

Dear Colleagues,

I hope that you all got some down time over the festive season. Many folk were working over the public holidays, delivering vital services to our residents. I hope when your rest days arrived you were able to enjoy some festive cheer.

The launch into 2022 is one of heightened awareness that Omicron could test our health and care system to limits we have not experienced before. There has been lots of planning and all your efforts to secure critical services are commendable, particularly as the underlying pressures had never receded.

There is optimism that what we are facing will be for a short duration, and may not peak as high as predicted, but importantly we continue to prepare for the worst which is the right approach just now. We will get through this together, and there will be better times in 2022.



Simon Bokor-Ingram
Chief Officer
Moray Portfolio

Responding to Omicron

The Omicron variant is taking hold in the Moray community and, consequently, on staffing levels within the health and social care workforce, with absences and vacancies being a fundamental aspect of the current pressure being felt right across the system.

The impact on workloads for remaining staff is a major concern given the relentless demand on services, some of which were already under significant pressure prior to this latest surge of infections.

NHS Grampian modelling data indicates a continued and significant growth in the levels of coronavirus infections, placing even greater pressure on care homes, primary care teams, community teams and hospitals. An Omicron response plan is being finalised which could be triggered by the end of the week,

leading to the redeployment of NHS staff to protect delivery of core services.

Our managers are working to constantly assess the position of their services and identify any actions that could be taken to release resources to focus on critical functions in the community.

We continue to do all we can to ensure the most vulnerable members of our community receive essential care, support and treatment but there remains significant concern about how much further resources can stretch.

The seriousness of this unprecedented situation will be shared with the public through joint communications asking for awareness and understanding and with appreciation for any offers of support from families, communities and organisations.

COVID rates in Moray

Community infection rates and the subsequent number of COVID cases in our local communities continue to stand at a very high level and is likely to be further impacted by schools returning this week.

628 people has a confirmed positive test result on 10 January – the highest ever daily total. In the week to 10 January, 2,797 new cases were recorded – up 120.8% on the previous seven days – which is around one in every 24 residents.

Addressing Parliament yesterday, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon indicated there were signs a corner was being turned in the current phase of the pandemic, but that the situation remained fragile.

For now, the requirement to wear face coverings, work from home, and meet in groups of no more than to three households will remain.

COVID vaccination programme

Focused activity is underway to increase uptake of COVID vaccinations in “cold spot” areas of Moray.

Data is being used by the vaccination team to pinpoint communities where uptake sits below the Moray average and a rolling programme of outreach clinics began last week to tackle pockets of lower uptake.

The Healthpoint mobile information bus has been used to host pop-up clinics in locations including Lesmurdie and New Elgin, Buckie, Keith, Forres and Lossiemouth. Additional sessions will be held in Burghead, Hopeman, Aberlour and Dufftown this week. Vaccinations are also being made available at antenatal clinics at Dr Gray’s Hospital over the coming days for pregnant women and their partners.

The vast majority of booked and drop-in vaccinations continue to be delivered at the Fiona Elcock Centre in Elgin which operates seven days a week in order to vaccinate large numbers of people as rapidly as possible.

Vaccinate rates currently stand at 92.5% (77,578) for first dose, 85.5% (71,940) for second dose and 68% (57,206) for booster or third dose.

All over 18s who are now at least 12 weeks from their second jab, are strongly encouraged to take up the opportunity to receive a booster jab, which is now known to play a key role in defending against the Omicron variant. Those aged 12+ can attend to receive their first or second dose.

Active travel strategy consultation

Moray Council is seeking views on its draft Active Travel Strategy and Action Plan (2022-2027) which aims to make active travel an attractive and realistic choice for short journeys across Moray.

Copies of the documents and response form are available in local libraries or see the full details on the council web page here: www.moray.gov.uk/activetravelstrategy