

Covid-19: Third National Lock-down announced

4th January 2021

The Prime-Minister has tonight announced a third national lockdown. This is in response to rising cases of Covid-19 across the county & the threat of hospitals being overwhelmed.

Further details of what you can & cannot do are available at <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

We in Cumbria, and more particularly here in Eden, far from living in a cosy, safe, rural backwater, have seen the County propelled into the news as cases have soared, driven by the more infectious new variant. Only yesterday our Director of Public Health & CCC Exec Director (People) wrote to the DfE asking that primary schools in the County be added to the Contingency Framework of schools not expected to open today (secondary schools were not due to open till later) In his tweet about this Colin Cox said "rates in Carlisle & Eden are now very high & ...rates in Barrow, Copeland & Allerdale are doubling every 4-5 days. ...Hospitals are under pressure. We do not have the capacity in the NHS to respond to further increases in rates." The North Cumbria Integrated Care trust yesterday also announced a level 4 alert meaning the pressures on the service were such that the organisation was unable to deliver comprehensive care and there was increased potential for patient care and safety to be compromised.

Clearly all this is very worrying but what does it mean for you or me? The most recent figures for Eden & more locally for one's own post-code area is available on <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/> by keying in a local post-code. Penrith itself seems to be divided into 2 main areas, Penrith Central & West & Penrith Outer. The latter covers quite a large area to the north & south of Penrith (including Yanwath, Tirril & Clifton) & covers more central areas of Penrith while not covering those which appear neither central nor west! Geography aside, Penrith Outer, which includes my own post code in Wordsworth Street has recorded 107 new cases in the 7 days up to 30th Dec giving a whopping rate of 1042.5 cases per 100,000 resident population. Penrith Central, a much smaller area, by contrast had 32 new cases over 7 days giving a rate of 425.8 per 100,000. Perhaps some of you can recall when we worried about the return of children to school in September 2020 with rates 100 times less than that, or quarantined people travelling from other countries which had a rate of 15-20 per 100,000? Just in case you think your own area is not as badly affected as Penrith, a quick input of post codes shows "Langwathby, Kirkoswald & Alston Moor" with a rate of 554.9, Appleby, Shap & Kirkby Thore area a rate of 487.4, "Hesket, Lazonby & Skelton" (inc Plumpton etc) a rate of 469.8 & "Askham, Ullswater, Greystoke" (inc Stainton etc) a rate of 417.7.

Overall, in the last 7 days to 4th Jan, Eden recorded 395 new cases with a rate of 585.9 new cases per 100,000 population. The latest available figures for the two hospitals covered by NCIC Trust were 112 patients admitted with Covid-19 & 13 requiring ventilation. I have no up

to date numbers for ICU beds available, but under the old trust name there were reported to be 14: 8 at Carlisle & 6 in West Cumberland. Hospitals too will have been affected by staff shortages due to illness etc.

There is therefore every reason why more stringent measures were needed locally, but with the new variant also spreading rapidly elsewhere a National Lock-down would seem to be inevitable. Schools too are to close, because though Covid19 illness in children tends to be mild, there are worries about children transmitting the more transmissible new variant between households.

For more detail of what is known about the new variant see <https://www.bmj.com/content/371/bmj.m4944>

Further detail for Cumbria is as always available at <https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/publichealth/covid19outbreakcontrol.asp>

In conclusion, there is risk in the current situation, though if everyone is sensible & follows the guidelines, that risk can be minimised. Perhaps to put things in perspective, we probably exposed ourselves to more risk before & over the Christmas period than we will during the coming lockdown. We should though do everything we can to stay safe & protect others.

JD