one of these households who do not qualify for our [symptom-free testing programme](#), can now collect home testing kits (each contains seven lateral flow device (LFD) tests) from any local testing site across Oxfordshire – symptomatic sites 2.30pm - 8pm and symptom-free sites during their opening hours. Residents do not need to make an appointment to collect home test kits but they can [check online](#) if the location is open or busy before they go. If they cannot get to a site, they can order home test kits on [gov.uk](#), where they will be delivered to their home.

Anyone who has COVID-19 symptoms, must self-isolate immediately and [book a symptomatic \(PCR\) test](#) at one of Oxfordshire's five symptomatic testing sites as soon as possible. They must not attend a symptom-free site or use a lateral flow device.

The symptomatic test sites are where people go to get tested when they have symptoms of COVID-19 – and because of that, collection of these home test kits is set for when testing of symptomatic people will not be taking place. The symptomatic local testing sites offering community collect 2.30pm - 8pm in Oxfordshire include:

Regional testing site (drive-through):

- Oxford Parkway, Water Eaton Park & Ride, Oxford Road, Oxford (OX2 8HA)

Local testing sites (walk-through):

- Woodgreen Leisure Centre, Woodgreen Avenue, Banbury (OX16 0HS)
- Osney Lane, Oxford (OX1 1NY)
- Woodford Way car park, Witney (OX28 6JS)
- Fuller Building Restaurant, Oxford Brookes University, Headington (OX3 0BP)

Community collect of lateral flow home test kits is available at all the county's symptom-free sites during their opening hours, which from 29 March will be:

- Spiceball Leisure Centre, Banbury (OX16 2BW): 7am-7pm (Mon-Fri); 8.30am-12.30pm (Sat)
- The Beacon in Wantage (OX12 9BX): 8.30am-7pm (Mon-Fri); 8.30am-12.30pm (Sat)
- King's Centre in Oxford (OX2 0ES): 8.30am-7pm (Mon-Fri); 8.30am-12.30pm (Sat)
- New site: Brownes Hall in Carterton (OX18 3JH): 8.30am-7pm (Mon-Fri); 8.30am-12.30pm (Sat)

For those using lateral flow tests at home, the sample is collected using a swab and needs to be tested following the instructions provided. The result is confirmed in 30 minutes and needs to be reported to the NHS on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk). Once a home test is completed, the kit should be placed into the bag provided and disposed of with general household waste.

A secondary PCR test will be required for positive lateral flow tests that are taken at home. For anyone testing positive for COVID-19, a [self-isolation information pack](https://www.gov.uk/self-isolation-information-pack) is available at oxfordshire.gov.uk/selfisolate to help provide advice and sources of support. If any result is negative, people must continue to follow social distancing guidelines, wear a mask in public and regularly wash their hands.

Community collect lateral flow tests are for eligible adults and should not be used for testing children. Children and young people at school or college should continue to use lateral flow tests provided to them by their school.

For further information on the types of tests available, you can read the answers to a number of [frequently asked questions](#) on our website.

Testing for people who have COVID-19 symptoms

As well as the above testing sites for people who have COVID-19 symptoms, we also have a number of mobile testing units operating in the county. The latest dates and locations for these are below. [Booking](#) is required for all testing sites.

Carterton Pavilion, Monahan Way, Carterton, Oxfordshire, OX18 3AN

- March: 31; April: 7, 14, 21, 28.

Chinnor Rugby Club, Rectory Pavilion, Kingsey Road, Thame, Oxfordshire OX9 3JL

- April: 1, 2, 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, 23, 29, 30.

Dalton Barracks, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX13 6JB

- March: 29, 30, 31.

Wheatley Campus, Oxford Brookes University, College Close, Oxfordshire, OX33 1HX

- March 28, 29. April: 4, 5, 11, 12, 18, 19, 25, 26.

COVID-19 vaccination programme update

As of 19 March, over 275,000 vaccines have been delivered to people in Oxfordshire since 7 December and second doses are now underway. This is well over one third of our local population. In line with the national roll-out, the vaccine is now being offered to priority groups 1 - 9, which includes all those aged 50 and over, those who are clinically extremely vulnerable, carers of someone at high risk from COVID-19 and adults with an underlying health condition.

Even people who have been vaccinated should continue to abide by the rules. The vaccines seem to be performing as we hoped, but our own personal and collective discipline buys those vaccines the space to do their work. When you get the call to take the jab, please do so – it keeps you and others much safer.

#stopthespread communications campaign

We continue to be very grateful for your help in sharing our social media messages with residents and underlining the importance of sticking to the rules. Our current campaigns are focused on raising awareness of the testing available for all public-facing workers, the launch of the community collect scheme for parents and carers, the opening of a new test centre in Carterton and the lifting of some restrictions on 29 March.

Government roadmap and agile working

Roadmap rules from 29 March

This week saw us hit the 12-month milestone of when we first went into lockdown - it is quite incredible that a year has already passed. As we look forward to what will hopefully be a brighter 2021, we look back in [this animation](#) at how the county council has kept Oxfordshire moving during the pandemic. I am sure you will join me in thanking staff for the tireless dedication, commitment and compassion they have shown over this period in supporting our communities and continuing to deliver our services.

On Monday, we move into the next phase of the government's roadmap, with new rules coming into play. The 'stay at home' rule will be lifted; you will be able to meet up outside - including in private gardens - with either six people (the rule of six) or

two households; and outdoor sports facilities such as tennis and basketball courts, and open-air swimming pools, will be allowed to reopen and people will be able to take part in formally organised outdoor sports.

The 'stay at home' rule will come to an end but many restrictions will remain in place. People should continue to work from home where they can and minimise the number of journeys they make where possible, avoiding travel at the busiest times and routes. Travel abroad will continue to be prohibited, other than for a small number of permitted reasons. Holidays abroad will not be allowed, given it will remain important to manage the risk of imported variants and protect the vaccination programme. The government has launched a new taskforce to review global travel, which will report on 12 April.

Planning for agile working

Current government guidance is that people should continue to work from home where they can. This guidance will remain in place until the final stage (Step 4) of the easing of lockdown, which will be 21 June at the earliest. In line with government guidance, we are therefore asking everyone who can work from home to continue to do so.

Before Step 4 begins, the government will complete a review of social distancing and other long-term measures that have been put in place to reduce transmission of the virus. This will inform decisions on the timing and circumstances under which the rules on 1 metre plus, the wearing of face coverings and other measures may be lifted. The review will also inform guidance on working from home.

While the guidelines for COVID-compliant workspaces after 21 June are still to be determined, we are working on the basis that some form of COVID adaptations will need to be made. If the same requirements around social distancing remain in place, we could only fit around 20 per cent of our workforce into our office space. We are therefore planning on the basis that; home-working will remain a significant part of our working experience after 21 June and for the foreseeable future.

With regards to council meetings, the government has confirmed that emergency legislation regarding virtual council meetings will end on 7 May and will not be extended. We are therefore working through the implications of this to ensure that we can hold meetings in a COVID-secure manner. I will update you on our plans as they develop.

Back in October, I set out our longer-term strategy for agile working, which has flexibility at its heart – both in terms of how we work and how we deliver services.

That vision still holds true. As an organisation, we need to build flexibility into the way we operate both in the short and the longer term. This will not only help us respond quickly to a rapidly changing situation with COVID, but it will enable us to make the most of digital technology, meet the changing needs of our residents by providing digital and remote access to services that are not bound to buildings or locations, and support our commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030.

Re-start, re-cover, re-new

Feeding families, heating homes and the holiday activities and food programme

We are working in partnership with the city and district councils and Citizens Advice services to help those struggling to feed their families or heat their homes this spring as a result of the impact of the pandemic. The families of 14,500 eligible children and young people will receive food vouchers or equivalent support worth £30 through their schools, college or nursery ahead of the Easter holiday. Financial help is also being extended into the spring for support with the costs of food and essential utilities.

Recognising school holidays can be particular pressure points for some families, this Easter free places are being provided in holiday schemes, which last between four and eight days for families in need. Recruitment into these places is taking place through schools and partner services. The attached briefing note provides detailed information on the holiday activities and food programme for 2021, which covers the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays. Embedded in this note is a word document listing all the free schemes in Oxfordshire. Please do everything you can to ensure those families who most need them benefit from these services. You can read more about all of the above in the [news story](#) on our website.

Important information for visitors to our household waste and recycling centres

The Easter holiday is one of the busiest times for Oxfordshire's household waste and recycling centres (HWRCs). We are asking people to defer their visits until after Easter if they possibly can to avoid getting stuck in queues. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and social distancing, Oxfordshire's HWRCs are currently operating at 50 per cent car parking capacity. Traffic control measures have been introduced at four of the county's seven HWRCs. For a three-week period, these HWRCs will be

closed early or for short periods in the day if queues start affecting surrounding roads. From 1 April, we are reintroducing late night opening on Thursdays, with centres staying open until 8pm to help the situation. Full details are in our online [news story](#). We would be very grateful for your support sharing this information with residents in your division.

Mental wellbeing hub for young people launched in Oxfordshire

We have launched a new information hub to help young people suffering psychological challenges made worse by COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. The hub aims to help young people navigate a myriad of local and national services by conveniently signposting them to practical advice, resources and help tools. Social media and the county council's young people's website oxme.info/wellbeing are central to the initiative, designed to offer a one-stop shop where advice is just a couple of clicks away. You can read all about it in our [news story](#). Please help raise awareness of the hub in your division.

Green homes grant fund success

At least 150 homes across Oxfordshire will be made more energy efficient thanks to our successful bid for £1.5 million of government Green Homes Grant funding. We will be working with expected delivery partner the National Energy Foundation (NEF) to help less well-off households retrofit their homes with energy saving equipment – cutting families' fuel bills while at the same time helping to reduce the county's carbon footprint. The scheme will focus on insulation as a method of improving energy efficiency, with each chosen property receiving work worth up to £10,000. More information, including alternative sources of funding for households, is in the [news story](#) on our website.

Recognising how the councillor priority fund has helped Oxfordshire's communities

Neighbourhoods across every single part of Oxfordshire have benefited from almost £1 million of funding that you, as councillors, have channelled to important projects in your divisions through the 2020/21 Councillor Priority Fund. This includes laptops for schools to help with distanced learning, tree planting schemes, playground refurbishments, installations of defibrillators and support to local food banks and larders. More information is in our [news story](#).

Investing in our highways

Roads, cycleways, bridges, drainage, pavements and streetlights will all benefit from the £31.3 million capital programme of works in the next 12 months, as part of our wider investment into highway infrastructure. The projects include resurfacing, repairs, road strengthening and surface dressing. More details in our [news story](#) on our website.

New stop smoking service for Oxfordshire set to launch

Stop for Life Oxon, our new stop smoking service, launches on 1 April. Replacing our existing service, it will offer an increased range of free support options to residents who are ready to quit and provides specialist stop smoking support and advice to increase people's chances of quitting. More information is in our online [news story](#).

Council meetings

Links to view all virtual public meetings can be found on the [meeting details](#) page on our website – simply click on each meeting in the calendar to view the link. For those members requesting to speak, committee officers will make the necessary arrangements for you to attend the meeting. Recordings can be viewed after each meeting.

There are no virtual meetings for the next three weeks. Meetings restart on Monday 19 April.

The top tips for councillors and the [councillor protocol for virtual public meetings](#) will continue to be useful in maximising the democratic potential of our digital meetings. Get in touch with democratic services at cllrs-covid19@oxfordshire.gov.uk if you have any feedback that will help us to improve your experience of future virtual meetings.

And finally...

I know this weekend will be hard for those councillors celebrating Passover and Holi as restrictions mean many of you will not be able to see wider family and friends – I really hope you still enjoy celebrating safely.

Don't forget this Sunday is the start of British summertime, when the clocks go forward. I know it might not feel like it, but it won't be long until we will be enjoying those warm light evenings.

Staying up to date

For the latest information about the council's response to COVID-19, regularly check your emails, visit the council's website [oxfordshire.gov.uk](https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk) and follow our social media accounts.

All the best – please stay safe and stay well.