

Norfolk County Council Covid update, 25th March:

Please follow the latest rules, as lockdown starts to lift

We're all looking forward to the next stages of lockdown easing from 29 March – but we must remain cautious, to avoid an increase in Covid cases, council and police chiefs said today.

County council leader, Councillor Andrew Proctor, said: "This has been a solemn week, as we remember those who have died during the first year of the pandemic. But there are clear signs of hope for the future as cases decline and the vaccination programme continues to be successfully rolled out.

"After months of lockdown, many of us are looking forward to seeing loved ones and friends again, as the Government proceeds to the next step of its roadmap and reintroduces the rule of six.

"It's definitely safer to meet people outdoors - but it's still important that we follow the rules like hands, face, space and avoid making unnecessary journeys.

"The rules are there for a reason – we need to continue to drive Covid rates down, if we're going to maintain our progress towards a more normal life and avoid the need for future lockdowns."

If the Government confirms that it can move to the next stage of its roadmap, the following will be permitted from Monday, 29th March:

- Outdoor gatherings (including in private gardens) of either six people or two households will be allowed, making it easier for friends and families to meet outside.
- Visits to outdoor sports facilities such as tennis and basketball courts and open-air swimming pools and people will be able to take part in formally organised outdoor sports

The 'stay at home' rule will end on 29th March but many restrictions will remain in place:

- People should continue to work from home where they can and minimise the number of journeys they make where possible, avoiding travel at the busiest times and routes.
- Travel abroad will continue to be prohibited, other than for a small number of permitted reasons.
- Holidays abroad will not be allowed, given it will remain important to manage the risk of imported variants and protect the vaccination programme. The government has launched a new taskforce to review global travel which will report on 12 April.

T/Assistant Chief Constable Julie Wwendth said: "Monday sees the most the most significant easing of lockdown rules since these latest measures were introduced in January, to help stop the spread of coronavirus.

"The best way of protecting ourselves and others is to be sensible and cautious. If we all continue to adhere to social distancing guidelines then, as a county, we will have the best chance of keeping infection rates and deaths low.

“With lockdown rules easing, our policing approach will also adapt to reflect these changes. Our approach will continue to follow the 4Es, with officers engaging, explaining and encouraging adherence in the first instance, with enforcement used as a last resort.”

(The T/Assistant Chief Constable’s full statement is included, below.)

Director of public health, Dr Louise Smith, said: “Current Covid case rates in Norfolk are 30.1 per 100,000 – which is down 23 per cent on the previous week.

“That’s really encouraging news but, as we know from last year, the reduction in cases can slow down or rise again as more people mix.

“The way forward is clear – following the rules, accepting your vaccination when you are invited and being tested up to twice a week if you’re going to work, school, college or visiting people in care homes.”

For further details on the Government’s roadmap, please see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021/covid-19-response-spring-2021-summary> .

Latest Covid figures for Norfolk:

Cases, for the week ending 20th March

There have been 273 cases in the seven days to 20th March this is 80 less compared to the same time last week

The seven-day incidence rate is 30.1 per 100,000 this is a decrease of about 23% compared to the week previously

Hospital activity:

Covid 19 occupied beds: 20 on March 23rd, a reduction of 9 compared to this time last week

ICU: 3 on March 23rd a reduction of 2 compared to last week

Hospital deaths: 1,587 to March 23rd an increase of 4 compared to last week
Setting-specific summary for 23/03/21 is as follows:

Across all settings there are 127 open outbreaks, compared to 148 outbreaks 7 days ago (-14.2% decrease)

Across care providers there are 59 open outbreaks, compared to 78 outbreaks 7 days ago (-24.4% decrease). There have been 7 cases associated with care homes¹ in the 7 days ending 18/03/21 (staff and residents), compared to 11 for the previous 7 days (-36.4% decrease)

Across businesses and workplace settings there are 39 open outbreaks, compared to 41 outbreaks 7 days ago (-4.9% decrease)

Across education settings there are 21 open outbreaks, compared to 16 outbreaks 7 days ago (31.2% increase)

Across health and emergency settings there are 8 open outbreaks, compared to 13 outbreaks 7 days ago (-38.5% decrease)

Full statement from Norfolk police, re 29th March changes to lockdown rules:

T/Assistant Chief Constable Julie Wwendth said: “Monday sees the most the most significant easing of lockdown rules since these latest measures were introduced in January to help stop the spread of coronavirus.

“We know the last 12 months has been challenging for our communities, particularly during this third lockdown. We absolutely recognise the sacrifices made by people during this difficult and testing time and our communities have done a great job in adhering to the rules.

“Rules around social contact will ease from Monday, meaning gatherings of either six people or two households can take place outside, which includes private gardens.

“The ‘stay at home’ rule also ends on Monday however many other restrictions will remain in place and we would ask people be sensible and responsible in their approach to these changes.

“People should continue to work from home where they can and minimise the number of overall journeys they make, avoiding busy travel times and routes wherever possible.

“After living under strict measures for almost three months, the impending easing of restrictions will of course come as a relief to many with people able to travel a little further and get outside a bit more. However, we must equally acknowledge there will be people who remain fearful about areas in our county being swamped with visitors at a time when social distancing remains vital in helping to prevent the spread of this virus.

“The best way of protecting ourselves and others is to be sensible and cautious. If we all continue to adhere to social distancing guidelines, then as a county we will have the best chance of keeping infection rates and deaths low.

“With lockdown rules easing, our policing approach will also adapt to reflect these changes. Our approach will continue to follow the 4Es, with officers engaging, explaining and encouraging adherence in the first instance, with enforcement used as a last resort.”

The end of shielding for clinically extremely vulnerable people:

Shielding for clinically extremely vulnerable people (63,000 of them in Norfolk) ends on March 31st. All of them should have received their first vaccination dose and anyone shielding who hasn't should contact their GP.

Ceri Sumner, the county council's director of community information and learning, said: “We want to say a huge thank you to everyone who has been shielding as you have helped to protect yourself, others and the NHS – and a thank you to the groups and volunteers who have supported them.

“We know for many this will be a huge relief but also understand that for some there will be feelings of anxiety and a lack of confidence in returning to work, or starting to venture out again

“Feelings of anxiety are normal and to be expected, but there are things you can do that will help such as focusing on the things you can control, complying with physical distancing, wearing face coverings, regular handwashing and getting back to the things you enjoy first.

“Due to the challenges that some people may face coming out of shielding, we also want to remind residents that help and support is still available and you are not alone. You can find out more about the support available by visiting our website <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/care-support-and-health/health-and-wellbeing/adults-health/coronavirus/community-support-for-people-at-home/vulnerable-people> or calling us on 0344 800 8020.”

Vaccination update from NHS Norfolk and Waveney CCG:

Cath Byford, Chief Nurse, NHS Norfolk and Waveney Clinical Commissioning Group, said: “I am delighted that the COVID-19 vaccination programme continues to move at pace across Norfolk and Waveney. This week, we hit a big milestone as more than half a million people have now received their first dose of the vaccine with tens of thousands of people also receiving their second dose.

“I’d like to take this opportunity to thank our hard-working health and care staff, volunteers and everyone who is supporting this enormous programme. Whilst it is pleasing that huge numbers of people are taking up their opportunity to have a vaccine, it is vital that people continue to follow the latest Coronavirus guidance. That includes washing your hands regularly, wearing a face covering and maintaining a 2-metre distance from others where possible.”

Water safety warning as lockdown starts to lift:

Drowning Prevention Forum chairman Greg Preston, of Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service said: “As the first lockdown lifted in 2020, many people headed to coastal and inland water to spend time outdoors.

“We anticipate the same will happen again this spring. We want to make people safer by making them aware of the risks and dangers when around water, what to do if they fall into water and how to help someone who is in trouble in water.

“In 2019, 223 people accidentally drowned in the UK. 44% of these people just happened to be near water and had no intention of even entering it.”

The advice is:

- Ensure that you and your family can swim, are water confident, and have water safety skills
- Make smart choices - swim at lifeguarded beaches and pools, use appropriate safety equipment and do not drink alcohol before going in the water
- Be aware of and know how to avoid water safety hazards such as rip tides, cold-water and moving water
- Be aware of the dangers of swimming in open waters, especially in waters without lifeguards. Water temperatures can drop sharply just below the surface and you don't know what may be underneath.

Water safety advice can be found online at <https://rnli.org/safety> .