



# **COVID related Public Feedback for Kent**

**Monthly Summary report  
March 1st-14th  
2021**



## Background

Every day both Healthwatch Kent and the Kent User Forums are working together to hear feedback from people about how they are coping right now. In the first two weeks of March, **33** people shared with us their experiences of the Covid 19 pandemic and life under social distancing. We have combined this with anecdotal feedback from **10** organisations who support a wide range of Kent residents including people living with mental health, physical disability, sight loss and impairment, carers and those suffering domestic abuse.

This report details everything we've heard. Its purpose is to enable decision makers and planners to understand how people are coping during the COVID epidemic.

## Methodology

We have been gathering feedback through a number of routes:

1. The number of calls to our Helpline has steadily increased since the start of the pandemic
2. People also share their experiences with us via our website, email or text
3. We've been running a series of social media campaigns to capture feedback
4. The Kent Forums have been proactively gathering feedback from the communities they represent
5. Regularly talking to community groups and voluntary organisations to understand how their clients and members are coping

Since March 2020, Healthwatch staff and volunteers have been building relationships with voluntary organisations and community groups. This has enabled us to hear from communities who may find it harder to share their feedback such as people living with Dementia or autism.

## What do we do with the feedback?

Every month, we bring together all the feedback from the multiple sources into one report. This is then shared with decision makers to provide a timely snapshot of how people are coping.

## What are we trying to achieve?

This report aims to summarise and reflect the changing experiences of people living and working in Kent during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Our aim is that the feedback is used to support emergency and recovery planning across the health and social care system in Kent.

## Things to remember when reading this report

- The comments in italics are direct quotes from people. They are people's personal views, not the view of Healthwatch Kent or the Forums. Other comments are anecdotal pieces of feedback from organisations.
- This is a snapshot of feedback over a fortnight-it is not intended to replace an organisations own responsibility to gather feedback from the public.
- Wherever possible we are raising issues and sharing feedback directly with relevant organisations.
- You may read some worrying stories. Some of these have come directly from the public and they have given us contact details, we are following up with them and escalating if necessary. However, not everyone will give us contact details. Where organisations have shared concerns with us, they are following their own safeguarding and escalation protocols.
- The previous months reports are available on our website.

Thanks to everyone who contributed!



## COVID VACCINES

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard from two people who were glad to have received their vaccine. One person spoke about how friendly and helpful the staff were at the vaccine centre. The other person couldn't get a vaccine appointment close to their home, but they were glad to have a "day out" after shielding for 12 months.
- *"I want to say a huge thank you to all the staff working hard in the Debenhams Vaccination Centre, Folkestone. Very slick and well organised, I was in and out within 15 minutes and I was also 25 minutes early to my appointment. The only downside is that it wasn't busy! I urge everyone who is either offered or eligible for the vaccine to please have it! Yes, there is side effects but that's with every vaccine/medication out there. By having it you will be protecting not only you but your family and friends plus the general public. So thank you again for all you working there and I shall see you again in May for my 2nd dose!"*
- An organisation providing advocacy services told us that they have found the vaccination roll out into care homes in Folkestone was working quite well.
- The same organisation told us that the Canterbury vaccine site was very efficient and they had heard positive feedback from their clients. However, they told us it was a shame that the centre was now cancelling appointments in order to focus on second doses.
- KCC Community Wardens in Maidstone and Tonbridge told us that they are aware of a lot of anti-vaccination disinformation that is being spread mainly by word of mouth.
- KCC Community Wardens in Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells told us that residents have raised concerns about text messages sent to encourage people to book their vaccines with a link; people are worried that the messages are scams and are not actioning the text message.

## Problems

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard about problems people faced when accessing their vaccine. One person booked online but was turned away when they got to the vaccine centre. Another person was sent a text message with a link to book an appointment but found that once they entered their date of birth, there were no appointments available.
- *"I'm rather concerned; I was sent for a vaccine 2 weeks ago and it was Pfizer. I can only have Oxford/AstraZeneca due to previous anaphylactic reactions. My GP told me they aren't getting the Oxford/AstraZeneca. I'm 73 this year and I'm really anxious about it. Why isn't the vaccine coming into surgery? Nobody seems to be chasing it up".* The caller has since had their Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine.
- A caller to our helpline was keen to get the covid vaccine. They hadn't heard from their GP for a while so they called the surgery and spoke to a receptionist who said that two text messages had been sent inviting them for the vaccine. The caller hadn't received any texts and it turned out that the messages had been sent to their old mobile number, despite the surgery having the new number on their records.

## TEST & TRACE

- *“NHS Test & Trace keep phoning every day, for different members of our family. It's the same conversation every day and I keep asking them not to call but they always do. My husband and I had Covid and alerted Test & Trace, so we got phone calls asking about places we had been. Then after 8 days, my daughter tested positive, so my husband started getting calls for her (as she's under 18), asking the same questions. My other daughter tested positive a week after that, so SHE got phone calls. They stopped calling for my husband and I at this point, but still calling the mobile for my daughters, one phone call each, every single day. They kept asking for details of where they had been, but we were all in isolation as my husband and I had it. My husband flipped and he said he wouldn't give any more details as surely, they can tell that we all live together. He tried to block the number and eventually stopped answering it”*

## COVID EXPERIENCES

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard about people who have had Covid and the struggles that they faced. One person is still suffering from fatigue after 9 weeks and said that their family don't appreciate how difficult it is to recover. Another person said that they and their partner tested positive on the same day; they recovered well but their partner was taken to hospital. They couldn't believe that the virus could have such a different impact on their health and subsequent recovery.

## LOCKDOWN

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard one person express concerns about lockdown ending because they believed it had simplified life, and they didn't want to go back to the way it was before.
- An organisation supporting elderly people in the community told us that their clients have concerns that despite the Prime Ministers recent announcements, they see no way out of Covid, especially with the large amount of people not following the rules.
- An Age UK in East Kent told us that they are receiving lots of calls, with clients talking about the future and the frustration of not being able to go outside.



## ACCESS TO PRIMARY CARE

- *“I moved to Ashford in December last year. Since then I have not been able to register with a GP here because local practices do not accept new patients or cannot be contacted. I find this concerning and I cannot understand how it is possible that a person is deprived of its most basic and fundamental rights, especially now during this crisis when people have no alternatives. Not to mention that I don't even know how I will get my Covid jab and the medical services that I am entitled by law. I have been in this situation for months and I don't know what else to do because I have exhausted all possibilities I had.”*
- An organisation supporting elderly people in the community told us that they have had lots of feedback from their clients who are fed up with their GP surgery either cancelling appointments or not calling them back when they said they would. Many people said that they are waiting for a week to get a call back when they should have been called the next day.
- An organisation supporting stroke survivors told us that the long wait for telephone calls to be answered at GP practices, are leading to a number of stroke survivors having to put the phone down because they are too weak to hold the phone. They are then missing out on being able to book appointments for the medical attention that they require.
- KCC Community Wardens in Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells told us about the difficulties their residents are having when getting a face-to-face GP appointment; for many of them the telephone consultations are hindered by hearing difficulties and so they struggle to understand the discussion. Other vulnerable people have also struggled because they are not allowed to bring someone with them to help them at their appointment.
- KCC Wardens in Dover and Canterbury told us that some residents have been reluctant to book an appointment with their Doctor to see about minor ailments, because they believe the Doctors to be very busy at the moment. There are concerns that this may cause long-term problems.

## ACCESS TO MEDICATION

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard about one person who needs a vitamin B12 injection because they cannot tolerate the tablets; they were told by their GP practice that they cannot have the injection at the moment.
- An organisation supporting stroke survivors told us about someone who had requested a prescription via Patient Access. After 9 days it had still not been approved by a GP, with no notification as to why. The client called the practice, who said that they had a high workload due to Covid.
- The same organisation told us about someone whose GP who prescribed antibiotics. The GP told them to collect the medication from the pharmacy later that day. When they arrived at the pharmacy there was no prescription there and they were told to contact the GP again. For the next 2 days they tried calling the GP practice but could not get through. They then walked to the practice and said that they were made to feel as if they were being told off. There was no apology and they were made to feel like it was their fault. They reported that they have lost confidence in their practice now.

## HOSPITAL TREATMENT

- An organisation supporting stroke survivors told us that recent hospital discharges have been too rushed, and patients are suffering the consequences of early discharges.
- An organisation supporting people to live independent lives told us about someone who recently attended an outpatients hospital appointment and wanted to have a chaperone escort them; not just to help navigate the hospital but also to listen, explain things or provide emotional support. However a chaperone couldn't be found. They wanted to know why such a service doesn't exist.
- KCC Community Wardens told us that some residents have been waiting for a long time for their routine procedures, such as cataract surgery
- Another group of KCC Community Wardens told us that some residents have raised concerns regarding communication with hospital appointments; one resident was told that they could bring a family member to support them prior to a procedure however on arrival at the hospital no note of this had been made. Security refused admittance to the family member, they had to wait in the car for 4 hours with no access to toilet facilities. The vulnerable resident was very anxious and faced the procedure alone and unsure of the process

## DENTAL

- Through our insight gathering on social media we heard about one person who (after recovering from covid) discovered that their dentures no longer fit. They were told in the hospital that the changes in the shape of the mouth and gums is a lesser-known side effect of Covid. They have been unable to find an NHS dentist to help them and as a result, are unable to eat properly.
- Our helpline took 16 calls from clients in the past 2 weeks who were all struggling to get access to a dentist; this includes families who have been trying to get an NHS dentist for their children.
- KCC Community Wardens in Maidstone and Tonbridge told us that residents have raised concerns about trying to access NHS dentistry.



## PUBLIC HEALTH

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard about one person who recently registered with a new GP and due to the pandemic, were unable to have the standard new patient assessment. They called the practice to give them their height & weight etc and then had a call back to say that they were eligible for the covid vaccine due to their BMI. They reported feeling “fat shamed” and that they didn't get any support or advice on weight management.
- An organisation supporting carers told us that carers have reported putting on a lot of weight in the past year, due to the inability to get out and about for their usual exercise. The organisation is putting on some online keep fit classes to support their clients.

## IMPACT ON CARERS

- An organisation supporting stroke survivors told us that one lady had suffered a stroke and then 3 weeks later became ill with covid. They recovered, but their husband (who is now their carer) then became ill with covid themselves and were taken to hospital. She was then at home without her carer, and it caused them great anxiety as they were not given any information.
- An Age UK in East Kent told us that many carers are now struggling with mental health issues, as they have not had any respite for months now. The carers have said that they are feeling isolated and are needing person-to-person contact.

## EDUCATION

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard about one parent who has withdrawn their child from mainstream school as their child was said to be thriving during the home-schooling period. Now that the lockdown has ended and they have de-registered, they get no help from the school to support their child (who has special needs)

## ACCESS TO FOOD

- KCC Community Wardens in Maidstone and Tonbridge told us that they have seen an increased reliance on food parcels lately; they say that the queues are increasing in size outside one foodbank.





## **FINANCE**

- An organisation supporting stroke survivors told us that people are struggling to access financial help. One stroke survivor has very bad speech and is no longer able to write, and needs to apply for benefits. The benefits staff used to do house calls but can no longer do this due to covid. A call was made to the DWP by the stroke support group on the client's behalf and it was 45 minutes before the call was answered, the advisor then said "we do not do it like that" and put the phone down.
- An Age UK in East Kent told us that they are receiving many calls from people who need help to fill in forms for their benefits and Blue Badge applications.
- KCC Community Wardens in Dartford & Gravesham told us that some people are finding it hard to access financial help; there have been reports that phone enquiries are not being answered, or that the waiting times for a response are sometimes two hours or more.

## **SUPPORT SERVICES**

- An organisation supporting stroke survivors told us that people are missing the face to face groups that were on before lockdown. It was a safe place to discuss experiences and to socialise, and they are not able to resume yet, to great detriment.
- An Age UK in East Kent told us that they are keen to get dementia groups back up and running as there is a clear need. The National Dementia Group stated that they can go ahead with meetings, but KCC have not given them an answer about when they can start booking meetings.

## **EQUIPMENT**

- KCC Community Wardens in Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells told us that they have received an increase in calls asking for advice regarding mobility aids. A lack of mobility during lockdown has led to increased frailty and has had a detrimental effect on people's confidence.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

- An Age UK in East Kent told us that many iPads have been lent and support given to clients to help them get online and help them to access social occasions, groups and support. A lot of their clients have encouraged more of their friends to join in too.
- KCC Community Wardens in Dartford & Gravesham told us about one resident who needs support from Social Services. However, they don't have a phone and so the process needs to be done via letter.

## **BEREAVEMENT/DEATH**

- An Age UK in East Kent told us that many of the people who were using their helpline service have now passed away, and this has had a negative impact on staff.

# Thank You



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