

22 February 2021

Together We're Better COVID-19 Stakeholder Update

Last week it was announced that the world's first COVID-19 'human challenge' trial will take place in the UK in a few weeks. This is where young healthy volunteers will be deliberately infected with COVID-19 to test vaccines and treatments. The study has received ethics approval and will recruit 90 people aged between 18 and 30 years old. Health professionals will monitor the participants' health while they are exposed to the virus in a safe and controlled environment. It will be interesting to hear what sort of results this study produces.

It is also reassuring to hear that since January, there has been a significant decline in levels of COVID-19 infections in England. According to Imperial College London's REACT study, infections have dropped by two-thirds across England. However, they stress that virus levels are still high, with one in 200 people testing positive between 4 and 13 February 2021. This is why, even with the tremendous success of the vaccine roll-out, we must still be cautious and remember that we are in a national lockdown that requires us to stay at home. If you do have to go out for essential reasons then you must wear a face covering, keep washing your hands and maintain social distancing.

We're continuing to see the decline in cases locally which is positive, albeit slower than we would like. We're below the West Midlands average, however, are still higher than the England average of 133 per 100,000. Stoke-on-Trent has declined again and was last week hovering around the 148 per 100,000 and Staffordshire was at just below 200. However, we're still seeing a significant divergence in cases between the South and North of the county, with Cannock almost double the rate of Newcastle-under-Lyme and the Moorlands. East Staffordshire is still on our local watch list, due to the higher positivity rate and current rate of 243 per 100,000.

We know it will take time for the same decline to be seen in the NHS and our hospitals continue to be under a lot of pressure. Tragically, we also saw the death of another porter at University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust (UHNM) last Monday, reminding us of the devastating impact this virus is having for our frontline NHS. We're all grateful to see the death rates coming down in our hospitals and care homes, but we still have a long way to go.

Waiting times has been another story in the media, and this will be the next challenge once we are out of this current wave. The Choice and Referral centre has been doing a fantastic job to transfer patients awaiting treatment at UHNM to the Independent sector. This is helping patients to get the urgent treatment they need and reduce the elective backlogs and reduce long-waiters. Over the last few weeks patients from UHNM have been contacted and offered the option to receive treatment in either Rowley Hall or Nuffield Hospitals - over 770 patients have so far been booked into these sites.

Locally, we're also starting to see some glimmers of hope for the vaccine. Early signs show that the numbers of outbreaks in care homes is reducing. It is too early to be certain this is a long-term trend, however NHS and local authority teams think this is thanks to the uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine. We know the impact this virus has

had on care home residents and staff, so we're all hoping this positive trend will continue.

Over 300,000 vaccines have been delivered so far locally. We know that over 98% of our over 80s, 100% of 75–79 year olds and 93% of our 70-74-year olds have received the vaccine and as a system we met the Government's target to offer a vaccine to everyone in priority cohorts 1-4 by the beginning of last week.

Although these numbers are impressive, they don't tell the whole story and once again we're seeing firsthand the barriers that exist within our society. If you have been following the media this week, you will know that some Black, Asian and ethnic minority (BAME) and deprived communities are not coming forward for the vaccine. We're seeing a similar trend locally. The numbers in these early cohorts who have not come forward may be small, but there is a worrying trend in the uptake for certain communities.

You can read more local COVID-19 news in the [COVID-19 vaccination bulletin](#).

Team Prevent UK has produced a [video breaking down the myths surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic](#). Featuring clear, simple facts about COVID-19 and why it is vital that we all continue to follow the guidance. The video aims to help people to understand how the virus works and why it is important to continue to adhere to government guidance.

At our local vaccination centres over half of those on duty at any time can be volunteers. The volunteers, who are helping make Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent's COVID-19 vaccination programme a success have been thanked for their efforts.

If you would like to become a volunteer you can find more information on the [Together We're Better website](#).

Overexposure to the news and constantly absorbing news stories related to COVID-19 can cause a lot of fear, anxiety and worry, so taking breaks from or reducing the amount of news you follow can be helpful. Be mindful of how much time you are spending on news channels and switch to more positive activities for your own wellbeing. We all need to keep up-to-date with what is happening in relation to the virus, but it doesn't need to be all-consuming, especially if it starts to affect your mental health.

Away from the subject of COVID-19 you may have noticed some television adverts aired this week from the new [Lung Cancer Symptoms campaign](#). The campaign highlights a cough that lasts for three weeks or more could be a sign of lung cancer and encourages anyone who has this symptom to contact their GP practice.

Despite lung cancer being the third most common cancer in England, suspected lung cancer referrals remain lower than normal. As of December 2020, lung cancer referrals had reached 73% of pre-COVID-19 levels, while referrals for all cancers were just over 100%.

You can also promote the campaign by using the key messages below and [campaign resources](#) available.

- If you've had a cough for three weeks or more, and it isn't COVID-19, it could still be a warning sign
- A cough for three weeks or more could be a sign of cancer. Just contact your GP practice
- It's probably nothing serious, but finding cancer early makes it more treatable
- Your NHS is here to see you, safely.

There are some online events happening next month that you may find of interest:

Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent is holding three public meetings to find out what health and social care services are important to you. You can register onto any of the three public meetings to support your local Healthwatch to shape its new annual priorities for April 2021 – March 2022. You can follow the links below to register:-

- [Monday 01 March, 10am – 12 noon](#)
- [Tuesday 02 March, 2pm – 4pm](#)
- [Thursday 04 March, 2pm – 4pm](#)

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic a much larger proportion of patient appointments are via phone, text or video consultation. Webinars have been arranged to help patients with raised blood pressure or atrial fibrillation learn more about their health conditions and what you can do using digital aids.

The webinars have been collated with experienced nurses and doctors who will endeavour to help patients to understand more about their condition and to be prepared for different formats of consultation, such as texting and video consultation. Nurses Kevin and Ann will be available to answer questions in the chatbox and live questions will also be taken at the end of the webinar by Dr Ruth.

Digital delivery of care – hypertension

Tuesday 2 March, 6.00pm – 7.00pm and Monday 8 March, 12.30pm - 1.30pm

To help anyone who has a raised blood pressure (hypertension) or thinks they might have it, to learn more about what they can do to get it confirmed; or get their blood pressure under control. This webinar will help you learn more about your health condition and what you can do using digital aids to manage your blood pressure better, in line with the treatment you have agreed with your practice nurse or GP. You can download a flyer with further information and a link to join the webinar [here](#).

Digital delivery of self-care of atrial fibrillation

Monday 1 March, 12.30pm - 1.30pm and Tuesday 9 March, 6.00pm – 7.00pm

To help anyone who has been diagnosed with atrial fibrillation (AF – having an irregular heart rate diagnosed) or thinks they might have it, to learn more about what they can do to get it confirmed; or optimise their treatment and adopt healthy lifestyle habits. You can download a flyer with further information and a link to join the webinar [here](#).

Useful Resources

A range of assets to target key behaviours and to promote the core message 'Hands. Face. Space' can be downloaded from the [PHE Campaign Resource Centre](#).

New campaign materials added to the Campaign Resource Centre:

- [Workplace Testing](#) including marketing assets for [local authorities](#) to engage with local businesses and [employers](#), as well as [private and public businesses and employers](#) to engage their employees
- [Symptoms and Isolation](#) – New assets to encourage symptomatic testing
- [New Stay at Home Assets](#)
- [Social Media Statics](#) including new assets to make it clear to those that have had the Covid-19 vaccine they still need to stay home and stick to the rules
- [Translations – Social Statics](#)
- [Translations – Social Animations](#)
- [Alternative Formats – TV, Socials and Video](#)

Links to the latest hard-hitting Stay at Home “Look into their eyes” creative and resources to support those who are delivering surge testing for new variants and those delivering community testing can also be found on the [PHE Campaign Resource Centre](#). You can also find links below to some BBC content for South Asian communities.

- [South African Variant Surge Testing](#)
- [Variant Surge Testing](#)
- [Community Testing](#)
- [Stay Home, Protect the NHS, Save Lives](#)

National lockdown restriction resources can be found [here](#).

Materials are available for the following campaigns; please can we ask for your help to promote them across your networks:

- British Sign Language resources.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-british-sign-language-resources>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/covid-19-vaccination-programme>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/covid-19-vaccination-programme#leaflets,-posters-and-resources>

- Public Health England (PHE) [guidance](#) for everyone to help reduce the risk of catching coronavirus and passing it on to others.
- [Fraud social media](#) and [explainer videos](#)
- [Stay Home](#) – Look into my eyes creative

- COVID-19 vaccine
- A guide to your COVID-19 vaccination easy read document
- Bending the rules costs lives
- Don't help the virus spread poster
- Act like you've got it social media animations
- Hands. Face. Space resources
- Stay Alert to Stay Safe: new youth messaging focusing on 'consequences' - social animations
- Stay Alert to Stay Safe posters: White background easy print for face coverings and distance
- NHS Test and Trace posters: White background easy print for drive through testing and self-isolate
- NHS COVID-19 App resources
- Wearing a face mask – translations (Arabic/French/Kurdish/Lithuanian/Pashto/Polish/Portuguese/Romanian/Russian/Spanish/Tigrinya)
- Test and Trace materials are available to use on the Public Health England Campaign Resource Centre. This includes BSL, easy read and large print formats [here](#).
- Signposting materials with useful information on how people can contact their GP, order repeat prescriptions and manage wellbeing and existing conditions at home: <https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/nhs-resources-facilities/resources/health-at-home/>
- Public Health England guide on how older adults can stay active at home during coronavirus to maintain strength and balance
- Translated information leaflets for parents with new-borns during coronavirus
- Mental wellbeing whilst staying at home
- North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust mental health support and advice guide
- Guidance on shielding
- Blood donation materials

Public Health England has updated its coronavirus guidance in light of changes to the government's advice and continue to ensure guidance for the public is timely and up to date. All guidance for members of the public, as well as for people in clinical and non-clinical settings, is published and updated regularly on the GOV.UK collection page.

For the latest information on coronavirus, please visit the [NHS](#) and [government](#) websites.

Together We're Better is the partnership of NHS and local government organisations, alongside independent and voluntary sector groups, that is working together to transform health and care services. You can find out more about us on our website: <https://www.twbstaffsandstoke.org.uk/>