

**OFFICIAL SENSITIVE
DRAFT – NOT GOVERNMENT POLICY**

**OPTIONS IN RESPONSE TO TRAJECTORY IN LONDON, SOUTH EAST AND EAST
ENGLAND**

The latest data includes the first robust indication of the impact of the ending of national restrictions on 2 December. In London, parts of the South East and parts of the East of England, this data although incomplete and so still subject to upwards revision shows large exponential increases in case detection rates, commensurate with a significant increase in transmission at the end of national restrictions. These data indicate doubling times for new Covid-19 infections of 7 days or less in some areas. This is extremely concerning as some of these (such as Kent and Essex) are areas where the national restrictions had least impact and as such are areas with a high base level of Covid-19 infection in the population.

If the behaviours and compliance of the population in the 'at risk' areas are consistent from 2 Dec through to the present, then a fourfold increase in daily case rates (two doubling periods) will be seen in some places once complete data up to 16th December is available. This data can take up to a week to be complete and so we would not see this until the beginning of the planned relaxation of restrictions around Christmas.

If the current trajectory persists up until 23 December, and we do not take very rapid action to turn this around, these areas may see an eightfold increase in background prevalence by the 23 December – when the Christmas bubble period begins. This 5-day easing of household mixing restrictions over Christmas will inevitably further accelerate transmission. In addition, the Christmas temporary easements provide a significant potential for Covid-19 positive individuals, from what are likely to be very high prevalence areas by 23 December, to transmit Covid-19 to households in areas with lower case rates across the country – in particular those areas that have spent significant time under more severe restrictions (such as Liverpool and Manchester).

In addition, an expanding cluster of a SARS-CoV-2 variant has been identified among available genomes from Kent. This was part of an epidemiological investigation into the recent increase in cases, which revealed a large cluster of cases where the virus had changes in spike protein.

There is currently no evidence that this variant has changed viral transmission, susceptibility or therapeutic options. Until we have a better understanding of the potential impact on human health, drug treatment, and vaccines, we do not recommend any additional response to the identification of this variant, which is explained in detail in a separate submission to SoS DHSC from Dr Susan Hopkins. The viral genomics will not diminish the need for urgent non-pharmaceutical interventions in response to this recent surge in cases.

Recommended action

In light of this early warning signal, the public health recommendation is to act quickly, proactively and decisively. The next formal review of the tiering allocations is due on the 16th December. Decisions made at this point will not come into force until the 19th. Given the pace with which case rates are rising, there is a strong argument for taking emergency action ahead of that review and moving the following Local Authority areas immediately into tier 3: