

Public Health Wales statement on Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

This statement will be updated daily at midday

Statement: Updated at 12pm on Wednesday 3 February 2021

Dr Robin Howe, Incident Director for the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak response at Public Health Wales, said:

"We have identified 13 cases of the South African variant of Coronavirus in Wales. Ten of these have a travel link to Southern Africa or international travel

"Although the data currently shows that on an all-Wales level the numbers of cases are reducing and that the incidence is now below 150 cases per 100,000 population, the rates in some areas – particularly in North Wales – are still at more than double that.

"The pressure on our hospitals is still severe and shows no signs of easing yet, so it is extremely important that everyone sticks to the rules and stays at home as much as possible.

"The announcement by Welsh Government last week that Foundation Phase pupils will be able to return to face to face learning in schools after half term is dependent on the numbers of cases continuing to reduce.

"The vaccination programme, run by Welsh Government and the local health boards, is continuing at pace, with more than 400,000 people in the first four priority groups having now received their first vaccination.

"The UK variant of Coronavirus prevalent in many parts of Wales is up to 70 per cent more transmissible, and as reported recently there is evidence which suggests that it may lead to a higher risk of death than the non-variant.

"This is a crucial time. We must ensure that we stick to the rules over the next few weeks so that the number of cases continues to reduce and that hospitals can start to recover, while the vaccination programme is underway to protect the most vulnerable in our communities.

"It is important to remember that all current variants of Coronavirus are still spreading and can cause severe illness and death. Therefore it is important to stay at home, and to reduce opportunities for spread by keeping your distance, washing hands regularly, and covering your face.

"All of Wales remains in lockdown. We ask that the public adopts the same mindset for this lockdown as they did in March 2020. We understand that people are fatigued but because the new, more infectious variant of Coronavirus is circulating across Wales it is vital that we all keep to the lockdown restrictions and do not meet other people.

"This means that you must stay at home. Shop online, but if you do need to visit essential retail then do this alone, if possible, to minimise numbers of people in retail spaces, and avoid stopping to chat with people outside your household. If you must leave home keep your distance, wash your hands regularly, and wear a face mask when required according to the regulations.

"Public Health Wales is working closely with the Welsh Government as they deploy Coronavirus vaccinations through local health boards. Welsh Government is leading on the deployment of the vaccine in Wales.

"We have been alerted to a number of increasingly sophisticated 'scam' emails in circulation claiming to be from the NHS which purport to offer appointments for vaccination. Coronavirus vaccines currently can't be bought privately in the UK. Do not share any of your personal information. Correspondence will only come from your health board and your vaccination will be free.

"Vaccinating the adult population of Wales, to protect people from severe disease, is a significant task and the vaccine will take time to reach everyone. The effects of the vaccines may not be seen nationally for some time and everyone – including those who have been vaccinated - must continue to follow the advice on keeping Wales safe.

"Members of the public should not phone their GP, pharmacy or hospital asking when they will get a vaccine. When someone is in one of the groups eligible for the vaccine, they will be invited to attend a dedicated clinic which will have been set up to ensure patient safety and that of the healthcare professionals.

"UK nationals returning home from travel abroad must provide evidence of a negative Coronavirus test result taken up to three days before departure.

"Under current UK Coronavirus restrictions, you must stay at home. You must not leave home or travel, including internationally, unless you have a legally permitted reason to do so.

"If you are due to travel out of the UK, please be aware of the changing situation and keep an eye on the FCO website for up to date details.

"If you or a member of your household develop a cough, fever or change in sense of taste or smell, you must self-isolate immediately and book a free Coronavirus test, either by calling 119 or by visiting www.gov.wales/getting-tested-coronavirus-covid-19."

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