

Press Release

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email: PressTeam@durham.gov.uk



‘Play your part’ plea as partners respond to rise in Covid cases in Durham City

People in and around Durham City are being asked to play their part in slowing the spread of coronavirus following a significant rise in cases.

Durham County Council, Durham University and Public Health England (PHE) have teamed up to make the plea to anyone who lives, works, studies in or visits the city; after a sharp increase of more than 300 new cases in the Durham City, Langley Moor and Neville’s Cross area in the last seven days. The vast majority of these cases are in the 19 to 24 year old age group.

The majority of the cases are the Delta variant, which is now the dominant variant nationally and is more transmissible, although measures to control it are the same.

While numbers of cases and infection rates in Durham City remain broadly in line with regional and national averages, the council, university and PHE are taking the situation seriously and are taking action now to try and reduce further spread:

- In order to increase access to PCR testing for people who think they have coronavirus symptoms, the council has opened extra mobile testing units in the city at Howlands and the overflow car park next to the former DLI Museum. These are open seven days a week and require advanced booking. Lateral flow device (LFD) tests are also being made available at council venues and pharmacies across County Durham. Further information on how to book PCR tests and where to access both PCR and LFD testing is available online at www.durham.gov.uk/Covid19testandtrace
- The university is asking all students to undertake once-weekly PCR testing.

Communications and Marketing

Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham DH1 5UF

Main telephone 03000 260 000 Text messaging service: 07860 093 073

- The local authority has written to schools and businesses in and around Durham City to ask for their support in making parents and customers aware of the need to be vigilant.

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- In order to support businesses in the city in being 'covid-secure,' the council's coronavirus compliance team has been visiting licensed premises to offer advice. Businesses visited have been found to be going to great lengths to ensure covid-secure premises.

The council, university and PHE are now asking for people in Durham City to help to slow the spread by:

- Following Hands, Face, Space, Fresh Air guidance.
- Socialising outdoors wherever possible and exercising particular caution when mixing indoors, where the virus can spread more easily.
- Having both doses of the coronavirus vaccination where eligible, as soon as you are invited to do so.
- Self-isolating and booking a test if you have symptoms.
- Taking twice weekly LFD tests if you do not have symptoms, and reporting the results online.
- Check in at hospitality venues using the NHS COVID-19 app.

Amanda Healy, Director of Public Health for County Durham, said: "We have seen a significant rise in cases in Durham City and along with Durham University and Public Health England we are taking the situation extremely seriously.

"We are taking steps such as increasing access to testing to try and reduce transmission but we are also asking everyone in the city to play their part by following some of the simple steps such as following Hands, Face, Space, Fresh Air guidance; socialising outdoors where possible; taking up both doses of the vaccination and getting tested twice a week.

"The vast majority of these cases may be in young people but that does not mean other age groups do not need to be vigilant. Given the Delta variant is more transmissible, it is easier for it to spread to older age groups which may be more vulnerable and this is why it is so important that everyone does their bit.

"With every transmission of the virus there is a risk of new and more serious variants emerging that may have different characteristics and may respond differently to vaccines; which makes it even more vital that we all work together to limit the spread.

"Equally we know that some young people might think 'I don't need to worry about Covid as it won't make me seriously ill'. Our message to them would be: 'There is a very real risk, if you don't follow the guidance, of transmitting the virus to your friends and others whom Covid could make seriously ill.'

"The more we all work together to reduce further transmission the sooner we can all hopefully return to life free of restrictions."

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Jeremy Cook, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Colleges and Student Experience), Durham University, said: "Our first priority is the health and safety of our students, staff and the wider community. We are working closely with Durham County Council and Public Health England to track and manage a rising number of confirmed Covid-19 cases within our student community. Those who are affected are following NHS advice and self-isolating and are receiving our full support."

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