

Tiering decisions to be made through national command structure

The Health Secretary will today set out in Parliament the tier which each local authority in England will fall under, in line with the measures set out in the COVID-19 Winter Plan published on Monday.

As announced earlier this week, the tiers have been toughened and many more areas will be placed into the higher tiers in order to safeguard the gains made during the period of national restrictions.

The first review point for the current tier allocations will take place by Wednesday 16 December.

This allows for the possibility of areas which continue to make progress in slowing the spread of the disease to be moved down a tier in advance of Christmas.

Decisions on tiers are made by ministers based on public health recommendations informed by the following factors:

- Case detection rate (in all age groups and, in particular, amongst the over 60s);
- How quickly case rates are rising or falling;
- Positivity in the general population;
- Pressure on the NHS – including current and projected (3-4 weeks out) NHS capacity – including admissions, general/acute/ICU bed occupancy, staff absences; and
- Local context and exceptional circumstances such as a local but contained outbreak.

If these indicators are not improving, an area may be moved up a tier and if the trajectory improves, the area may move to a lower tier.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

Thanks to the hard work and sacrifice made by people up and down the country, we are able to move out of national lockdown and into more targeted local, tiered restrictions.

I know for those of you faced with tier 3 restrictions this will be a particularly difficult time but I want to reassure you that we'll be supporting your areas with mass community testing and extra funding.

By following the rules together we can get out of these tough measures.

The Contain Outbreak Management Fund will be extended so that it can provide monthly payments to Local Authorities facing higher restrictions until the end of the financial year, in recognition of the ongoing public health and outbreak management costs of tackling COVID-19. For those authorities in Tier 3, this funding will amount to £4 per head of population per month, and for those in Tier 2, it will amount to £2 per head of population per month.

The Joint Biosecurity Centre works closely with PHE, the NHS and across government to monitor the number of new infections, positivity rates, and pressures on the NHS.

These factors form their public health advice to the Chief Medical Officer and Ministers through the Local Action Committee and the COVID Operations Committee.

Final decisions on tiering are made by the Prime Minister at the COVID Operations Committee.

The government will also publish an analysis of the health, economic and social impacts of the tiered approach.

Local authorities that fall into tier 3 will be offered support from NHS Test and Trace and the Armed Forces to deliver a six-week rapid community testing programme.

Community testing will make use of rapid Lateral Flow Tests which give results within an hour, and will focus on locating and suppressing asymptomatic transmission. The more cases identified and self-isolating, the quicker the control of virus transmission which is essential to help areas move down a tier.

With some individuals with coronavirus showing no symptoms increased community testing will help identify those who are infected and infectious, but asymptomatic and unaware that they might be spreading the disease, so that they can isolate and protect others.

Local authorities will be able to decide whether to use lateral flow test kits for targeted testing for high-risk workplaces and industries, or for wider asymptomatic community testing, to find positive cases more quickly and break chains of transmission.

Anyone who tests positive, using either a lateral flow test or an existing swab test, must self-isolate along with their household immediately and their contacts will be traced.

Rapid community testing will expand on existing testing programmes within the NHS, care homes, universities and schools to protect those most at risk, and builds on the pilots of community testing which are taking place in Liverpool and Merthyr Tydfil.

Notes to editors

- Guidance on what is allowed in each tier can be found on GOV UK:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-restriction-tiers-what-you-need-to-know>
- All available data has been assessed by the government, including the Health and Social Care Secretary, NHS Test and Trace, the Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC), Public Health England (PHE), the Chief Medical Officer and the Cabinet Office. Data assessed includes incidence, test positivity and the growth rate of the virus.
- A Watchlist will be published every Thursday detailing the latest data at a regional level providing the rationale and data behind these decisions.