

**News release from North Tyneside Council
Marketing and Communications, Quadrant, Silverlink North, Cobalt
Business Park, North Tyneside NE27 0BY**

Thursday 20 May 2021

For immediate release

Surge testing and vaccination drive to launch in North Tyneside

Surge testing and additional vaccinations are launching in North Tyneside, following a rise in case numbers and growing concerns nationally around increased cases of the variant first identified in India.

COVID-19 cases in North Tyneside have risen from 22 to 53 per 100,000 over the last week and more cases of the variant, first identified in India, have been found in parts of the borough. There are currently 19 confirmed cases and it is likely that this number will increase.

From Saturday 22 May, the council will deploy two mobile testing units (MTUs) in North Shields and Wallsend.

From Saturday morning they will be open without an appointment between 10am and 4pm at Wallsend Forum, behind the Anson pub, and in North Shields town centre.

Residents and those who work or learn in North Tyneside are encouraged to make use of these PCR test sites, if they do not have symptoms of COVID-19.

The guidance for anyone who does have symptoms of COVID-19 remains the same: stay at home, self-isolate and book a test online or by calling 119.

The existing test sites at The Parks Leisure Centre in North Shields and the Coronation Street car park in Wallsend should continue to only be used by those with symptoms.

This enhanced testing is in addition to lateral flow tests which the government encourage everyone to do twice a week.

The council and the local NHS is reminding residents that getting vaccinated is the best defence against COVID-19.

People over 50 and those with underlying health conditions who have had their first dose and not yet had their second will be contacted either by their GP practice or by the NHS National Booking Service with an offer to bring forward the date of their second dose.

Residents in this group should not contact their GP or the NHS and should wait to be contacted.

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The rollout will remain in line with national eligibility, which is now open to everyone aged over 34 to book a vaccine appointment.

People who are eligible but who have not yet had a first dose can book quickly and easily at one of 11 local community pharmacy locations in North Tyneside.

There are over 15,000 weekly appointments available in North Tyneside via the NHS National Booking Service <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/> or call 119 between 7am and 11pm.

The Council and NHS are also exploring additional opportunities to get vaccinated within North Tyneside.

It follows a Government announcement on Wednesday that North Tyneside and five other areas of England would receive an extra supply of testing kits and vaccines.

There is no current evidence that the variant first identified in India causes more serious illness and there is no evidence that vaccines are less effective against it. It does though appear to pass to others more easily.

Wendy Burke, Director of Public Health, is appealing for people to remain vigilant and get themselves tested and vaccinated when the offer is made.

She said: "Extensive surveillance of COVID-19 has found in North Tyneside a small number of cases of the variant that was first identified in India. All cases are now self-isolating and robust contact tracing has taken place to trace their contacts and ask them to self-isolate as well.

"Although there is currently no evidence that the new variant causes more serious illness, or that the vaccine will be ineffective against it, it does appear to pass to others more easily.

"Working in partnership with NHS Test and Trace, we strongly encourage every resident over the age of 16 to take a PCR COVID-19 test, even if they are not showing symptoms.

"The additional testing, together with other measures such as hands-face-space-fresh air and following national guidance, will help us to suppress and control the spread of the virus, while enabling a better understanding of the new variant.

"If a person tests positive, has any symptoms, or are contact traced following contact with someone who tests positive, they should self-isolate immediately.

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“We’d like to offer reassurance that the surge testing is being carried out as a precaution and these areas are not subject to extra or different restrictions. However, this acts as a reminder to us all that the virus is still out there, and we must not allow complacency to creep in.”

Professor Neil Watson, who runs the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme for the North East and North Cumbria said: “Now is the time to get vaccinated if you are in an eligible group because the sooner you're vaccinated, the sooner you'll begin to protect yourself, your family, your friends and your community.

“We also know that vaccinating as many people as possible should reduce the levels of local infections too.

“The NHS in North Tyneside has made thousands of appointments available each week via community pharmacies, while GPs concentrate on bringing second dose appointments forward for people over 50. So please do your bit to help beat COVID – take up your appointment when it’s offered.”

For those who need to self-isolate because they test positive or because they are a close contact, financial support is available from the council through the Test and Trace support payment. Recipients must be financially impacted because they cannot work from home and will lose income as a result, or be in receipt of benefits.

Details of locations of the test sites can be found on the North Tyneside Council website.

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