

COVID-19 Response Stakeholder briefing

05 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.

Current cases

The number of new cases of COVID-19 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.

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

Work continues at pace to roll out the COVID-19 vaccination across East Sussex.

Vaccinations are taking place in

- Hospital hubs;
- GP led vaccination services;
- Roving service to care homes and housebound; and
- Planning for large vaccination services (formerly known as mass sites).

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 is due to go live this week. These hospital hubs are using the Pfizer vaccine that has to be stored at very low temperatures and is difficult to transport.

Princess Royal Hospital in Haywards Heath 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 15 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, six GP-led vaccination services have gone live and have all 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

This week, a GP-led vaccination service goes live at 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 share this as soon as possible.

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.

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.

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.

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

Now that regulators have approved a way for the Pfizer vaccine to be transported in smaller batches, we have begun the process of delivering it in care homes. The approval of the Oxford vaccine, which is much easier to transport, means that we will now be able to vaccinate in many more care homes much more quickly.

To date, the first eight homes were vaccinated at the end of December 2020, including in East Sussex. While we are making great progress, we need to be realistic that it will take time.

We are working in partnership with care homes to organise and schedule the vaccinations. Vaccines are being delivered in the main through the GP-led vaccination service, managed by the local Primary Care Networks. We expect these to cover about 60 per cent of the care homes in Sussex, with the remainder being served by Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust vaccination teams. All residents will receive the vaccination in their care home. Staff will continue to also be able to access the vaccine from hospital hubs.

In the immediate term, our planning continues to be based on the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. Because it cannot be split into batches of less than 75, and cannot be transported between homes, we will be starting with larger homes, and homes with more than 50 residents are being prioritised.

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.

The NHS, local authorities, acute hospitals, and community services have worked together to draw up a prioritisation schedule for the order in which Sussex care homes will receive the vaccine, and this will be aligned with availability of the vaccine in local areas to work towards the goal of getting all care homes vaccinated by the end of January. 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.

A detailed plan for each 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.

COVID-19 vaccination scam alert

We are aware that some people are receiving fraudulent calls and text messages offering the COVID-19 vaccination. In some cases, people are asked to press a number on their keypad or to send a text message to confirm they wish to receive the vaccine. Doing so is likely to result in a charge being applied to their phone bill. In other cases, callers are offering the vaccine for a fee or asking for bank details.

People are warned to be alert to these scams. The vaccine is only available from the NHS and the NHS will contact you when it is your turn. At present, appointments are only being offered to members of the public over 80 years old.

The NHS will:

- NEVER ask you to press a button on your keypad or send a text asking you to confirm you want the vaccine.
- NEVER ask for payment for the vaccine or for your bank details.
- If you receive a call you believe to be fraudulent, hang up. If you believe you have been the victim of fraud or identity theft you should report this directly to Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040. Where the victim is vulnerable, report it to Sussex Police online or by calling 101.

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.