**CORONAVIRUS, COVID-19 UPDATE – 9A**

**COVID-19 INFECTION RATES**

**Comments from the Director of Public Health** (29th January 2021)

The local rate now stands at 304 cases per 100,000, down a quarter from the peak rate seen three weeks ago.  Although it is pleasing that rates have fallen, it remains the case that the rate of decrease locally is not as rapid as the national average.  This pattern is also apparent in other parts of the East and West Midlands.

In response, the focus this week has been on targeting workplaces and possible sources of workplace transmission, and increasing the rate of compliance with self-isolation.

Blaby has the highest rate in the County (363.5 per 100,000 population) followed by North West Leicestershire (337.8), Oadby and Wigston (303.4), Harborough (296.4), Hinckley and Bosworth (294.3), Charnwood (284.1) and Melton (226.5).  The largest fall this week has been seen in Oadby and Wigston (down 25%) corresponding with the extension of asymptomatic testing in Wigston.

A new asymptomatic testing site was opened in Blaby on Wednesday with a site in North West Leicestershire opening early next week.

**COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT**

The County Council continues to encourage compliance with the national lockdown through a comprehensive communications programme, including several media interviews this week. Posters have been distributed to small retailers, helping to ensure customers wear face coverings, and employers will receive messages over the next week promoting the need to work from home and ensure COVID-secure workplaces.

The roll out of [rapid testing for key workers](https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/rapid-asymptomatic-testing) continues to be promoted with sites opening at Swannington Village Hall on 1 February, followed by Melton Mowbray (Polish Centre) and Loughborough (Gorse Covert Centre), later next week.

The County Council continues to support NHS partners in promoting the NHS vaccination programme. Our focus is particularly on the care workforce to ensure take up of the vaccine, as well as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities. This week we have shared a [powerful video message](https://youtu.be/wg00_7vSQis) on our social media channels featuring well-known BAME figures.

**ENFORCEMENT OF REGULATIONS**

This update provides a summary of how Government Regulations are enforced locally.

Leicestershire Constabulary and the local authorities of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland are signatories to a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to ensure there is appropriate collaboration and consistency around the enforcement of Regulations.

The overarching principles of the MOU are :

- Enforcement action relating to **businesses** will be led by **local authorities.**

- Enforcement around requirements placed on **individuals** at or in a private dwelling or in public are led by the **Police**

With the plethora of Regulations there are some areas of enforcement within a business setting that may necessitate a response from both the Police and a local authority.

On 2nd December 2020 local authorities were given new powers to issue improvement and restriction notices on businesses failing to comply with COVID-secure regulations :

*The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Local Authority Enforcement Powers and Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020 No. 1375*) can be found here : <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/1375/contents/made>
These regulations were amended on 26th December 2020 to take account of the introduction of a new Tier 4: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/1646/contents/made>.

Government guidance on the new local authority powers can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/additional-covid-19-local-authority-enforcement-powers>.

Leicestershire local authorities (county and district) have agreed that the district councils will provide the initial enforcement response. Such action may result in the issue of an improvement notice, a 24 hour immediate restriction notice or a 7 day closure notice for persistent non-compliance. There is also a range of fixed penalty notices that can be issued for non-compliance. There is no requirement under these Regulations to establish *a serious and imminent threat to public health*; the new powers are designed to provide a swifter local enforcement response to specific breaches of the Regulations.

Where the above enforcement methods fail to achieve compliance or the breach relates to an event or public outdoor space, the County Council will consider deploying its upper tier authority powers prescribed by the *Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 3) Regulations 2020*. These provisions allow for longer closure periods and more scope in terms of the restrictions that could be imposed. The decision to apply the ‘No 3 powers’ is solely a decision for the County Council as the upper tier authority with a requirement to consult with the relevant district council and the Police.  However, before issuing a direction, the Director of Public Health must be satisfied that the alleged lack of due diligence creates a *serious and imminent risk to public health.* The County Council must apply proportionality when determining the duration and scope of the closure or restriction. Guidance on the use of these powers is published on gov.uk : <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-powers-to-impose-restrictions-under-coronavirus-regulations/local-authority-powers-to-impose-restrictions-health-protection-coronavirus-restrictions-england-no3-regulations-2020>

The current lockdown has reduced enforcement activity with only essential retail now open for business. The County Council’s trading standards officers continue to meet regularly with the Director of Public Health, district council environmental health officers, and the Police. This is necessary to ensure there is a collaborative approach to operational enforcement with a methodology in place to identify those businesses, business sectors and outdoor spaces that pose the greatest risk to disease transmission. There is some variance across the county on monitoring and enforcement at district level.  Any concerns about the level of enforcement should be taken up first with the relevant district council.

The following guidance sets out the restrictions that certain businesses and venues in England are required to follow :

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close/closing-certain-businesses-and-venues-in-england>.

It provides details of the types of businesses that are permitted to trade during lockdown and those sectors which must close. This guidance continues to evolve, in particular providing further commentary for enforcers on the issue of essential retail and how particular sectors can continue to do business. Local authority enforcers have a difficult task in terms of the emerging enforcement anomalies, mindful that the clarity provided by the Government is set out in this guidance and not prescribed in law, through amending legislation.

Complaints or queries relating to businesses breaching this guidance should be directed to the appropriate district council.

Breaches by individuals should be referred to the Police using the coronavirus reporting web link : <https://www.leics.police.uk/tua/tell-us-about/c19/v7/tell-us-about-a-possible-breach-of-coronavirus-covid-19-measures/>

**ECONOMIC RECOVERY**

At its meeting 5th February 2021 the Cabinet will be considering a number of initiatives in response to the economic impact of Covid-19 :

The **Kickstart Programme** was launched nationally in September 2020.  With Cabinet approval the County Council will become a Kickstart Gateway in collaboration with Leicester City Council.  Whilst there are already many organisations acting as Kickstart Gateways locally, including the East Midlands Chamber, district councils and training providers, the proposal for the County Council (and City Council) is that the offer to young people will be a placement of upto 12 months, doubling the national offer. In addition, the County Council will actively seek to support young people furthest from the labour market, including care leavers. As part of the scheme, the County Council will identify 15 internal roles across its departments. The costs related to the extended placements and scheme management will be £175,000.  Small and medium businesses (SMEs) in the County and City will be supported to recruit a further 90 extended Kickstart placements funded through the Local Enterprise Partnership Investment Panel fund.  Recruit is due to begin from April 2021.

**Work+** is a universal work club initiative responding to the high level of unemployment caused by the pandemic. The is to fund a 2-year project to support people to become work-ready. This will include assistance and advice focused on interview techniques, digital training, self-employment, business support, volunteering opportunities, job searches, using social media platforms to search for jobs, CV development, drafting cover letters and opening email accounts. The proposal is that Work+ is a universal offer targeted at “people actively looking for work” with targets including engaging with ethnic minority communities, people with disabilities, with mental health issues, and ensuring a gender balance. Delivery will be primarily through a combination of a virtual, online offer as well as the County Council’s Libraries, utilising existing assets and supporting community resources.  The Work+ programme is due to go live online from April 2021 and then, through a series of stages, offered across the library network. The estimated cost for 2 years is £340,000.

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**Leicestershire County Council Business Recovery Grant** : Thiswas a £750,000 Business Recovery Fund to support businesses impacted by the pandemic. The fund has now closed but over the last six months has awarded grants ranging from £2,000 - £10,000 (match funded by participants) to over 100 Leicestershire businesses. These businesses have come from a range of sectors including 67 in independent/retail, 11 in agriculture, 11 in tourism and 17 in the creative industries sector. 234 jobs have been safeguarded and 94 jobs created.

**Community Pubs Fund:** The County Council recognises that rural pubs are at the heart of many Leicestershire communities and as part of the Council’s commitment to helping businesses during these tough times, wet-led pubs in our smaller settlements, struggling during the pandemic, had the opportunity to apply for a one-off payment of £1000. Of the 180 applications, 146 were eligible with payments made quickly. This fund is now closed.

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Please remember to keep up to date, including for the latest information on changes to services:

Twitter [@LeicsCountyHall](https://twitter.com/leicscountyhall)

[**https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19**](https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19)

[**https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/adult-social-care-and-health/working-with-you-during-coronavirus**](https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/adult-social-care-and-health/working-with-you-during-coronavirus)