**BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN VOC RESPONSE**

**18th MAY 2021**

Blackburn with Darwen is experiencing increased levels of the new Variant of Concern (VoC), b.1.617 first identified in India. While this variant is thought to be more transmissible there is currently no evidence to suggest it affects people more seriously or is resistant to the vaccines currently being rolled out across the UK. It is important for everyone to continue to follow handwashing, social distancing and face masks guidance as we continue to vaccinate the population to reach the required levels. As restrictions ease further today, we are encouraging people to remain cautious and follow all COVID-19 guidelines.

The most recent data highlights that in the week up to 11 May there were 177 positive cases in Blackburn with Darwen at a case rate of 118.2 per 100,000 residents. While testing rates have increased gradually to 380 per 100,000 per day, the positivity rate has grown more swiftly to 4.6%. Case numbers and case rate are now doubling every 8-9 nine days. Without concerted action, this would result in a case rate of more than 500 by 7th June.

Shear Brow and Corporation Park, Billinge and Beardwood, Wensley Fold and Bastwell and Daisyfield wards have shown significant increases week on week and all wards with the exception of Livesey and Pleasington, Darwen East and West Pennine showed increases in weekly case numbers.

Young people aged 11-24 have the highest case rates with 17-18 year olds showing the greatest rate at more than 300.

In accordance with planned responses to such outbreaks we have mobilised local and North West Incident Management arrangements and implemented the following measures:

***Surveillance***

Enhanced surveillance has been implemented including genomic sequencing of all cases in BB1 and BB2 postcodes, wastewater analysis has been switched on and the sharing of additional local intelligence on healthcare utilisation is being undertaken.

***Contact tracing***

We are working closely with PHE to rapidly complete case and contact tracing of all confirmed cases and ensure people are supported to self-isolate.

***Communications / Community engagement***

A programme of universal and targeted communications has been developed which includes clear warnings to the public about the risks, the reinforcement of hands, face, space and ventilation advice, promotion of testing and encouragement to take the vaccine when offered. In addition to this, an extensive programme of community engagement is being undertaken via the Community Champions, VCFS commissions, Youth Ambassadors and LA Neighbourhood Teams.

***Surge testing***

Surge testing will commence for two weeks on 18th May in the following postcode areas: BB1 6\*\*, BB1 7\*\*, BB1 8\*\* and BB2 6\*\*.

The programme will incorporate promotion of the existing local PCR testing offer, distribution of home PCR test kits and deployment of mobile testing units (MTUs). The following community venues will serve as PCR test kits community collection sites:

* Revidge Fold United Reform
* Corporation Park Main Entrance
* Bangor Street Community Centre

All of the above sites will be open Monday to Friday 8am-6.30pm, and 10am-4pm on weekends. Drive through PCR tests will be available at the Regional Test Site (RTS) at the Royal Blackburn Hospital and walk through PCR tests will be available at Local Testing Sites (LTS) at Blackburn College and Railway Road, Darwen.

***Vaccination***

Additional doses of the Pfizer vaccine are being made available for those eligible, at locations across the borough.

A number of new sites are opening from Tuesday 18th May to boost the delivery of the vaccination and additional first dose vaccinations have been secured.

Vaccination of residents is according to a priority list, as set out by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), based on age and vulnerability of people and the risk of them becoming seriously ill and dying from Covid-19.

The current criteria is:

* Aged 38 and over
* Aged 18 and over with any underlying health conditions
* Aged 18 and over AND living, caring or working with anyone with underlying health conditions
* Health and Social Care staff
* Any carers – paid or unpaid. You will not be asked for proof as unpaid carers are eligible.

Anyone who is eligible can book into the appointments for their first dose.

They include:

* [Mobile 5 Bay Clinic](https://www.healthierlsc.co.uk/CovidVaccination/blackburn/penny-street-car-park-blackburn) with disabled access delivered by articulated lorry, Penny Street, Blackburn, BB1 6HQ (Available from Tuesday)
* Pop up clinic in [Revidge Fold Church](https://www.healthierlsc.co.uk/CovidVaccination/blackburn/revidge-fold-church-blackburn), Shear Brow, BB1 8DS. (Available from Wednesday)
* [Acorn Medical Centre](https://www.healthierlsc.co.uk/CovidVaccination/blackburn/acorn-medical-centre-accrington), 421 Blackburn Road, Accrington BB5 1RT (Available from Wednesday)
* [Everest Pharmacy](https://www.healthierlsc.co.uk/CovidVaccination/everest-pharmacy-darwen), 21 Cemetery Road, Darwen BB3 2LZ (Available now)
* [Burnley General Teaching Hospital](https://www.healthierlsc.co.uk/CovidVaccination/blackburn/burnley-general-hospital), Casterton Ave, Burnley BB10 2PQ (Available from Wednesday)
* [Royal Blackburn Hospital](https://www.healthierlsc.co.uk/CovidVaccination/vaccination-centres/blackburn-hospital), Haslingden Road, Blackburn, BB2 3HH (Available now)

Further details on the COVID-19 response are available at [Coronavirus | Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council](https://www.blackburn.gov.uk/coronavirus)