Update for key stakeholders
24 June 2021

COVID cases

We had 239 new cases in the seven days to June 20. The infection rate is 74.3/100,000 across the NHS Highland area: 185.2/100,000 in Argyll and Bute and 33.9/100,000 in North Highland.

We have no patients in hospital with COVID-19 and none in ITU.

There have been 169 recorded deaths in the NHS Highland area since the start of the pandemic: 98 in Highland and 71 in Argyll and Bute. These are deaths within 28 days of a confirmed positive test and represent no change for eleven weeks.

Vaccination

As at 22 June, we have vaccinated 82.4% of over 18 year olds with their first dose, compared to a Scottish average of 82.7%. We have vaccinated 64.1% with their second dose, compared to a Scottish average of 58.9%. You can view progress on the national vaccination programme online here.

All adults should be booked for their first appointment by the end of June. Second dose clinics for July are finalised, and we are now planning second dose clinics for August and September.

Similar to other areas, we are aware that some people who will not turn 18 by the deadline of July 31 2021 may have received letters inviting them to be vaccinated. We are contacting these individuals and ask anyone who will be under 18 by the end of July to ignore their invitation. This does not apply to unpaid carers: unpaid carers age 16 or over are eligible for the vaccine.

Managing COVID cases, clusters and outbreaks

The figures show that vaccination is proving successful in reducing symptoms and severity of COVID-19. However the loosening of restrictions has meant that cases are rising. Even people who are fully vaccinated can still contract and pass on COVID, often without noticing symptoms, so it is important to carry out regular testing. The rise in cases also means that more people have to self-isolate and more people need to be contact-traced.

Positive results from COVID PCR tests and registered lateral flow tests are fed through an electronic notification system to the Health Protection Team (HPT) and contact tracers at NHS Highland. People with a positive test are then phoned by a contact tracer who has a detailed discussion with the person, noting potential sources of infection, identifying their contacts and giving advice including on self-isolation. The contacts of the case are then phoned, are advised on self-isolation and almost everyone will be advised to have a COVID test. In school situations written communication is used and if case numbers are high SMS text messaging may replace phone calls for contacts. If someone

who is diagnosed with COVID uses the protect.scot mobile phone app they will be given a code to input which will then automatically generate instructions for close contacts to isolate.

The contact tracing system is medically confidential and someone's test results are their private clinical information. This is subject to public health legislation, but the identity of people testing positive will not be made public and it is unhelpful to have public speculation on individual diagnoses.

Where there are several cases of COVID in a community, or where an outbreak has started, wider action is necessary. This may involve, for example, informing people who have attended a particular workplace or noted their attendance at a venue that they should isolate and be tested whilst further risk assessment is carried out. Outbreak management is led by the HPT though Incident Management Teams, working closely with others including Environmental Health.

It is important that everyone who has symptoms has a PCR test, but in an outbreak it may be helpful for PCR tests to be offered more widely to people without symptoms in order to control the outbreak within that locality. This would generally be done through requests for people to book PCR tests at an existing fixed site or through the deployment of a mobile testing unit. In a large community outbreak ever more intensive testing may be indicated.

Testing is an important part of COVID control, but it will only work effectively if people with symptoms isolate and have a PCR test and if isolation advice is followed by cases and contacts.

Feedback

If you have comments or queries please contact nhshighland.feedback@nhs.scot