

COVID-19 Response Stakeholder briefing

07 January 2021

Response to COVID-19 – East Sussex

This briefing aims to update you on the response across our local NHS system in East Sussex to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, in particular the vaccination programme.

Latest position in East Sussex

The number of new cases in East Sussex has continued to rise. Across all districts and boroughs in the county the local rates are now above the national figures.

The latest stats show a rate of 634 new cases per 100,000 population in East Sussex while the rate for England is 518.5.

Declaring a Major Incident

As you will have seen the Sussex Resilience Forum declared a Major Incident on Wednesday (January 6) to best respond to unprecedented pressures of Covid-19 on the county.

The same decision has been taken by several other local resilience forums in the South East.

A major incident is a recognition of national demand and puts all agencies in Sussex in the best possible position to come together to tackle the virus. It is a well-recognised and rehearsed escalation that can be expected at times of exceptional need – a major incident was also in place during the summer of 2020.

The SRF decision recognised the strong and connected pressures across the entire health and care system, from 999 calls to hospital admissions, clinical treatment, discharge from hospital, community services and provision in care homes.

Partners are satisfied that they are currently managing the extra demands on the system but agree that they must now make plans for the likelihood that pressures will increase still further in coming weeks. There is a particular need to continue delivering the programme of vaccination to Sussex residents.

We agreed the decision would allow the SRF to step up and strengthen its response still further. This may include making more use of volunteer help, preparing in detail for extra capacity needed across services and considering requests for extra support from national government if necessary

The SRF thanked the vast majority of the public in Sussex who are doing everything they can to help the NHS keep the infection under control. Everyone is asked to follow the Covid rules and protect each other; stay at home wherever possible, wash your hands regularly, keep your distance from people you don't live with and if you develop symptoms, self-isolate immediately and book a test.

Managing demand on NHS services

The demand for all NHS and care services across Sussex has risen significantly due to the higher infection rates of COVID-19 in the community in recent weeks. In some places, we are now seeing triple the number of COVID-19 positive hospital inpatients compared with the first peak back in the spring, and numbers are still increasing.

Staff across the NHS and local authorities are working tirelessly to ensure they continue to provide safe consistent care; hospitals, community teams, mental health services, social care, GP practices and the NHS111 telephone service are incredibly busy, but remain open.

In terms of impact on services, the current position is:

Discharge - at times, to ensure we can treat patients who need urgent care quickly and to maintain the highest standards of safety for all our patients, this will mean some patients are discharged from hospitals into community settings which may not be their first choice. Our teams are working to have conversations with families and manage this with each individual in the best possible way;

Planned operations – at this time the system is continuing to provide cancer, urgent elective operations and diagnostics, but some routine, planned operations are being delayed in order to respond to the increase in demand. These decisions are never taken lightly and are temporary measures only.

Maternity services - due to the significant pressure on our ambulance service, immediate changes are being made to maternity services to ensure that all births can take place as safely as possible. Whilst the ambulance trust is prioritising urgent 999 calls, this means that support for all emergencies from the ambulance service will be stretched and response times may be delayed. This includes attending home addresses for complications that can arise during home births, and attending for complications that can arise at stand-alone midwife led units where women/people may need to be transferred to another maternity unit.

The safety of births is our priority, so across East Sussex the decision has been made to suspend planned homebirths and births at stand-alone midwife led units including Eastbourne Hospital at this time. Our teams are working to ensure that our maternity services are as accommodating as possible and the home birthing teams and midwife-led unit midwives will be available to continue to provide care if you were planning a home birth or a midwife-led unit birth.

The situation continues to be monitored regularly and there are system calls every day. We will continue to keep you updated.

COVID-19 Vaccination programme

The NHS in East Sussex continues to be committed to continual roll out of the COVID-19 vaccination.

Residents in East Sussex are being vaccinated in:

- Hospital hubs;
- GP led vaccination services; and
- Care homes by a roving service (that will also support housebound).

Planning continues for large vaccination services (formerly known as mass sites) in Sussex.

Hospital hubs

Hospital hub vaccination services in Sussex were launched at the Royal Sussex County Hospital in Brighton on 08 December 2020. Teams at the hospital have been vaccinating those over the age of 80 who were attending the hospital and health and care staff.

In East Sussex, the Conquest Hospital in Hastings went live as a hospital hub last week, and Eastbourne Hospital has gone live this week.

There are three other hospital hubs that have gone live in Sussex, including Princess Royal Hospital in Haywards Heath which became one of the first in the country to use the new AstraZeneca vaccine. This vaccine can be transported easier than the Pfizer vaccine and will be rolled out more widely as supplies become available.

GP-led vaccination services

GP-led vaccination services are where the majority of the current population are being offered their vaccinations. In total in Sussex there are 23 sites which have gone live to date.

In the majority, each service is supported by a number of GP practices (within their Primary Care Network footprint) working together to vaccinate their collective population.

Currently in East Sussex, seven GP-led vaccination services have gone live and have started to vaccinate patients over the age of 80.

These sites are:

- The Meads Medical Centre in Uckfield
- River Lodge in Lewes (moving to the Phoenix Centre)
- Beacon Shopping Centre in Eastbourne
- Hampden Park Health Centre in Eastbourne
- Princes Park Health Centre in Eastbourne
- Sidley Medical Practice in Bexhill
- The Kings Church in Hastings

Next week, subject to final approvals it is expected two further GP led vaccination services will go live at Saxonbury House Medical Practice and Brighton race course.

The two areas where discussions are underway in terms of alternative arrangements are Rural Rother and Hailsham. In these areas the GP practices have not signed up to the Enhanced Service to lead the vaccination programme, but Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust will provide the service to these patients instead. Final details are being confirmed in terms of locations for these services and we will be able to share more on this next week.

Each site that has gone live had an initial delivery of vaccine with 975 doses to provide the first vaccination to their patients. Some have ordered further supplies and have completed a

second session of first doses to their patients. This will now be an ongoing process with the sites ordering vaccine and inviting in more of their over 80 registered population.

Some sites this week have received the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine and will be vaccinating with it this week and weekend.

The Government guidance on the timing of the second dose has been updated and is now over a 12 week period. All of our vaccination services will be working to adhere to the guidance and invite their patients back for their second dose in the 12 week period.

We are working to vaccinate as many people as possible as quickly as possible, but deploying a vaccine at this scale is unprecedented. Timing will be dependent to a large extent on manufacturing timescales and supply.

We would please ask all partners to encourage the public not to call their GP practice to find out more about the vaccination programme and to make an appointment. GP practices are incredibly busy at the moment providing their day to day care for patients and they have seen an increase in calls to their teams to ask about the vaccination programme and when it will be available. We are working with all GP practices to have clear information on their websites and working with community partners to ensure we can share the latest updates in our communities.

Vaccinations in care homes

Older people in care homes have been identified as the top priority group for the vaccine by the Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations due to their high risk from COVID-19. Care staff are also in the top priority.

However, due to the well-publicised logistical challenges associated with the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, the NHS was initially unable to transport the vaccine to care homes and instead began inviting care staff to receive the vaccination at hospital hubs and then at other local vaccination services.

As regulators approved a way for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine to be transported in smaller batches, we began the process of delivering it in care homes for older people, with the first homes vaccinated in the week of 29 December 2020. The vaccine cannot be split into batches of less than 75, and cannot be transported between homes, so delivery began at larger care homes.

The recent approval of the Oxford/Astra Zeneca vaccine, which is much easier to transport, means that we will now also be able to vaccinate in many more care homes, much more quickly, safely and effectively. However it has only been available to the NHS since Monday 4 January and initially was at just one location in Sussex, to ensure a safe roll out.

National guidance for roll out of the vaccine is being followed, with priority for vaccinating residents and staff of care homes with greater than 50 residents initially. This is for a number of both clinical, workforce capacity, and logistical reasons including the need to minimise the number of unnecessary visits to care homes to mitigate potential risk.

Vaccines are being delivered through a GP-led vaccination service, managed by the local Primary Care Networks which we expect to cover the majority of the care homes in Sussex. The remainder will be served by Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust vaccination teams. The Oxford/Astra Zeneca vaccine will be made available to Primary Care Networks over the next three weeks, allowing the NHS in Sussex to increase the number of care home residents and staff vaccinated each day. Delivery of vaccinations by the GP-led service is

also dependant on the readiness and approval of the local vaccination service, in line with planned go live dates, which will be expedited throughout January.

We will be working in partnership with care homes to organise and schedule the vaccinations. This will be aligned with availability of the vaccine in local areas to work towards the goal of getting all national priority group care homes scheduled for vaccinations by the end of January.

A detailed plan for each local area is currently being worked up which will confirm the timelines, requirements and Standard Operating Procedures for care homes and scope any support likely to be required based on learning from the pilot sites already vaccinated. The NHS will be in touch with care homes directly to arrange and support the process of vaccinations and the appropriate information sharing and consents needed, including any additional considerations such as mental capacity and safeguarding.

Availability of the vaccine and sites able to vaccinate people are increasing week by week, but again, we need to be realistic that it will take time. All residents will receive the vaccination in their care home.

We will shortly be writing out to homes with more detail about the schedule of vaccinations in care homes.

Vaccinations are now also being given to care staff via all our Sussex hospital hubs including Brighton, Chichester, Eastbourne, Hastings, Haywards Heath, and Worthing. Staff must book an appointment directly with the hub before attending.

More information

We continue to publish all of the latest information on the vaccine of the [Sussex Health and Care Partnership website](#) including a public FAQ, which you may find useful. An FAQ with suggested replies to common enquiries is also attached to this briefing to help you with the questions you may be receiving.