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## Covid-19 - update

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### Lockdown is working, so let's keep going

#### Latest update

We are now seeing significant and sustained falls in the infection rate across our district.

When England entered lockdown on 5 January Malvern Hills District's infection rate was 232 per 100,000. As of Monday morning (15 February) that had fallen to 112 per 100,000 which shows lockdown measures are working and that's down to you and the efforts and sacrifices you are making.

Our infection rate is still too high though and could easily start rising again if we start to relax. Our NHS is still under pressure so we need to see that rate continue to fall. We expect this to happen if we all continue to follow the rules.

Stay at home and only go out for essential reasons. If you have to go out, wear your face covering when indoors and keep your distance from others. Keep washing your hands regularly too.

These simple things - along with the vaccine - will help to keep you and your loved ones safe, but also help us get back on top of this virus and reopen society so we can get back to the people, and things, we love.

Even if you have been vaccinated, it is really important you continue to follow these basics and the rules of lockdown.

The Prime Minister will set out his roadmap for the easing of lockdown next week. That, together with the rollout of the vaccine, should give us all cause for hope that we have truly turned the corner on this virus and we are getting closer to a return to normality. Now is not the time to give up. The end is in sight. Let's keep going.

**Cllr Sarah Rouse, Leader of Malvern Hills District Council**

#### Covid-19 vaccine rollout

Across Herefordshire and Worcestershire more than 180,000 people have now received at least one dose of the Covid-19 vaccine. These have been people in the first four priority groups ([find out more about the Covid-19 vaccine priority groups](#)).

The vaccination programme will soon be moving on to the remaining five priority groups. The Government hopes to offer vaccinations to everyone in the top nine priority groups by the end of April.

[You can find out more about the rollout of the Covid-19 vaccine on the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Group website.](#)

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## Get a test without symptoms

If you **do not** have symptoms of Covid-19 and live and work in Worcestershire then you can now get a rapid test (Lateral Flow Test). These tests can give you a result within an hour.

If you test positive you will need to self-isolate immediately. Introducing this type of testing will help drive down cases further by identifying the 1 in 3 people with Covid-19 who have the virus, but show no symptoms, so could be spreading it without knowing.

Remember, if you test negative it is still important you follow social distancing rules. A negative test result only means you did not have Covid-19 at the point you were tested. It does not mean you are free to act normally. Please continue to stay home and only go out for essential purposes.

[Find out more about rapid testing and how to book on Worcestershire County Council's dedicated community testing page.](#)

If you **do have symptoms of Covid-19** then self-isolate immediately and [book a test online](#) or call 119.

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## Covid-19 recovery at heart of our revised Five Year Plan

We have made helping our residents, communities and businesses to recover and come back stronger from the Covid-19 pandemic, a key part of our revised Five Year Plan.

It contains actions on rebuilding our economy, helping to strengthen communities, supporting residents to look after their physical and mental health and protecting and enhancing our environment.

[Read more about our Five Year Plan commitments.](#)

We also have [plans to make The Malverns a green tourism destination](#) as part of our support for the recovery of the tourism sector.

A proposal is being put to Council next week to raise our share of the Council Tax bill by £5 for the average Band D household from April. We would prefer not to do this but the pandemic has hit our finances hard.

The pandemic has so far cost us about £1.4million and not all of that has been replaced by the Government. There are also future uncertainties around our finances including the speed of the economic recovery and future government decisions on local government funding.

Since 2010 we have saved more than £6 million with less than one per cent coming from reductions to frontline services. By 2026 we need to save another £500,000 which we plan to do through efficiency savings, working with other councils and growing our income but tough decisions are ahead.

By raising the Council Tax this year it will help safeguard the essential services we have all relied heavily upon during this pandemic.

We will still have one of the lowest Council Tax levels in the country. But, if you are struggling to pay then help is available. You can apply for [Council Tax Support](#) and help and advice is also available at [visit www.malvern hills.gov.uk/money-advice](http://www.malvern hills.gov.uk/money-advice).

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## Apply for a winter fuel grant

Through our partner Act on Energy, you may be able to get help with paying your fuel bills.

[Find out who qualifies for help, and how to claim, on the Act on Energy website.](#)

If this does not apply to you then the Government has produced [a guide for people struggling to pay essential bills](#) because of the pandemic.

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## Elections and Covid-19

On 6 May, elections will take place for the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner and Worcestershire County Council.

Efforts are being made to make sure people can vote in person on the day in a safe way. This includes putting in Covid-19 Secure measures at polling stations, such as one-way systems and sanitising common touchpoints regularly.

If you wish to vote in person on polling day then you will be asked to take simple safety measures such as bringing your own pen and pencil. You will also need to

wear a face covering inside the polling station and maintain social distancing.

You may decide you would rather stay at home on this occasion. If so, you do not have to lose your voice. You can apply to vote by post or to send someone to vote on your behalf, known as voting by proxy.

The deadline for postal votes for this election is 5pm on 20 April and 27 April for proxy votes. If you are thinking of voting in this way, then we strongly recommend you apply early. This will give you the maximum amount of time possible to receive and return your postal ballot or confirm arrangements for your proxy vote.

You can find out more about [how to vote in 2021 elections](#) on our website.

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## Lots to do at Worcestershire's libraries

Worcestershire's libraries may only be offering a limited in-person service at the moment due to lockdown, but they are still offering plenty of virtual activities.

From bounce and rhyme sessions and Lego club to virtual photography and board game bubbles, there is something for people of all ages to try.

[Find out more about virtual events at Worcestershire's libraries.](#)

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## Share your experiences with our Covid-19 Memory Bank

We set-up our Covid-19 memory bank as a way of marking our experiences during the pandemic so we could preserve and share them for future generations to learn and reflect on.

So far we have had pictures of artwork, poems, blogs, videos and photos capturing everything from outdoor garden exercise and Zoom calls with friends to people sharing how the pandemic has affected them mentally and emotionally.

We'd like to encourage all of you to contribute something to that memory bank. Some things you could try:

- Provide a tribute to a loved one or friend lost to the virus
- If you have had the virus share your experience
- Share a picture of you having the vaccine and describe how you felt receiving it
- Write down how you are feeling now as we experience the hardship of our third lockdown but look ahead with hope to the end of this pandemic
- Tell us what you are planning to do when normal life returns? Is there anything that has changed due to Covid-19 that you would like to see become permanent?

You can upload your experiences on our [Covid-19 Memory Bank page](#).

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## Residents' survey results

We have published the results of our annual residents' survey which show high levels of satisfaction with the way services continue to be delivered and information given to the public and businesses during the pandemic.

The questionnaire, which took place in September 2020, found for most council services more than 70% of people were highly satisfied, with parks and open spaces and waste and recycling services recording satisfaction levels of 86.9% and 84.2% respectively.

Residents were asked about the level of support provided to people during the pandemic so far with 85.7% of people happy with advice and support given on Covid-19, more than 80% happy with information and support for businesses and 71% with help for individuals in need.

The survey also asked about how people thought their habits would change once the pandemic was over. People said they were more likely to shop online in future, support local businesses and exercise every day, while they were less likely to eat out, attend large sports events/entertainment and use public transport.

[Read the Residents' Survey 2020 results in full.](#)

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## Support for your health and wellbeing

Even though times are tough at the moment, it is really important you continue to look after your mental and physical health and wellbeing.

[Every Mind Matters](#) has various tools to help you support your mental wellbeing.

If you are [dealing with difficult feelings about the pandemic](#) then the charity Mind has help and support available.

The Government has also published [a guide to looking after your mental wellbeing during the pandemic](#) on its website.

If you are looking to lose weight and get active then the [NHS Better Health website](#) has links to a range of online workouts and other tools to help you.

Remember, despite the severe pressure the NHS is under, you should still contact them if you need them and not just for Covid-19 related conditions. You can speak to your pharmacist, use the NHS 111 service or contact your GP. In a life-threatening emergency you should call 999.

