

Dear Residents,

I know that the news of a new lockdown for England, will be frustrating and upsetting for many people. Worcestershire has tried very hard to keep Covid-19 cases down, and many of you have made sacrifices to protect yourselves and others. We have all had to make changes to the way we live our lives in recent months, and that included over Christmas, when so many were not able to spend time with loved ones.

But some stark realities remain for us all. Worcestershire's infection rates are at the highest we have ever seen. In the past 7 days alone, the county has 1,888 positive Covid-19 cases, which is more than all positive cases seen during May, June, July, August and September 2020 combined. I am concerned about this level of spread, and the risk it poses to our health and the lives of our vulnerable and elderly residents. We need to act now to protect one another, prevent the virus spreading further and reduce the demand on our hospitals.

The pandemic continues to dominate our daily lives, cases are rising nationally and we know the new variant of Covid-19 spreads very quickly. Our NHS is also facing considerable pressure on its services. All of these factors have led to the government's announcement of a new lockdown across England. This means once again, we are facing tough restrictions on our way of life. I know this is hard, but by doing as we are asked, we are saving lives. The restrictions have been brought in to protect every one of us.

Please now stay at home, don't go out unless you need to, for example to buy food or collect medicines. The Government has set out the clear limitations of the lockdown and I ask you to read the restrictions and follow the rules. You can read a full explanation of all the restrictions on the government's website; <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home>

Once again, Worcestershire County Council's Here2Help service is available to anyone who needs support or is clinically extremely vulnerable (shielding). If you have no-one to turn to for help, our service can respond and provide help such as collecting medicines and getting shopping. You can reach the service online; <https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/here2help>

If you are on the Government's shielding list, you will be receiving guidance about what to do now. It is key that you socially distance, and you reduce your physical contact with others. The governments webpages are updated regularly and you can read detailed guidance at; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

While we are all at home, please do remember to check on vulnerable or isolated residents. Just a phone call or a text message can provide a vital link to the outside world, and can ensure those who need comfort or help, have someone to turn to.

You will know that a programme of vaccination has begun nationally, and we are already seeing Worcestershire residents receiving the first doses. This process is being co-ordinated by central Government, and following a strict order for administering the doses. Worcestershire County Council is supporting NHS colleagues to ensure the roll-out is progressing. The vaccines are safe, and if you are called forward to receive one, I strongly urge you to do so. In the meantime, please keep following the rules, wear face coverings, wash your hands, keep your distance. These simple measures help reduce the spread of the virus.

We are all in this together. Throughout the pandemic, you have shown your resilience, kindness and compassion for others. We have seen many examples of people supporting one another, lending a hand or going the extra mile. The situation has demonstrated how working together, we are able to support one another and get through. I am asking you to do this once again. The single most important thing you can do for everyone, is to stay home. Please do this for yourself and for others. We all want to protect people who are precious to us, our family and friends. Let's take care of each other, and work together.

Thank you for doing this. Our actions now will hopefully bring brighter days for us all in 2021.

Best wishes
Dr. Kathryn Cobain