

MKC Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee: COVID-19 UPDATE

Cases

The official Government rate published for MK on Monday 21 June is 67 cases per 100,000 people per week – based on cases reported for the 7 days to Tuesday 15 June. This equates to just over 181 cases a week, and is similar to the levels of infection seen in October 2020. This represents about a five-fold increase in the number of weekly cases in MK, since late April.

These rates are below the England average (85 cases per 100,000 per week), but are relatively high compared to the East of England average (38 cases per 100,000 per week).

Whilst cases have been increasing they are not close to the levels seen in the January peak and remain significantly below the levels seen in some parts of the North of England. In recent days, there are some signs that the rate of increase in cases in MK may be slowing.

Geographically cases are widely distributed across MK. Case rates are highest in younger adults (under 40 years of age, and particularly those under 30 years of age) and secondary school children.

Hospital admissions

Hospital admissions for Covid remain very low, as they were in October 2020. There have been four patients admitted to MKUH in June 2021 (up to the 13 June).

Nationally the trend has been for younger patients to be admitted. Most people being admitted have not been vaccinated, some have had a single dose of vaccine and a few have had two doses of vaccine. The length of stay is tending to be shorter when people are admitted to hospital, which will further reduce pressure on the NHS should cases rise. However, the NHS has a significant backlog of work, has reduced its bed capacity and is delivering a major vaccination campaign, so even small increases in need to care for patients with Covid-19 may have consequences.

Delta variant

The Delta variant (B.2.617.2 that was first detected in India) is now the dominant strain in MK, accounting for nearly all of the cases. The earlier arrival of this new strain in MK and surrounding areas has contributed to.

Our current understanding is that the Delta variant:

- is 60% more transmissible than the previous strain (i.e. it spreads more easily)
- partly evades the current vaccines
- is associated with a two-fold higher risk of admission to hospital

Outbreaks

In recent weeks we have seen an increasing number of outbreaks. These have been affecting schools (tending to see a relatively greater impact in primary schools than we have

seen before), offices, warehouses and the hospitality sectors. Workplaces that have a young workforce appear to be particularly vulnerable. Outbreaks do lead to considerable disruption in the workplace and particularly in schools, given the large number of children that are often required to isolate.

BLMK

Currently the BLMK (Bedfordshire Luton Milton Keynes) NHS area is a 'hotspot' within the East of England. The four upper tier local authorities with the highest case rates in East of England are all in BLMK: Bedford Borough (128 cases per 100,000 in the 7 days to 15 June), Luton (95 cases per 100,000), Milton Keynes (67 cases per 100,000) and Central Bedfordshire (62 cases per 100,000).

Bedford Borough is an 'Enhanced Response Area', meaning it gets prioritised for vaccination and testing resources. Cases in Bedford appear to have stabilised for the time being.

Testing

There are currently no issues with access to PCR tests. There are around 7-8,000 people getting a PCR test each week in MK. There are just over 20,000 LFD or 'rapid tests' reported for MK each week, although the true number of tests conducted may be higher. The increasing use of surge testing, particularly in the North England, may push laboratory capacity for undertaking PCR testing to its limits.

Vaccination

As of Saturday 19 June, 166,635 people in MK (62% of the population, 84% of the adult population) have had at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.¹ Of these, 112,242 have had two doses (42% of the population; 57% of the adult population). This a total of 278,877 vaccinations given.

The current focus is on ensuring as many adults aged over 40 years, who are at higher risk of hospital admission have received two doses by mid-July, and all those aged over 18 years have been offered at least one by mid-July. Adults aged between 18 and 40 years are currently driving much of the spread, but have only recently had the opportunity to be vaccinated.

The vaccination programme is now open to all adults aged 18 years and over. Locally it is being led by BLMK CCG, and they have provided a separate update.

Contact Tracing

MKC has now taken on responsibility for contact tracing of all cases in MK, as part of a shared service with Bedford Borough and Central Bedford. Completion rates are very high (99%), significantly higher than when they were handled by the national team. It is also allowing us to respond faster to outbreaks and emerging patterns.

¹ [Vaccinations in Milton Keynes | Coronavirus in the UK \(data.gov.uk\)](https://data.gov.uk/dataset/vaccinations-in-milton-keynes-coronavirus-in-the-uk)

Summary

The overall situation remains finely balanced. The Delta variant, which has more potential for harm, is now the dominant strain. Cases have increased and continue to increase, but are not at a level that is resulting in a significant level of hospital admissions. Cases – and control measures – are causing significant disruption in some settings, particularly schools.

Vaccination levels are good or very good for older age groups, but are lower for younger adults. Vaccination levels continue to increase, but are not yet at a level that control the infection in younger adults and school-aged children with the present level of Covid controls.

The key messages remain the same:

- Get vaccinated
- Be vigilant for symptoms of COVID-19, and get a PCR test when you have symptoms
- Continue with usual precautions: hands, face, space and ventilate

The increase in protection from the second dose is much greater for the Delta variant than the Alpha variant (or Kent strain). Two doses of Covid vaccine is now really important.

Fresh air and ventilation of indoor spaces offers important protection from the virus. The summer is a good time to meet outdoors and open windows when people are visiting your home or workplace.