

ECC March 2021 Report

Essex residents reminded to stay vigilant as latest Covid-19 data is published

Covid-19 data for Essex (excluding Southend and Thurrock) is published online here: <https://www.essex.gov.uk/local-outbreak-control-plan>

Cases and rates

- In the seven days up to 18 February, there were 1,366 confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Essex. This is the latest date for which complete data is available.
- Up to 25th February, the weekly case rate for Essex is 91.7 per 100,000. This is the latest date for which complete data is available.
- Up to 25th February, the highest weekly case rates were in Brentwood and Tendring, with rates of 118.2 and 145.3 per 100,000 respectively.
- Up to 25th February, the area with the lowest case rate was Maldon with a rate of 57 per 100,000.

Cllr John Spence, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Adults and Health, said that case rates continue to decline at a reasonable rate, albeit less rapidly than in previous weeks, but significant reductions in a number of areas which had seen higher rates recently, including Tendring, Harlow and Braintree are now beginning to emerge.

However, there is some variation within Essex, with Brentwood, which had shown a low rate recently, now seeing an increase in recent days. This is expected to fall again, but it is a stark reminder to us all that we simply cannot drop our guard now.

We were given a very clear timeline out of the pandemic this week which has been the welcome news everyone has been waiting for, but we need to remember it will take a collective effort to get us there.

Cllr Spence added that he would urge every single resident in Essex to please keep following the guidance – socially distance, wash hands regularly and wear a face covering if you are able to. It is vital that anyone that has to go out to work also gets tested frequently and if you test positive, you must self-isolate.

Other Covid-related news:

Essex Wellbeing Service (EWS) – the EWS has been successful in recruiting and deploying volunteers to support people over the last few months. This includes

support for the additional 18,000 people in Essex who have been added to the list of those being asked to shield.

Among other headlines, the EWS has achieved the following:

- 207,000 Essex residents supported in the last year
- 382,000 volunteer jobs completed to support people with daily living tasks
- Over 500 new befrienders recruited to support those who are isolated and lonely
- Over 1,000 people trained in mental health first aid during covid-19
- 11,000 volunteers recruited to support shielding, testing and vaccination across Essex to complement the work of community hubs.

Mental health – the Leader of Essex County Council this week announced an extra £1million investment in mental health support for children and our health and care workforce, with half going towards children’s mental health, and the remaining £500,000 being offered to Essex Partnership University Trust (EPUT) to expand their scheme - ‘Here For You’ – which provides a vital, confidential counselling service for key workers, to help ensure that our excellent staff get the support they need in these challenging times.

Vaccinations – Ed Garrett, Chief Executive of the NHS Ipswich & East Suffolk CCG, North East Essex CCG, West Suffolk CCG, today emailed me to say:

“I write with the positive news that based on the NHSE published data yesterday, Tendring District Council is the highest ranked council in the East of England (1st / 45 councils) and second nationally (2nd / 314 councils) for first doses given to adults!

Remarkably 46.9% adults have already received a first dose – and that was by last Sunday. Obviously, this in part reflects the very elderly population.

A big thank you to all the teams, and to Sir Bernard Jenkin MP who helped us to bring in the military which was a game changer.”

All best wishes

Ed

Ed Garratt

Chief Executive

NHS Ipswich & East Suffolk CCG, North East Essex CCG, West Suffolk CCG

Executive Lead

Suffolk & North East Essex Integrated Care System

Walk-in and get tested for Covid-19

People living and working in Essex, without Covid-19 symptoms, are now being offered walk-in appointments for a rapid test at their local test centre. With 13 test centres now in full operation, capacity for testing has increased, meaning people now have another option available to them. This means that every District in Essex now has a walk-in testing centre.

Residents and those working in Essex had previously been invited to book their test appointment in advance, online or by phone. The new option brings more flexibility, especially for those who are unable to work from home and want to get tested for peace of mind and reassurance.

Around a third of people with Covid-19 have no symptoms and could be spreading the virus unknowingly. Although case numbers are declining, there is still a worrying number of people with Covid-19 in Essex. Health officials in the county advise figures could go down even quicker if together we break the chain of transmission by getting tested regularly.

Councillor John Spence, Cabinet Member for Health & Adult Social Care said that finally the number of cases in Essex is continuing to reduce, and that's down to the great efforts of the people of Essex. This is also because of the upscaling of testing of those without symptoms. It's important to get tested regularly to stop the spread, which has prompted the setting up of a walk-in in every District, Borough, and City Councils throughout Essex.

Rapid Covid-19 tests are available at 13 test centres across Essex, all easily accessible and Covid-secure:

Basildon - Towngate Theatre, and The Place Leisure Centre, Pitsea
Braintree - Witham Town Football Club
Brentwood - The Nightingale Centre
Castle Point - Waterside Farm Leisure Centre
Chelmsford - Central Baptist Church
Colchester - Colchester Leisure Centre
Epping Forest - Theydon Bois Village Hall
Harlow - Civic Centre, The Water Gardens
Maldon - West Maldon Community Centre
Rochford - The MegaCentre
Tendring - Long Meadows Community Centre, Harwich
Uttlesford - Saffron Walden ECL

Walk-in or book an appointment online at www.essex.gov.uk/getting-tested or by calling 0333 772 6144.

Anyone with symptoms should book a test via www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test

£100,000 fund announced for new emotional well-being initiatives
to support people affected by the pandemic

This April will see the opening of a new fund to support initiatives focused on helping people whose emotional wellbeing has been affected by COVID-19.

The £100,000 “Emotional Wellbeing: New Opportunities Fund” will open on 1 April for applications from individuals or groups who need help in kickstarting their ideas.

Small grants of £100 to £5,000 will be available.

Suitable projects could target support for vulnerable children, young people or adults. They must meet one or more of these outcomes:

- Managing and coping with change
- Separation and loss
- Managing and coping with anxiety
- Maintaining healthy relationships
- Staying active
- Education and learning.

Successful applicants could use the grant in a range of ways:

- To develop their thinking about how to respond to pandemic impacts
- To build new knowledge
- To develop or try new ways of working post-pandemic
- To enable accessibility and help people reconnect with self, family and communities as we emerge from lockdown.

Examples could be, but not exclusively:

- To develop a new idea or try a new delivery concept
- To access or develop specific/unique training to meet a niche and unmet need
- To buy new resources to enable a different way of supporting delivery of work
- To develop new resources to support delivery of work.

Cllr Louise McKinlay, Cabinet Member for Children and Families at Essex County Council, said that the pandemic has affected so many people in so many ways. For some, they are experiencing emotional issues for the first time whilst for others, the situation has deepened the struggle.

Although it is good that there is light at the end of the tunnel, the months ahead are going to be bumpy and uncertain. Many are struggling with their mental wellbeing and will need extra or different support to get back on track with the social, physical and emotional impacts of the pandemic.

All our local communities have been fantastic in reaching out to people and a

number of ideas have come forward seeking funding support, and hopefully by making this money available, we will see the rollout of many initiatives that will help even further.

Anyone who has been involved in providing support, in receiving it or you've just seen how the pandemic has impacted people around you, you might have some great ideas for new or better ways to help people to recover from the impacts of the pandemic. If so, start developing your ideas now for when the fund opens in April.

People can register their interest from 15 March by email to CandFCommissioning@essex.gov.uk

1. The Emotional Wellbeing: New Opportunities Fund will open for applications on 1 April 2021. Those who have registered their interest from 15 March will be contacted then with more information about how to apply. It will be a rolling fund, open to applications at any time.

2. It is funded from the package of Government grants announced in autumn 2020 to support residents through the pandemic (the Contain Outbreak Management Fund). ECC held over some of those funds to the new year to spend on emerging needs.

Essex County Council announces new measures to rebuild economy

ECC has pledged its commitment to restart the county's economy and help people recover from the pandemic, with dedicated measures to boost businesses, upskill people and create new employment opportunities in growth sectors including health and social care, construction and the green economy.

500 apprenticeships and 500 new Kickstart Essex placements will be created to provide employment opportunities to young people across Essex.

The Council's 2021/22 Budget and 12-month [Organisation Plan](#), produced under the most testing circumstances the Council has ever faced, was approved by Full Council on 23 February and sets out the measures for securing inclusive economic growth from which everyone can benefit.

Each year Essex County Council spends around £900 million of its budget on Essex businesses and in October 2020 announced a £100m economic growth investment strategy and £5m economic recovery fund which will be rolled out in 2021/22.

Unemployment is at a 30-year high in Essex, with young people under 25 feeling the greatest impact. The number of well-qualified adults (with skills at Levels 3 and above) is increasing but remains below the national average.

New measures will tackle increased unemployment and help people develop the skills they need to thrive post Covid-19. The Kickstart Essex scheme, launched in the county in 2020, will continue to support the creation of new jobs for 16-24 year-olds. It enables small and medium sized enterprises to access Government funding to pay a young person's salary for six months, and so far 124 local businesses have registered, enabling 200 young unemployed people to get into work. Another 500 Kickstart Essex placements will be created in 2021/22.

The Essex Accelerator programme, which has been piloted since November 2020 with COLBEA (Colchester Business Enterprise Agency), will continue to support those at risk of unemployment, or recently unemployed, to set up their own businesses. The pilot eight-week intensive online course gave 25 people advice on starting out and enabled six new business start-ups, creating 12 new jobs. Four more courses will run in 2021.

Essex County Council's Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Councillor Tony Ball, said that the Council was totally dedicated to building back the Essex economy as its highest priority in the coming year, and in a way that everyone benefits. It will do all it can to get people back into work, give businesses the support they need to survive and grow, and enable people to grow their skills so they can thrive as Essex recovers.

On 23 February 2021 the Council allocated a further £7.2 million for Covid-19 business recovery grants, in addition to the £2.2 million for business adaptation grants announced in October 2020. A new Additional Business Support Grant was announced which is being made available to Essex self-employed people and small and medium-sized businesses who do not have rateable premises and have been excluded from accessing other Covid-19 financial support schemes. Grants of up to £5,000 are available.

An additional £1m of Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans has been made available, working with Let's Do Business Finance, and an additional £2 million of investment to ensure a successful reopening of the Essex economy.

The extension of the Essex Business Adaptation Grant scheme until July 2021, meanwhile, will give many more businesses the opportunity to access grants of up to £1,500 to help them be safer for customers and employees. The grants can also be used to help diversify the way businesses operate, fund new technology and support home working.

Further information

1. Essex County Council's 2021 Organisation Plan was approved by Cabinet on 23 February 2021. It responds to the challenges faced by the Covid-19 pandemic and sets out a path to recovery that will allow it to fulfil its strategic aims. See <https://www.essex.gov.uk/plans-and-strategies>
2. Kickstart offers funding to create new jobs for 16 to 24-year-olds on Universal Credit at risk of being long-term unemployed. It provides financial support for

six months covering 100% of the National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage (depending on age) plus other necessary employment contributions. Using the service is free to small and medium sized businesses and public sector organisations. email kickstartessex@essex.gov.uk

3. Essex County Council has partnered with COLBEA to deliver the Essex Accelerator Programme. Find out more via social media at Twitter: colbeabizadvice Facebook: colchesterbusinesscentre or Linked in: COLBEA
4. The [BEST Growth Hub](#) helps businesses understand the support available, telephone 0300 303 4864.
5. Grant advice and support for Essex business is available on the County Council website at the following weblink: [Support for businesses: Financial support for your business - Essex County Council](#)

Free school meals vouchers for half term

ECC once again provided free school meal vouchers for some 35,000 eligible children and young people during February half term.

The vouchers worth £15 per child will be sent out to parents and young people by email or text by Friday 12 February. Printed vouchers will be provided to parents who cannot access them online.

The vouchers can only be exchanged for food and can be used in most supermarkets and the McColl's chain of local shops.

The council used more than £1m of its Covid-19 winter grant from Government to ensure all eligible children had support for food over the Christmas holidays. Now it is once again funding the vouchers for February half term. The national free school meals programme only covers term time.

WONDE, a national provider of free school meal vouchers, will send the vouchers direct and ease the burden on schools that are already busy coping with the impacts of covid-19.

Parents or young people who have received vouchers or who have questions can find out more at help.schoolvouchers.com/hc/en-gb.

Cllr Louise McKinlay, Cabinet Member for Children and Families at Essex County Council, said that with the current lockdown arrangements continuing, the authority is determined to support children and young people and do all it can to ensure they do not go hungry during the school holiday.

Using the government's Winter Covid Fund, over £500,000 has been allocated to provide vouchers for the week, which complements the national, term-time scheme to provide extra help to those families who need it.

County Council Leader outlines road to recovery and brighter future for Essex

A message of hope was shared by Essex County Council's (ECC) Leader on Tuesday 23rd February when he outlined plans for the county's recovery from the pandemic and unveiled the Council's Organisation Plan and 2021/22 budget.

Significant investment in the county's young people, highways, local communities, and businesses make up ECC's plans for the coming year, with Cllr David Finch announcing key initiatives across three priority areas - environment, family and economy. These include:

- An additional **£2million investment** in economic development to ensure a successful reopening of the Essex economy.
- **£1.5million** to support a new **Educational Recovery Task Force** which will lead and oversee the educational recovery of all Essex children.
- A further **£1million** investment in mental health support for children and our health and care workforce.
- A further **£1million community action fund** for environmental initiatives to help communities create less waste, travel sustainably, use renewable energy and produce less carbon.
- A further **£500,000** to break the cycle of violence and protect young people from gangs.
- A further **£7.2million of capital funding** for Local Highways Panels (LHP) - £200K more for each panel, each year, for the next three years.
- An additional **£180,000** added to LHP revenue budgets for smaller highways projects.

In total, ECC will be investing an additional £33m across its portfolios over the next year, with the majority of this being invested in adult social care services to support some of the county's most vulnerable individuals and those that care for them.

ECC's ambitious capital programme, which was announced in the papers for its January Cabinet meeting, also includes a £1.34 billion spend over the next four years on major infrastructure projects, such as new schools and major road improvements. The spend in 2021 is set to be £290m - 50% more than the last two years' capital budget.

Cllr David Finch, Leader of Essex County Council, said: "While this year's budget has been produced under the most testing circumstances the council and our communities have ever faced, I want people to take away a message of hope today.

"We are committed to building on the work we have done to date – not just through the pandemic, but over the past decade since the last recession – to help Essex to emerge healthier and with a brighter future.

"I am extremely proud that we have been able to set out robust plans today for how we will do this, while at the same time achieving a 0% county council tax increase

for residents and just a 1.5% increase from the Government's Adult Social Care precept.

“As an organisation, we have taken great strides over the last ten years, investing in Essex to benefit the communities and businesses that call the county home. We have a strong record of sound financial management and I am confident we will recover – we have done it before, and we will do it again.”

Essex prepares for return to schools and colleges

With a phased return to the classroom for secondary school and college pupils set to start from Monday 8th March, settings are currently putting arrangements in place for pupils to take part in asymptomatic Covid-19 testing as per the latest Government guidance.

The Government has stated that secondary schools and colleges should offer three rapid Lateral Flow Tests (LFT) to pupils as they return to on-site education and that the return of secondary-age pupils can be flexible to allow for this to take place.

This is aimed at identifying positive cases more quickly and breaking the chain of transmission within the school community.

It is down to each individual secondary schools or colleges to decide how they fulfil this guidance and there are two options for schools and colleges to use.

Schools and colleges have the option of offering all three tests on site and flexibility in terms of how they organise pupil's phased return from 8 March.

Alternatively, ECC has put in place increased community testing capacity so that pupils could take the **first** of these three LFTs in advance of their return to school or college. If schools decide to use this option, the second and third tests would then need to be taken on the school site three to five days apart.

Community testing would be carried out at one of the existing rapid testing centres across Essex. Additional capacity to support pupil testing only is also being put in place for the next couple of weeks in the form of three temporary rapid testing sites in Clacton, Dunmow and Braintree.

Parents and carers will be sent specific instructions from their child's school or college about what they need to do and are encouraged to speak to their setting if they have any questions or concerns.

Testing is voluntary and will not be done unless a parent of young person themselves (if over 18) has given consent. It is also not a determining factor for whether pupils are able to return.

However, it is something that is being strongly encouraged so that potential transmission of the virus within the school community is reduced.

If they are taking part in testing, pupils can return to face-to-face education following their first negative test result. Once these three initial tests have been carried out, pupils will be provided with rapid tests to be carried out twice a week at home.

If they test positive, they will need to self-isolate immediately in line with current Covid-19 guidance and not return to school until this is complete.

The results of these home tests must be reported to NHS Test and Trace as per the instructions in the test kit as soon as the test is completed (results will be given in around 30 minutes). The results should also be shared with your child's school or college, whether positive or negative, to support them with contact tracing.

The DfE is now also recommending that face coverings are worn by secondary-age pupils in classrooms, only where social distancing cannot be maintained and unless a young person is medically exempt from wearing one. Secondary and college pupils are already required to wear a face covering when moving around school buildings in corridors and communal areas, as well as when travelling to and from school on public transport.

Primary school pupils

For primary school-age children, on-site attendance at school on and from 8 March will be mandatory.

The advice from Public Health England is that there is no requirement for primary age pupils to be tested for Covid-19 before returning. This is because there are limited public health benefits attached to testing primary pupils in terms of stopping the spread of Covid-19 and younger children are less likely to catch the virus.

Primary school pupils are also not required to wear a face covering at school, however adults may be asked to wear a face covering when entering the school site.

Cllr Ray Gooding, Essex County Council's Cabinet Member for Education, said that he knew full well how eager schools and colleges are to see children and young people back in the classroom. By increasing community rapid testing capacity, schools will have greater flexibility in terms of how they are able to fulfil the Government guidance.

If schools take up the offer to encourage their pupils to have a rapid test in advance of 8 March, this will help prevent pupils with symptoms spread the virus within schools when they return and make arrangements for subsequent testing in schools less onerous.

Dr Mike Gogarty, Essex County Council's Director of Public Health, said: "We strongly advise parents of secondary-age children to get their children tested. By using our network of rapid testing centres, they can do so before children return to the classroom safe in the knowledge that they are free of the virus."

