

Kent County Council COVID-19 Update

This guide includes a summary of the latest Government announcements, alongside information on KCC's website (kent.gov.uk). The guide is updated regularly and, is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all the resources, funding and advice being issued, therefore it links to other sources of information where available.

COVID-19 RESPONSE: LIVING WITH COVID-19

- The Government published their [COVID-19 RESPONSE: LIVING WITH COVID-19](#) on Monday, 21 February.
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- The Prime Minister has also given a [statement](#) to the House of Commons on the Government's future strategy for living with COVID-19. The Prime Minister subsequently also held a [Downing Street press conference](#), alongside England's Chief Medical Officer, Professor Sir Chris Whitty, and the Government's Chief Scientific Advisor, Sir Patrick Vallance.
- The strategy involves ending all the remaining COVID-19 legal restrictions in England, with an emphasis on personal responsibility. Professor Whitty has said that "This is a gradual steady change over time, as the rates are going down and as we enter spring".
- The Prime Minister said that "restrictions pose a heavy toll on our economy, our society, our mental well-being and all the life chances of our children and we do not have to pay the price any longer. We have a population that is protected by the biggest vaccination programme in our history. We have the advantage of the treatments and the scientific understanding of this virus and we have the capabilities to respond rapidly to any resurgence or new variants". "It is time we got our confidence back", "let us learn to live with this virus". The Prime Minister has added that - "I would encourage people to get back to work with confidence".
- The Prime Minister said that "while the pandemic is not over" "and there may be resurgences", "we have now passed the peak of the omicron wave". "With cases falling, hospitalisations in England now lower than 10,000 and still falling, and the link between severe disease and infection, substantially weakened. Over 71% of adults are boosted in England, including 93% of those aged 70 and over". The Prime Minister has also said that there are "sufficient levels of immunity to complete the transition from protecting people with Government interventions to relying on vaccines and treatments as our first line of defence".
- It is [reported](#) that as of Monday, 21 February, there had been a further 38,409 new cases of COVID-19. Week on week, a fall of 20.5%. This figure was 51,899 on 17 February. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has also [reported](#) that in England, the percentage of people testing positive for COVID-19 decreased in the week ending 12 February 2022, when it is estimated that around 1 in 20 people has COVID-19. As of Monday, 21 February, there had also been a further 15 deaths from COVID-19.

Week on week, a fall of 19.1%. Professor Whitty has said that the number of people dying from COVID-19 “This is steadily going down”. This figure was 183 on 17 February. As of Tuesday, 15 February, there had been a further 1,294 patients admitted to hospital. Week on week, a fall of 11.9%. Professor Whitty has [said](#) that the number of people in hospital with COVID-19 is “still significant and in some hospitals still providing a lot of pressure”.

- **However, the Prime Minister has also emphasised that COVID-19 “remains a dangerous disease, particularly if you haven’t been vaccinated and if you’re vulnerable”. Consequently, the Government will retain “some surveillance systems and plans for contingency measures which can be stood up if needed to respond to new variants”. Sir Patrick Vallance has [said](#) that “there is no guarantee that the next variant will be less severe”, and that that scaling back COVID measures “will increase transmission”. So, in his analogy – “you can take your umbrella with you when the sun shines”.**

[Further information](#)

The update comprises:

- [The changes](#)
- [Updated guidance](#)
- [Underpinning COVID-19 legislation](#)
- [COVID-19 booster vaccinations for the over-75s & immuno-suppressed](#)
- [Future infections & variants](#)
- [Building on the response to COVID-19](#)

THE CHANGES

From Monday, 21 February:

- **The guidance for staff and students in most education and childcare setting to undertake twice-weekly asymptomatic testing will end.**
- **Childcare providers are no longer required to notify Ofsted, or the childminder agency with which they are registered, of any COVID-19 cases in the setting, whether that is of a child or staff member.** They also do not have to submit notifications for any cases that have happened in the last 14 days. It remains a legal requirement under the [Early years foundation stage \(EYFS\) statutory framework](#) to report cases of serious illness. Ofsted should be notified as soon as practical, and in any case within 14 days of a notifiable event happening.

[Information about what is classed as a notifiable event or serious incident and what to tell Ofsted](#)

[Future information](#)

From Thursday, 24 February:

- **The legal requirement to self-isolate following a positive test will end.** “Until April 1 [Government] will still require you to stay home if you test positive”, and avoid contact with others for at least five full days. Professor Whitty has [said](#) that “as we look at the next weeks...I would urge people...if they have COVID” to self-isolate.

- **Government will end the self-isolation support payment for people on low incomes**, “although COVID provisions for statutory sick pay can still be claimed for a further month”. The Prime Minister has said that - “I know that won’t [cover] everybody”, and the Government is “trying to do it in other ways”.
- **Routine contact tracing will end and Government will no longer ask fully vaccinated close contacts, and those under 18, to test daily for 7 days.**
- **The legal requirement for close contacts who are not fully vaccinated to self-isolate will end.** Until 1 April Government is still advising people who test positive to stay at home. After 1 April, Government will encourage people with COVID-19 symptoms to “exercise personal responsibility, just as [they] encourage people who may have flu to be considerate to others”. New guidance will be published, which will be similar to that for seasonal flu. The new guidance is intended to allow people, and employers, to make their own judgments about the risk of catching or transmitting COVID-19.
- **Workers will no longer be required to tell their employer if they need to self-isolate.**

From Friday, 1 April:

- **Free symptomatic and asymptomatic testing for the general public will end.** By this point, the Prime Minister has said that Government hope “incidence will have further declined.
- **Government will continue to provide free symptomatic tests to the oldest age groups and those most vulnerable to COVID-19.** The Prime Minister has said that the Clinically Extremely vulnerable will have “priority access to therapeutics and vaccines”.
- **Government is also working with retailers to ensure that everyone who wants to buy a test will be able to.** Professor Whitty has encouraged people to continue to take a lateral flow test in settings where people are most vulnerable.
- **Government will also no longer recommend the use of voluntary COVID Certification.** “The NHS app will continue to allow people to indicate their vaccination status for international travel”.
- **Employers will no longer have to explicitly consider COVID-19 in their health and safety Risk Assessments.**

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UPDATED GUIDANCE

- [Coronavirus: how to stay safe and help prevent the spread](#)
- [The guidance for working safely during COVID-19](#)
- [Enabling safe and effective volunteering during COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19: Wedding and civil partnership ceremonies, receptions and celebrations](#)

- [Guidance on COVID-19 measures for grassroots sport participants, providers and facility operators](#)
- [If you need to self-isolate or cannot attend work due to coronavirus](#)
- [Actions for schools during the coronavirus outbreak](#)
- [Actions for early years and childcare providers during the COVID-19 outbreak](#)

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UNDERPINNING COVID-19 LEGISLATION

- **The Government will also expire all temporary provisions of the Coronavirus Act.**
- The Prime Minister has said that “Of the original 40, 20 have already expired and 16 will expire on 24 March, and the last four relating to innovations in public service will expire six months later after we’ve made those improvements permanent via other means”.
- Of the 20 remaining non-devolved temporary provisions, 16 will expire at midnight on Thursday 24, March. These are:
 - a. Section 2: Emergency registration of nurses and other health and care professionals.
 - b. Section 6: Emergency registration of social workers: England and Wales.
 - c. Section 14: NHS Continuing Healthcare Assessments: England.
 - d. Section 18: Registrations of deaths and still-births.
 - e. Section 19: Confirmatory medical certificate not required for cremations: England and Wales.
 - f. Section 22: Appointment of temporary Judicial Commissioners.
 - g. Section 38: Temporary continuity: education, training and childcare.
 - h. Section 39-41: Statutory Sick Pay: funding of employers’ liabilities; power to disapply waiting period limitation; modification of regulation making powers.
 - i. Section 45: NHS pension schemes: suspension of restrictions on return to work: England and Wales.
 - j. Section 50: Power to suspend port operations.
 - k. Section 58: Powers in relation to transportation, storage and disposal of dead bodies.
 - l. Section 75 (2) and (3): Disapplication of limit under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982.
 - m. Section 81: Residential tenancies in England and Wales: protection from eviction.
 - n. Section 82: Business tenancies in England and Wales: protection from forfeiture
 - o.
- The remaining four provisions will be expired within six months. These provisions have enabled innovations in the delivery of public services and the Government is seeking approval to make them permanent through other primary legislation currently before Parliament and due to come into force over the spring and summer. In each case, a final six-month extension is necessary in order to ensure there is no gap in the legislation that enables public service delivery. The relevant provisions are:
 - a. Section 30: has supported coronial services throughout the pandemic in England and Wales by enabling inquests, where COVID-19 is suspected as the cause of

death, to take place without a jury, helping reduce pressures and backlogs. This provision will be made permanent via the Judicial Review and Courts Bill.

- b. Sections 53 to 55: have allowed thousands of court hearings to take place using audio and video links. Over 12,000 hearings per week have taken place using remote technology across 3,200 virtual courtrooms, helping courts reduce the backlog in cases and bring more people to justice. The provision for remote hearings will be made permanent via the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.

Permanent provisions and devolved governments

- There are a number of permanent provisions within the Coronavirus Act 2020 which would require new primary legislation in order to repeal. Some of these provisions are still necessary to support the recovery from the pandemic, including:
 - a. Section 11: Indemnity for health service activity: England and Wales. This provision ensures that any gaps in indemnity cover for NHS clinical negligence do not delay or prevent ongoing care. Without this, NHS Resolution would be unable to pay legitimate clinical negligence claims, leaving clinicians exposed to the full cost and patients without compensation.
 - b. Section 75(1): Disapplication of limit under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 (IDA). This provision ensures that the financial limits set out in section 8 of the IDA do not hinder the allocation of vital Government schemes for businesses such as the Help to Grow scheme, the Automotive Transformation Fund, and the Offshore Wind Manufacturing Investment Scheme (OWMIS).

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COVID-19 BOOSTER VACCINATIONS FOR THE OVER-75S & IMMUNO-SUPPRESSED

- From spring, an additional COVID-19 booster vaccination will be offered to people aged 75 years and over, residents in care homes for older adults, and people aged 12 years and over who are immunosuppressed.
- This will apply from around six months after these groups last COVID-19 vaccination, and the NHS will set out further details in due course.
- The Health Secretary has said that “we know immunity to COVID-19 begins to wane over time. That’s why we’re offering a spring booster to those people at higher risk of serious COVID-19 to make sure they maintain a high level of protection. It’s important that everyone gets their top-up jabs as soon as they’re eligible”.
- The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) will keep under review whether the booster programme should be extended to further at-risk groups.

[Further information](#)

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FUTURE INFECTIONS & VARIANTS

- The Prime Minister has said that the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) has advised that there is “considerable uncertainty about the future path of the pandemic”. SAGE say there will be “significant resurgences, they are certain there will be new variants, and it is very possible they will worse than Omicron.

- As a consequence, Government will maintain their “resilience to manage and respond to these risks”, including continuing with the Office for National Statistics COVID-19 Infection Survey, “which will allow” Government “ to continue tracking the virus in granular detail, with regional and age breakdowns helping [spot] surges and when they happen, and...laboratory networks will help...track the evolution of the virus and identify and changes in characteristics”.
- The Prime Minister said that Government “want to spot the new variants of concern as soon as we can, then we want to surge our testing capacity in the way that we did before”.
- The Prime Minister added that “In all circumstances the Government’s aim is to manage and respond to future risks through more routine public health interventions with pharmaceutical interventions as the first line of defence”.

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BUILDING ON THE RESPONSE TO COVID-19

- The Vaccines Taskforce will continue to ensure that the UK has access to effective vaccines they become available.
- The Therapeutics Taskforce will continue to support seven priority national platforms focussed on prevention, novel treatments and treatments for Long-COVID.
- Government is refreshing their Biosecurity Strategy.

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