

29 October 2021

Enhanced Response Area status vital to protect NHS and vital services

Local leaders have welcomed the announcement that, following an approach from Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Councils, the Government has agreed that both areas will become an Enhanced Response Area for tackling the Covid pandemic from Monday.

They have pledged to use it to push for additional measures and resources to drive down recent rises in Covid-19 infection and to protect vulnerable people, the NHS and other vital services as the winter months approach.

Rising rates in older people coupled with building pressures on local health and education services led to the Councils who are both responsible for public health to ask Government to grant the whole area 'enhanced response area' status for at least five weeks from Monday November 1 - to bring down infection rates which are currently higher in most areas than seen in January's peak.

An application by Jyoti Atri the area's joint Director of Public Health – supported by lead politicians and local health partners – for Enhanced Response Area status was agreed by Government today.

The ERA status allows us to push for additional support to:

- Accelerate and target 12-15 vaccination roll out to key areas and schools where infections are highest
- Accelerate booster vaccinations for eligible groups who have had their second vaccination more than six months ago
- Increase vaccination rate in areas with the lowest uptake

In addition, as part of ERA status the area will enter into further discussions with the DfE about additional measures it can use in schools, but in the meantime it will continue to:

- Encourage secondary school teachers or pupils who are household contacts of positive cases to take daily LFT tests
- Continue with advice given to schools before the half term that face coverings should be worn in secondary school communal areas, and that meetings happen virtually where possible

- Encourage anyone who is a household contact of a positive case to take daily rapid tests, until a negative PCR test is received

For the general population a government funded additional communications push will also begin from next week

- Recommending wear face coverings in crowded and enclosed areas where you come into contact with people you do not usually meet'
- Reminding people to get their vaccinations, test regularly and particularly before attending events, meet with others outside their households in well ventilated spaces and wash hands regularly and well

“A rising rate of infections particularly in our older population meant I had to make this application now,” said Jyoti Atri, Director of Public Health for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. “This increase starting to build in our 60+ age groups, coupled with low vaccination rates in some parts of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough – means pressure is building on our local health services. This is exacerbated by increased levels of Covid infections in the general population, and staff being unable to work because they are infected or isolating. If unchecked, this will also impact on health care for other non Covid needs.

“If we all do more now - together we can reduce pressure before worst effects of winter really begin.”

“We are taking leadership locally now to protect lives and the health of local people, acting quickly in response to the expert advice given by our Public Health officials and recognising the seriousness that local trends have highlighted,” said Cllr Richard Howitt, Chair of the Council’s Adults and Health Committee. “I fully support the steps our Director of Public Health has taken and our County Council will do everything both to push for the resources to which this new status entitles us and to do everything to help implement new measures in response.

Cllr Howitt added: “Our vital public services – not just the health services, but the education of children in our schools - is starting to be severely affected by the rising rates of infection, with children missing their lessons or schools needing to close classes or even whole year groups because there aren’t a safe level of adults present due to isolation.”

“The Enhanced status will further enable measures across the whole population that we know can work to slow down infection rates and were working earlier in the year. I hope this will be a wake-up call to anyone locally who believes the pandemic is over, and urge people to take notice of what is being recommended very seriously indeed.”