

Junction improvement gives nature a helping hand

Aside from showcasing their natural beauty, these native species of flora and fauna, which include native species of daises and poppies, provide a huge boost to the local wildlife of the area they inhabit.

Some of these benefits include providing a critical habitat for pollinators such as honeybees, native bees and butterflies, improving soil and water quality and supporting an ecosystem for other local insects and wildlife. Graham Construction, are currently upgrading junction 25 connecting the M25 with the A10 on behalf of Highways England. At peak times up to 6,300 vehicles per hour currently travel through the junction roundabout, causing congestion and regular delays. The A10 southbound approach into the junction is also a congestion hotspot in Broxbourne.

Improvements when complete will include:

- Quicker journey times
- Increase in average speeds through the junction
- Less disruption following incidents
- Reduced congestion will increase future development and growth opportunities
- Improved local air quality

Indy Grewal, Highways England's project manager, said:

We are always looking for ways to reduce the impact our business has on the environment and to enhance it where possible. It's not just about operating in an environmentally responsible way, we also recognise that there's a need to balance people's needs to travel on our roads with doing all we can to protect the environment.

Highways England manages a road network that stretches for 4,300 miles, connecting people and places from Berwick-upon-Tweed to Penzance. It also looks after around 30,000 ha of green verge which contains a range of habitats supporting interesting plants and animals.

Highways England contractors are now obliged to create conditions for species-rich grasslands to thrive using low fertility soils. The verges will then be allowed to regenerate naturally or be seeded with wildflowers.

Ben Hewlett, Highways England Senior Environmental Advisor, said:

The M25 J25 shows that if we create the right conditions, wildlife will return very quickly. Going forward Highways England will be creating more spaces through its construction activities that

provide vital habitat for wildflowers, insects, pollinators and other wildlife to thrive.

In December 2020, Highways England launched a new verge creation policy which will create the correct conditions for wildflowers to thrive, through the removal of topsoil from new areas of grassland created by Major Projects. Removal of topsoil lowers the level of nutrients in the soil making it a harsher environment for coarse grasses and weeds, making more room for wildflowers to establish and thrive.

Get more information on the [M25 junction 25 scheme](#)

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[COVID-19 study finds lower prevalence in schools](#)

A coronavirus (COVID-19) study has found that prevalence of the virus was lower in schools in June 2021 than in the autumn term 2020.

[COVID-19 study finds lower prevalence in schools](#)

[Round 6 of the Schools Infection Survey \(SIS\)](#) – a study jointly led by Public Health England (PHE), the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – was carried out in June 2021 across 141 primary and secondary schools within selected local authority areas in England.

The study looked at prevalence of COVID-19 infection among pupils and staff sampled in schools. The results from testing showed lower levels of current

infection in pupils and secondary school staff than in the autumn term 2020.

The percentage of primary school pupils in school on the day of testing that tested positive was 0.27%, showing very little change from [Round 5](#) (May 2021).

In secondary schools 0.42% of students tested positive, representing an increase from Round 5 but a significantly lower level than the autumn term 2020 ([Round 1](#) and [Round 2](#)).

In secondary schools, 0.27% of staff tested positive for COVID-19 – infection was similar level to [Round 4](#) (March 2021) and significantly lower than the autumn term 2020. For Round 6, the number of positive test results from primary school staff was too small to present due to [statistical disclosure criteria](#).

SIS is not intended to be generalisable to England as a whole but does have good representation in the North West. Data for schools in the North West were compared to the wider community prevalence among children of comparable age taken from the [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Infection Survey \(CIS\)](#). This analysis showed that the prevalence of infection among pupils in schools was consistently lower at all time periods of the study.

The study also found that antibody seroconversion rates (the incidence of SARS-CoV-2 antibody test results changing from negative to positive following natural infection) among primary and secondary school staff were at the lowest level recorded by the study for the academic year. Between Rounds 5 and 6, seroconversion rates for primary school staff was 0.8 per 1,000 person-weeks and for secondary school staff 1.9 per 1,000 person-weeks.

Dr Shamez Ladhani, Consultant Paediatrician at PHE and study lead, said:

Through this study we've closely monitored the risks of COVID-19 in schools.

Latest results show that infection and antibody positivity rates of children in school did not exceed those of the community. This is reassuring and confirms that schools are not hubs of infection.

Keeping community infection rates low remains critical for keeping children safe and schools open safely.

Thanks to all staff and pupils up and down the country for playing their part in keeping transmission of the virus in schools low.

Dr Patrick Nguipdop-Djomo, Assistant Professor of Epidemiology at LSHTM, and co-investigator of the study, said:

It is encouraging to see that the prevalence of COVID-19 infection in schools has remained lower than in the autumn term 2020, and the

high vaccine uptake in school staff taking part in the study. This is a testament to the huge amount of work done in schools to prevent and reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Although the study is not designed to be representative of all schools in the country, SIS has also shown that infections in schools mostly reflect the patterns of infection observed in the local community, thus measures to reduce community transmission remain important.

The whole team working on SIS are grateful to the pupils, staff and parents taking part in this landmark study. With their collaboration and time we are able to better understand how best to respond to COVID-19 and protect the children and school staff.

Fiona Dawe, Deputy Director, Wider Surveillance Studies at the ONS, said:

It's really encouraging that our results today show infection rates in the summer term 2021 were lower than in the autumn term 2020.

As we have now completed the final round of testing, I would like to say thank you to all our incredible participants for taking part in the study throughout the school year, especially during such uncertain times.

This study wouldn't have been possible without them.

Round 6 also recorded COVID-19 vaccination uptake of staff at participating schools in the 14 local authorities. The study found that 92.93% of staff had received at least one vaccine dose by the end of June 2021, an increase from 86.60% at the end of May 2021, and from 62.94% at the end of March 2021. Of staff, 70.47% had received both doses, an increase from 43.13% at the end of May 2021, and up from 1.01% at the end of March 2021.

In a separate data release from Round 4 (March 2021) of [antibodies in primary and secondary school pupils](#), antibody levels following natural infection were found to be lower in schools located in local authorities where community infection rates have been relatively low throughout the pandemic than areas where infection rates have been higher. These findings support the suggestion that infection rates in school reflect those of the community.

Overall, the data suggest that adult vaccination (including in staff), and other 'school-gate' measures such as the rapid asymptomatic testing programme, excluding bubbles and measures to limit the likelihood of transmission within the school site (for example, social distancing), have contributed to reducing the risk of COVID-19 infection in schools.

Background

Parental opinion on child vaccination recorded in Round 6 found there had

been no significant change since Round 5 (May 2021); 40% of primary school parents and 54% of secondary school parents said 'Yes, definitely' they would want their child to have a COVID-19 vaccine; 3% of primary school parents and 6% of secondary school parents said they would 'Definitely not' want their child to have a vaccine.

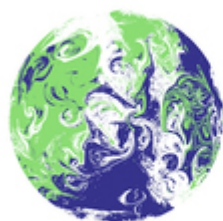
Round 4 also measured conversion rates among pupils (the incidence of an oral fluid antibody test result changing from negative to positive). For all pupils combined, conversion rates were lower between Rounds 2 (December 2020) to 4 (March 2021) than between Round 1 (November 2020) to 2 (December 2020) at 5.7 per 1,000 person-weeks and 12.0 per 1,000 person-weeks respectively.

The closure of schools during the national lockdown from 5 January 2021 meant that the 3rd round of the COVID-19 Schools Infection Survey was cancelled.

[COP26 President welcomes commitments towards climate goals during critical visit to Brazil](#)

Press release

Alok Sharma had constructive discussions with ministers on progress towards Brazil's pledge to reach net zero emissions by 2050 and eliminate illegal deforestation by 2030



**UN CLIMATE
CHANGE
CONFERENCE
UK 2021**

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ITALY

- Alok Sharma met with Brazilian Vice President and Cabinet members and welcomed commitment for implementation plans to be presented by COP26 in pursuit of green growth
- COP President congratulated subnational governments and private sector on their commitments and for joining the UN Race to Zero campaign
- Sharma welcomed plans from Congress to raise ambition on ending illegal deforestation

In his first visit to Brazil as COP26 President-Designate, Alok Sharma, had constructive discussions with Vice President Mourao and other key ministers on progress towards the Brazilian government's pledge to reach net zero emissions by 2050 and eliminate illegal deforestation by 2030.

With three months to go before the UK hosts the critical UN climate change summit, Mr Sharma encouraged Brazilian ministers to honour these crucial commitments and welcomed Brazil's commitment to present an implementation plan by COP26 in order to deliver green growth. Ahead of the Glasgow summit, the UK is urging countries to come forward with plans to halt deforestation, as well as to end reliance on coal, transition to zero emission vehicles, and deliver the finance needed to tackle climate change.

During his three-day visit to Brasilia, Mr Sharma hosted a "Closing the Ambition Loop" event with UN High-Level Climate Champion, Gonzalo Muñoz, where two more regions, several cities and businesses committed to neutralising their carbon emissions by 2050 by joining the Race to Zero campaign. With further net zero commitments from other states present, total commitments will account for nearly 50% of Brazil's emissions and half of its GDP.

Meeting with representatives from Congress, Alok Sharma welcomed their plans to bring forward a 2030 commitment to end illegal deforestation.

The COP26 President also spoke to influential civil society organisations about the UK's aims for COP26, highlighting how important their voices are in maintaining an inclusive process as we work together to tackle climate change.

Speaking at the end of his visit, Alok Sharma said:

I welcome Brazil's pledge to reach net zero emissions by 2050 and eliminate illegal deforestation by 2030. I have heard encouraging signs of progress towards these goals, and look forward to seeing detailed plans on implementation of those commitments.

Brazil is key to the global fight against climate change, and as an agriculture powerhouse has much to contribute to advancing climate action and delivering green growth.

Ends.

Published 11 August 2021

National Statistics: Latest horticulture statistics

Annual statistics on the area, yield, production, trade and valuation of fruit and vegetable crops grown in the UK.