

Vaccination update

Council officers will be helping a county-wide project, working with local GPs, to increase take up of the vaccine, calling at the addresses of people in the first four priority groups who have not responded to repeated invitations from their GP to book their COVID jab appointment.

They have already been visiting residents who are shielding or self-isolating throughout the pandemic and so are highly experienced. They will be dressed in clearly identifiable clothing, carry an ID, and follow all social distancing guidelines.

Details of the Four-Step Roadmap

On Monday we were all introduced to the four-step roadmap for the 'cautious easing' of lockdown restrictions. The government has created some handy graphics to make it easier to digest the different steps – the first of these for step 1 is below and I will pass on the others in due course. You can read the full details of the roadmap and the four steps on the government website (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>).



Step 2 from April 12 at the earliest

STEP 2

At least five weeks after Step 1, no earlier than 12 April.



Indoor leisure (including gyms) open for use individually or within household groups.



Rule of 6 or two households outdoors.
No household mixing indoors.



Outdoor attractions, such as zoos, theme parks and drive-in cinemas.



Libraries and community centres.



Personal care premises.



All retail.



Outdoor hospitality.



All children's activities, indoor parent & child groups (up to 15 parents).



Domestic overnight stays (household only).



Self-contained accommodation (household only).



Funerals (30), wakes, weddings, receptions (15).



Minimise travel.
No international holidays.



Event pilots begin.

Services at the district councils

The earliest the Vale offices could reopen according to the road map would be from 21 June, but any reopening of the building is likely to be phased gradually.

COVID-19 rates across Oxfordshire

These change every week. I compile these and present them graphically on a weekly basis on my Facebook page (Cllr Dr Paul Barrow). Cases continue to fall gradually but it has been more or less static for the last 2 weeks.

Covid-19 cases in the 60+ age group in particular are coming down. The latest weekly Covid-19 rate for South Oxfordshire is 61.2 cases per 100,000 population, and 59.6 in the Vale.

The message that we need to keep sticking to the rules to protect ourselves and our neighbours and the vulnerable will remain in place for many months to come, along with remembering 'hands, face, space'.

Vaccinations in Oxfordshire latest

Vaccinations for the groups 5 (people aged 65 and over) and 6 (people aged 16 to 64 years with certain underlying health conditions) is underway. Rough sleepers and staff working with them are also included in this cohort. For our districts cohort 6 is a much larger group of residents than the previous one (group 5).

Getting vaccinated remains crucial to the country's strategy against the virus so please encourage everyone who has been contacted to arrange their vaccination to do so without delay. The higher the percentage of people vaccinated the more likely it is that Covid-19 will almost disappear. With measles this % is about 95% (it is amazingly infectious) and with polio it is about 80% so it is likely to be of the order of 90%.

By the end of this month 30% of the UK population has been vaccinated. This should amount to 200,000 people in Oxfordshire (I have no idea of the exact figure 😞)

Symptom-free testing - latest

The symptom-free testing centre at The Beacon in Wantage is running well. As of Tuesday last week, testing at the centre has expanded to include all public-facing workers in the public sector, and volunteers.

An increase in uptake at the centre is expected, but we still need to encourage people who leave home to work or volunteer to get a test as soon as they can. Tests are booked via the county council's online booking system (www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/council/coronavirus-covid-19/controlling-local-coronavirus-outbreaks/rapid-symptom-free-testing).

Community hub support

The hub will be contacting those who have recently been added to the shielding list to let them know about the support available to them. A total of 2,539 new shielded residents have been added to our lists in the past week in the Vale.

The government is adding more people to the shielding list as a result of new risk models showing that a combination of health and personal factors, including age, ethnicity and BMI could mean someone is at a higher risk from Covid-19.

Queries were mostly from residents self-isolating due to Tack and Trace or a positive Covid diagnosis as well as further finance related enquiries.

Financial assistance for residents in the Vale

The advice centres expect to have allocated all their remaining funds over the next couple of weeks, and the Vale will keep us updated on this.

Over the Easter holidays, Oxfordshire County Council will continue to support children with food vouchers or equivalent support via schools.

Business grants update

The government has confirmed details of the next payment period for the *Local restrictions support grant (closed) addendum*, which provides ongoing funding for rate-paying businesses that have been forced to close due to the national lockdown.

The second payment cycle covers 16 February to 31 March 2021:

- businesses with a property of rateable value £15,000 or less, may be eligible for £2,096
- businesses with a property of rateable value over £15,000 but less than £51,000, may be eligible for £3,143
- those with a property of rateable value £51,000 or above, may be eligible for £4,714.

The Vale will now begin the process of preparing the new grants in advance of payment, subject to receiving final clarification, including grant funding, from the government. The Vale expects to be able to email eligible businesses confirming the payment process and their grant allocation week commencing 8 March if not before.

Businesses in receipt of this grant do not need to take any action, they will continue to receive the money automatically without having to apply again.

For more details about the grants available to businesses visit svbs.co.uk.