

# Covid-19 update for Kent Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee – March 2021

Content of this report is accurate for the deadline of paper submissions. Verbal updates will be provided at the committee meeting.

## Vaccination programme

In Kent and Medway, the Covid-19 vaccination programme is being delivered from 55 sites:

- 39 GP-led vaccination sites cover Kent and Medway's 42 primary care network areas
- Six hospital hubs, which are vaccinating exclusively health and social care staff, other than Medway Maritime Hospital, which is now open for weekend appointments for patients according to the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation cohorts one to five
- Three large vaccination sites in Folkestone, Gravesend and Tonbridge – with two more in development in Thanet and Medway
- Seven community pharmacies.

As of 14 February, 430,752 people have been given a first dose Covid-19 vaccine (455,910 vaccines have been given including second doses). Weekly updates of data at NHS system (Kent and Medway) level is issued by NHS England/Improvement:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/covid-19-vaccinations/>

In the week leading up to the national target of offering a vaccine to everyone in cohorts one to four by 15 February, we put a number of actions in place to maximise capacity:

- On Thursday, 11 and Friday, 12 February, walk-in appointments were offered at the three large vaccination sites. This was extended through Saturday also at our Gravesend and Tonbridge sites.
- Medway Hospital opened a walk-in service for people aged 70+ and those considered clinically extremely vulnerable which was available from Friday, 12 to Sunday, 14 February to support extra capacity and offer patient choice. Text messages promoting the walk-in service were sent to eligible patients registered with a Medway GP.
- Working with our community provider in Medway and local GP practices, we delivered more than 1,000 vaccines to housebound patients in Medway and Swale from Friday, 12 to Sunday, 14 February. Visits continued the week beginning Monday, 15 February to complete the identified housebound cohort. People who have subsequently been identified as being housebound are also being visited for their first dose vaccination.

The system is confident that appointments have been offered to everyone identified within cohorts one to four, all residents in a care home for older adults and their carers, all those 70 years of age and over, frontline health and social care workers and people on the shielded patient list (those who are clinically extremely vulnerable).

## **Cohorts five and six**

The NHS is now offering vaccination appointments to people in Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation cohorts five and six.

Cohort five is people aged 65 to 69. People in this group will receive a letter from the national booking service and you can book an appointment at one of our large vaccination sites or community pharmacy services.

People in cohort six, those aged 16 to 64 with underlying health conditions (considered clinically vulnerable) and those registered as their carers, will be invited by their GP surgery for a vaccination appointment. To be offered a vaccine as a carer of someone who is considered clinically vulnerable, you must be registered as a carer with your GP.

## **Inequalities framework**

A joint working group has been formed across NHS, public health and council partners to create a targeted action plan which will address inequalities and increase vaccination uptake in people from Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities. This group will also look at how to provide vaccinations to individuals identified as having no abode and those not currently registered with a GP within Kent and Medway.

## **Current pressure from Covid-19**

The NHS across Kent and Medway has seen the level of admissions and infection rates slowly reduce since January and this is a positive indicator that the national lockdown requirements are having an impact. This reduction has been welcomed across the system as the numbers of patients requiring admission to intensive care reduce and the number of Covid positive patients occupying acute hospital beds decrease. Community beds and services remain under significant pressure and we anticipate this will continue for some time.

NHS staff, across all organisations in Kent and Medway, continue to perform at exceptional levels, supporting those affected by the pandemic and the delivery of services for non-Covid patients. As the Kent and Medway system begins to plan our approach to recovery, building on existing workforce initiatives to protect and support the wellbeing of staff is crucial, ensuring plans take into account the need to take annual leave and provide psychological support where required.

The vaccination uptake and programme progress brings further hope that Kent and Medway is now in a stronger position to restart those services which were paused and recover the health service itself, all with a clear system plan.

## **Deaths linked to Covid-19**

The impact of the pandemic on Kent and Medway residents has been significant. As of 21 February in Kent there have been:

- 3,810 deaths within 28 days of a positive test
- 3,969 deaths with Covid-19 recorded on the death certificate

In Medway there have been:

- 720 deaths within 28 days of a positive test
- 700 deaths with Covid-19 recorded on the death certificate

# NHS service summaries

## Staffing

Staff absences from Covid-19 infection and self-isolation following Test and Trace contact have had an impact on all services from hospitals to ambulance services and general practice. Absence rates on 15 February stood at 2.01 per cent across all Kent and Medway providers with 25 absences due to Test and Trace. There has been an improvement in recent weeks and with significant progress in vaccinating staff it is hoped that staffing absence rates will continue to improve.

## HOSPITAL SERVICES

Hospital services have continued to operate under extreme pressure. Although the number of Covid-19 patients has decreased in January through to February, the total level of occupancy remains high across all Trusts. An improving position can be seen from the peak of the first wave, where 600 confirmed Covid positive patients occupied hospital beds, through to the second wave, where 1,200 were seen. Presently across Kent and Medway there are approximately 500 beds occupied by Covid patients.

## Critical care

Critical care units across all Kent and Medway hospitals continue to be under extreme pressure, requiring the use of surge beds in each unit to manage demand. However, the need to transfer stable patients from one unit to another has reduced, with units more frequently able to manage within their own internal surge capacity. As at 15 February, the number of critical care beds currently open and staffed, was 124 against the business as usual number of 83.

- Over the last few weeks mutual aid has been offered to other parts of the country that are struggling for critical care capacity. Kent and Medway has received both national and regional praise from NHS England/Improvement for how the system is managing critical care, particularly given the length of time we have been under sustained pressure.

Work continues to repatriate patients back into Kent and Medway, where they have been transferred to other units, as soon as they are well enough. The system has been asked to pilot a regional repatriation process and provide feedback to refine this for other parts of the South East.

A set of principles has been agreed with all providers for managing critical care capacity alongside elective activity, and will continue to build on these to ensure that de-escalation happens appropriately, enabling staff to have more downtime, while ensuring we maintain sufficient capacity for both Covid and non-Covid demand.

We have produced a set of key principles and a prioritisation process in relation to elective surgery and use of intensive therapy unit's crisis surge capacity during the Covid pandemic. This is supported by acute provider chief executive officers and the regional critical care cell and is being implemented from February 2021.

## Planned care

The NHS has worked hard to ensure that patients requiring urgent elective surgery have still been treated wherever possible during the last two months. The focus has involved working with all providers of NHS care including acute Trusts and independent sector providers to enable patients to be treated within the timeframes indicated by the Federation of Surgical Specialty Associations.

In order to minimise the impact on intensive therapy unit beds, independent sector providers have refined access criteria to reduce the risk of needing transfer to acute providers. The patients transferred to the

independent sector are patients who require surgery within one month; this enables acute Trusts to operate on patients who require surgery no later than 72 hours.

The need to increase elective surgery as soon as it is safe to do so is widely recognised by the NHS. The system recognises the impact on individual patients of delaying non-Covid treatments and is working with organisations to identify plans to restart services where it is safe to do so. The plans will be in accordance with the decreased need for intensive therapy unit capacity and focused on ensuring patients who have waited the longest amount of time are prioritised. Kent and Medway will be in a position to provide more specific information on this at the next meeting.

### **Cancer care**

Access to urgent cancer diagnostics and treatments continued throughout Wave 2 across all of our acute providers. Some of these services were running at a slightly reduced capacity due to wider system pressures. Cancer screening has also continued throughout Wave 2 for breast, bowel and cervical programmes. In addition, a significant drop in the number of two week wait referrals has not been seen during and coming out of Wave 2 as was seen earlier in the pandemic.

### **Maternity**

Maternity services have continued throughout the pandemic despite pressure on the workforce from Covid-19. Home births were temporarily suspended by all providers on the 31 December 2020. System wide reinstatement occurred on 2 February 2021. All Trusts are currently working on offering testing for partners attending the 20 week scan appointment, and using the national testing service to facilitate this. It is hoped that this will be in place in all Trusts by mid-March.

### **A&E pressure and ambulance handovers**

The urgent and emergency care system is now stabilising following the significant pressures felt by the Accident & Emergency departments and the ambulance service during December and January. Handover delays are now minimal and the patient flow through the Accident & Emergency departments and hospital settings is in a much stronger position so overall performance is on an upward trajectory and the collaborative system working that has been essential to the management of the second wave continues and will be built upon further as the system continues to de-escalate.

Staffing across the urgent and emergency care system is significantly improved and there is very strong uptake of the Covid vaccination which will support the system in the long term.

Following the successful roll out of 111 First phase one, which saw the 111 service having the ability to book patients directly into emergency departments, Kent and Medway CCG is now implementing phase two. Milestones for delivery are currently being agreed with the national team. The CCG continues to actively promote the use of 111 as it was hugely beneficial in supporting wave two and managing patients outside of face to face settings given the full system integration of 111 into all components of the health economy including primary care, urgent treatment centres, mental health, community providers, frailty and end of life pathways.

## **COMMUNITY SERVICES**

Although the pressure and response from all parts of the system have been profound, Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) welcomes the efforts made by all partners. In particular community providers continue to be flexible in providing support to patients in community and non-acute settings and this has been very welcome.

A number of organisations continue to support a wide range of patients from the housebound to those being discharged from hospital. In addition Kent Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust is playing a significant role in the Covid-19 vaccination programme as the lead co-ordinating organisation for the large scale vaccination sites.

Occupancy at community hospitals remains high, currently at 96 per cent (15 February), and has resulted in the need for additional beds to be opened across two further community hospital sites; many of these beds remain occupied by Covid patients. Frailty services have been expanded within east, north, and west Kent, as well as Medway, to support the increased system demand witnessed. There is also a falls/frailty car in Medway in operation which continues to have a positive impact on avoiding potential admissions into hospital. Targeted redeployment of tier two and tier three staff, to support the increased demand for tier one services has taken place. Support has also been provided to South East Coast Ambulance Service by providing clinical expertise including GPs and senior nurses, who can help with clinical triage using a direct call pathway. Setting up of these wraparound services has ensured admission avoidance, reduction in conveyance and follow-up care where required.

This is an excellent example of an integrated whole system response to support the needs of patients in a much pressurised system.

## **MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

In order to support patients, a number of initiatives are in place across Kent and Medway:

- Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust and North East London NHS Foundation Trust 24/7 crisis lines services moved to 0800 (free-phone numbers) in December 2020 to ensure the cost of calls are not borne by patients.
- Safe Haven sites have continued to operate and have offered both face to face and telephone support during lockdown restrictions.
- Work continues across the system to monitor the increased presentations of people to emergency departments with a primary mental health diagnosis; this will help the system to understand how to improve access and identify collaborative actions to support the acute hospitals. To support this further, development of a clinical model is underway for 111 as the point of entry for mental health crisis pathway.
- In January 2021, a winter project commenced to provide proactive follow up treatment for people who have presented to an acute Trust site with self-harm. Liaison mental health services continue to be available 24/7 at each of the acute Trust sites.

Community mental health team referrals have remained slightly suppressed by approximately 10 per cent since June 2020. Whilst there has not been an increase in numbers, the acuity of symptoms experienced by people referred is much heightened.

Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) providers have enhanced their advertising, however they have not seen anticipated activity levels follow. They are all offering online interventions for service users.

Real time Covid demand modelling is forecasting new referrals to rise to around 10-15 per cent above normal rates in the early part of 2021. Ongoing increased demand is likely and will therefore be considered in the next iteration of the modelling.

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub website pages are currently being built and will be completed by end of March 2021. As well as providing information for the public, it will also house the mental health offer for both health and social care staff. Also a mail out is being prepared listing sources of help and support and this will go to every household in Kent and Medway to promote services and the website.

Advertising for Release the Pressure, a website to help support individuals with their mental wellbeing, has been increased and a campaign is currently being run on Kent radio.

To note, staff have been redeployed from the community mental health teams for older people to support staffing within care homes. This is to enable proactive discharges from acute hospitals and is very much welcomed by providers.

### **Children and young people services**

As part of the Mental Health Investment Standard 2020/21, there are a number of areas in development to support young people throughout Kent and Medway:

- Crisis Pathways - there has been an investment by North East London NHS Foundation Trust to increase workforce and crisis response including development of out of hospital/home treatment models to meet Long Term Plan (LTP) targets
- Investment in SHOUT text service
- Development and issuing of 75,000 crisis cards issued to schools, Kent Police, primary care and other partner organisations
- Roll out of the Emerge project - a pilot at Maidstone and Darent Valley Hospitals to reach children and young people presenting in Accident & Emergency because of self-harm, suicidal ideation or emotional crisis.

There are also a number of transformation projects within Kent and Medway including:

- 0-25 specialist bereavement service (in procurement)
- Evidence based intensive mentoring for children delivered by Salus in Dartford, Gravesham and Swale to respond to low access rates within the area
- Investment in the established suicide prevention programme
- Unaccompanied asylum seeking children psychological therapies delivered within reception centres and outreach centres
- Programme commissioned to deliver Trauma Informed Approaches training for 1,300 staff, working with children between 18 and 25 years
- Development of a service user-led peer mentoring model, via Young Lives Foundation.

There is also a focus around eating disorder services, with Dr Simon Lundy leading as the Clinical Lead for the CCG. A business case has been developed around Enhanced Care Pathways, Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder and First Episode Rapid Early Intervention.

## **Children and young people community services**

Services across the system continue to be delivered virtually in the main, with face to face appointments offered to those risk-assessed as most clinically vulnerable. The biggest challenge remains access to schools for therapy services during the current lockdown period. Referrals across the system have dropped; however modelling suggests there is likely to be a significant increase in March once schools return. Providers have been asked to prepare for this and we continue to monitor the situation. The vaccination programme is being rolled out in special schools and to those parents of children deemed most clinically vulnerable. Significant progress made on actions identified following the 2019 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities inspection in Kent.

## **Learning disability and autism**

Throughout the Covid period the Learning Disability and Autism Programme has continued to function in line with NHS England requirements. The key priority areas are reduction of inpatient hospital activity, completion of Learning Disability Mortality Review and completion of annual health checks which have continued.

In terms of agreed priorities the Learning Disabilities and Autism Programme has made the following progress:

- Learning Disability Mortality Review improvement plan completed - all outstanding reviews completed. The Kent and Medway Learning Tool was shared as good practice across the region.
- Association of Healthcare Communicators Plan - to improve current position agreed with NHS England - the plan improves the Kent Community Healthcare Foundation Trust model to help primary care deliver Association of Healthcare Communicators through the Network Contract Direct Enhanced Service. A new clinical lead is in post, and the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Plan to deliver Association of Healthcare Communicators to children and young people was agreed, commencing in January.
- Care and Treatment Reviews are compliant and on.
- Children and young people in-patient activity is on target and the improvement plan for adult in-patients has been agreed with NHS England.

During December 2020 there was an increase in the number of people with learning disabilities dying from Covid-19. In response Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group has adapted the local vaccine implementation plan to respond to this health inequality impacting our learning disabled population. Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group agreed to include all adults with learning disabilities who are on the GP learning disability registers in the first phase of the vaccination delivery in order to mitigate health inequalities. There are approximately 9,500 people in Kent and Medway on GP learning disability registers. Adapting the priority list to reflect evidenced local need will not disrupt other vaccination priorities and the CCG will continue to provide the co-ordinating role as the system's command centre liaising with NHS England/Improvement South East. A number of clinical staff from the CCG have been redeployed to support frontline services.

## **POST-COVID ASSESSMENT SERVICES**

As the UK is faced with the prospect of living with Covid-19 for the foreseeable future, protecting those who have been affected by Covid-19 now and in the future is a priority for Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group.

Prevalence rates note that the spread of Covid is highest in areas with increased deprivation/high population and a relatively younger population. Therefore, Kent and Medway's approach to developing a post Covid syndrome assessment services, will be focused on responding to specific differences in our

population and ensuring that the most vulnerable and affected in our community are supported throughout their journey and recovery. Work is moving at pace with a partner to pilot a test of change approach to the introduction of services for patients. It is expected the service will be ready to accept referrals within a matter of weeks. This approach will ensure the service can adapt quickly to reflect the patients who need ongoing support and enable a more comprehensive offer to be developed and rolled out across Kent and Medway.

In terms of understanding the volume of patients, the system is working with NHS England/Improvement to develop a model which will take into account the acuity of Covid patients, the Kent Covid variant and the volume of people who have experienced Covid and Covid-like symptoms.

Kent and Medway will ensure inequalities and variation in service provision are avoided by working closely with colleagues in the design and implementation of services.

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