



COVID related Public Feedback for Kent

**Monthly Summary report
February 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 February, **66** 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 March
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.

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 month-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!



VACCINES

- A community hub told us that many of their clients have been receiving a letter in the post about their Covid vaccine. Many of them have already had their vaccine so they are finding these letters confusing.
- A voluntary organisation helping elderly people told us that many of their clients are feeling happier now that they have received their vaccination. One volunteer was concerned that there is no certificate of proof that clients have been vaccinated.
- An organisation supporting vulnerable elderly people in the community told us that they have received a lot of feedback about the vaccine, relating to mobility issues and locations. In particular, people are concerned that vaccine centres are some distance away, and worried about leaving loved ones at home for an unknown length of time to get the vaccine, as well as the lack of toilet facilities and accessible parking at vaccination sites.
- An organisation supporting children with disabilities and their families told us that one family lives in Dover and had to go to Sandwich for their vaccine, another family lives outside Sandwich and had to go to Broadstairs, and another lives in Broadstairs but had to go to Folkestone!
- An organisation who supports people to live independently raised concerns about their clients who have no access to online services and so can't book their vaccine appointments. (at the time appointment booking was only online) .
- An organisation who supports people to live independently shared questions from people about vaccinations for Personal Assistants and Carers. One client was told that their PA could go to a vaccination hub that was far away, and was refused a more local vaccination hub; they now have to pay for the mileage for the PA's journey from their care budget. They tried to call the Direct Payments Coordinator for clarification, but no one has come back to them.
- An organisation visiting rural communities in the Dover & Deal area told us that the majority of residents in one village have either received the vaccine, or have an appointment booked. The local GP surgery isn't offering the vaccine and most of the residents are being offered a slot in the Debenhams site, which is a 23 mile round trip. The KCC Community Warden was able to signpost residents to a closer location, more accessible for residents.
- *"I'm so glad that we'll be able to access the Angel Centre in Tonbridge for our vaccines, but will the council waive the parking fee to allow us to park there?"*



Had the vaccine

- Through our social media insights, we heard from three people.....one person received a “fantastic service” in Strood and another felt that staff at Lydd airport had done an “amazing job”. The third person was happy to have been seen quickly at the Debenhams site, and noted the new canopy outside. One person took her neighbour to the Debenhams site and queued outside for 40 mins and was told there was also a queue inside. They went to the Civic Centre because she was struggling to stand for much longer, and they were seen within 5 minutes inside their car.
- *“I had my Covid vaccine yesterday at XXXXX as I am a CEV. It was really good to get it done. The lady was lovely and it was all fine but they didn't sit me down for the 15 minutes afterwards to check for any reaction or talk to me about any side effects. I know from listening to your interview with the Vaccine lady that that should happen. I feel fine though so all good”*
- *“Waiting 90 mins outside in minus 2 degrees wasn't great. Otherwise, the process was fine”*
- *“I am the carer to an adult who has a long term mental health condition. I have been looking forward to getting the vaccine to increase my protection from the virus. It has been quite a hassle to get. There seems to have been a shortage and queues of up to 300 people were shown at the XXXXX vaccination centre on TV. I received a letter giving the number 119. On ringing the number, I was told there was only one jab available in Rochester and one in Maidstone but both myself and my wife needed the jab. This caused us a lot of anxiety because we have been looking forward to getting the vaccine. I called my GP and they managed to arrange for two vaccinations at XXXXX. I am relieved”*
- Our Helpline spoke to a man whose partner is a keyworker but has been unable to get a covid vaccine. They contacted their GP clinic, XXXX, who said not to call about the vaccine, and also removed a contact email address from their website. The client contacted the practice manager and they agreed to arrange a vaccine, once they heard the nature of the partner’s job.
- We spoke to a lady on our Helpline who had taken their mother for her covid vaccine. She would not have been able to get to the vaccination centre herself unless her daughter took her. In the waiting area there were “lots of older people in wheelchairs and walking sticks”. The client wondered why her mother, and others in the same situation, could not have been vaccinated in the retirement home?
- *“I found the vaccine centre in the Age UK building in XXXX very small, with limited opportunity for social distancing which was worrying. I didn't have to wait after the vaccine, but it was obvious that there was no comfortable or safe way to queue, should there be a brief delay. Why couldn't the dog track have been used, free of charge, (it has) so much larger and undercover waiting areas with free parking?”*
- An Age UK in East Kent told us that they are aware of a much better take up for the covid vaccine in their over 70's group, and they knew of vaccinations being offered through home visits.
- An organisation visiting rural communities in Shepway told us that one couple were delighted to have received their vaccines, *“We went to Lydd airport to have our vaccination, the army did it, we knew we were in safe hands, they were brilliant, it only took a few seconds and that was it, done!”*

Not had the vaccine

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard a few stories of people who have not been able to get their vaccine; One person said that their vaccine hub in Sittingbourne was closed for the day, but didn't know why, and another person received an email inviting them for a vaccine, but it turned out to be a scam. One carer has struggled to get a vaccine for their parent who is housebound so they are both continuing to shield until they can both get a vaccine.
- We heard stories of people who were turned away from vaccine hubs; one person had their appointment booked by a London hospital and was turned away because they didn't have a letter or any proof, a second person had a slot booked after a call to the CCG but were turned away at the site, even though they were a frontline worker. Another frontline worker in the private sector is struggling to book their vaccine, and are losing business because they cannot get an appointment.
- A caller contacted our helpline for advice; most of their friends of the same age (and some even younger) and registered at the same GP surgery have already received their covid vaccine. The client is concerned that they have been missed but didn't want to bother the staff at the GP clinic.
- A mental health support group told us about a man who is in the vulnerable category and has not had his COVID vaccine, but other people in his building had got theirs already.
- Our helpline spoke to a lady who has had their vaccine. Her husband has had pneumonia, embolisms & tuberculosis and was on a ventilator. He is 70 this year and hasn't yet had the vaccine. They were told not to shield but she thinks he should be classed as extremely vulnerable as two years ago the hospital said that his lungs were scarred. They called the GP surgery but the practice manager said that he is not vulnerable enough.
- An organisation supporting vulnerable elderly people in the community told us that their clients are concerned that their carers (a relative or other unpaid carer) are not being vaccinated at the same time as them.

Side effects

- Through our insight gathering on social media we heard from four people who experienced some side effects from their vaccine, including headaches, cold extremities and a painful arm. They all said that the symptoms subsided after 24 hours.
- An organisation supporting vulnerable elderly people told us that a few of their members reported feeling under the weather, and were quite tired after they received their vaccination. Many of these people had left their house for the first time in a year to get their vaccine which may have added to the tiredness.

COVID TESTING

Testing sites

- Through our insight gathering on social media we heard one person from Faversham who was unable to get to a local testing centre. They said that their town was big enough for five supermarkets, but not large enough to have its own testing site.
- *"We booked our no symptom COVID test online and went to the testing centre in Ashford at our allotted time. There was a small queue which moved very quickly. The whole experience was well organised and members of the army were running it. The whole process was quick and we all received our (negative) COVID test results within an hour. Everyone was wearing a mask and you could maintain social distancing"*

Home testing

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard of one person who recovered well after contracting Covid before Christmas. They recently went to their GP for routine blood tests but were turned away at the door because of a high temperature; they are not allowed to get their blood tests until they get a negative covid test, but they have been unable to request a test as they tested positive within the past 90 days.

COVID RECOVERY

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard of two people who have struggled with their recovery from covid; one person said that their oxygen levels drop dramatically when they walk or are upright, but return to normal when they sit down. A second person, described how exhausted and fatigued their daughter was in her recovery; she has also lost weight and had lost her appetite. Their GP admitted that they don't understand "long covid" much at the moment.
- *"I'm currently looking after my partner who has been home for 10 days now after being in the XXXX for 2 weeks with covid. He's still so unwell. He has lost an extreme amount of weight, and he wasn't very big before anyway. I need to pull him up from the sofa as he can't manage to do it himself, and help him to the toilet. He has pains all over his body. He hasn't improved since he was discharged from hospital, he can't do anything for himself. There is no support for post discharge patients"*



GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE

- An organisation supporting vulnerable elderly people told us that their clients are feeling frustrated when people do not adhere to the government rules, such as wearing facemasks and social distancing.
- An organisation who supports young refugees told us that young people are struggling to understand the Government guidance. Although some of it is published in different languages it's not always easy to access.

ACCESS TO PRIMARY CARE

- An organisation supporting vulnerable elderly people told us that their clients are reluctant to contact their GP surgery as they know staff are overstretched and they don't want to add to the pressures.

HOSPITAL TREATMENT/ONGOING HEALTH CARE

- Our Helpline chatted with a couple about a hospital appointment for a tumour in December. He got a negative Covid test prior to the appointment but it was then delayed until late January. When they did get their appointment, they did not get the expected biopsy. Staff couldn't get the tube down as the tumour had grown so they were sent home. Now they need to go to A&E but they are worried about the delays due to Covid.
- An organisation supporting children with disabilities and their families told us that the Paula Carr eye screening van used to come to their village. This has stopped since lockdown started, and they have to make the journey to the Paula Carr centre, which is a 2 hour round trip.



Maternity

- Our helpline spoke to a lady who had a distressing time in hospital. She was pregnant and experienced some bleeding. The doctor told her following the scan that it was bad news. Her husband wasn't allowed to be there due to Covid and she told us that hearing the news without her husband was 'devastating'. She was taken to a room and left on her own to wait for her husband to arrive, as he was waiting in the car park. She then experienced, what she believed to be, a natural miscarriage at home. She called the ward and explained, asking if she needed to come in. The member of staff explained that they just needed to complete a pregnancy test in 3 weeks and to call in with the result; there was no signposting to any support provided. The client hopes that staff could better support patients when they receive bad news both in the hospital and also when they are back at home.

IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN

- A community hub told us about an active lady who is showing a marked deterioration since lockdown. She's had multiple falls and now her daughter has to sleep in the house to care for her. The daughter is in need of support now.
- A voluntary organisation helping elderly people told us that they have received 10 new applications to receive support in January, and another 10 in February. They believe this is driven by an increase in loneliness.
- An organisation who supports young refugees told us that many of the young people are finding the third lockdown tougher than before; it is more difficult to stay at home and they are going out to see their friends.
- An organisation visiting rural communities in the Dover area told us that they are hearing how hard people are finding this lockdown compared to the others. People are reporting feeling quite depressed.
- An organisation visiting rural communities in Shepway told us that their communities are feeling more positive since the vaccine became available, although one family was suspicious of visitors meeting them at the gate rather than allowing them to the front door.
- An organisation visiting rural communities in Maidstone told us that one village community was feeling fairly positive as most of the older population had been vaccinated or were on the list to be vaccinated, which had lifted the mood. The general feeling reported was that people were too afraid to come out after lockdown one, so it felt that the year was just one continuous lockdown, with no breaks.
- An organisation supporting vulnerable elderly people told us that their clients are keen to resume "normal" life as soon as possible because they are concerned that they do not have much time left with the people that they love.

SEXUAL HEALTH

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard of one person who was having trouble accessing sexual health services; they had been advised to use a different method of contraception until such times that the sexual health team were able to make appointments to remove contraceptive implants.

DENTISTRY

- Our helpline took 13 enquiries in two weeks from people throughout Kent who were struggling to access an NHS dentist. Many people said that they have tried to register with a dentist but no one is taking on new patients, including one parent of a 2 year old child.
- An organisation supporting children with disabilities told us that many of the families they support were having difficulty getting an NHS dentist. One family found their dentist had closed. She called 111 but they were advised that there was nothing that could be done as the child wasn't in pain. Another family from Dover can't get a local dentist. The nearest they could find was Faversham; they had to take time off work to get the children to the dentist as it was so far away.

ACCESS TO MEDICATION

- Our helpline had two calls this fortnight from people wanting to know how to get their Vitamin D supplements.

111/SECAMB

- A mental health support group told us about a person who called 111. They then called an ambulance. On arrival, they were very worried about letting the paramedics into their home due to Covid, but they said the paramedics were very professional, respectful and ensured they were being safe at all times.



MENTAL HEALTH

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard of one person who was concerned that their mother's mental health has suffered. She is in a care home and been unable to see her family during the pandemic. Another person felt "suffocated" because they found that their daily routine was just a repeat of work/cook/TV/sleep, describing it as "groundhog day".
- *"I have various mental health conditions, including agoraphobia. XXXXX have been supporting me for the past 6 months, the aim was to get me to go outside. The lockdown situation has not made this possible. The support I received from their worker through Zoom was really good. I hope to be able to get support from them in the future, as my support plan has now finished"*
- *"My friend has severe anxiety and agoraphobia, and has been caring for a sick partner. They are disillusioned with services, and will not seek anymore help. They do not feel the help they have received in the past has made much difference. They were receiving support from XXXXX with weekly appointments at a local cafe, however, this seems to have stopped due to lockdown"*
- An organisation who supports young refugees told us that mental health issues have become more prevalent, with a few breakdowns, leading to several referrals. There have also been one or two cases of substance misuse as an impact of lockdown.

In-patient care

- *"I had an episode last year and I ended up dissociating. I was taken to hospital because of self harm. When I got to the specialist mental health hospital, I was told I would have to isolate for a day while the Covid test came back. I understand this but I ended up being in isolation for 3 days. They didn't check that I was eating and because I was dissociating, I woke up to find everything destroyed so didn't have any activities to do or anything to watch. It was just really hard being alone there for that long"*

Community Mental Health Teams

- *"I waited four months for an appointment with a psychiatrist with the Community Mental Health Team. I went online at the appointed time and waited half an hour in the waiting room and no-one turned up. I rang the CMHT who said the meeting was cancelled but they hadn't let me know. I feel very let down and this experience is exacerbating my mental health"*
- *"In August 2019 I was discharged from the CMHT but told that any time I needed to talk to someone, I could get in touch and speak to someone. They said if I am struggling please do get in touch. So this week during lockdown, I felt the need for some extra support and I called reception and they said "no, you can't call in like that anymore you have to go back to your GP". I feel very let down"*

Children & Adolescent Mental Health Service

- An organisation supporting vulnerable young families told us that they are struggling to chase up referrals and issues with Children & Adolescent Mental Health Service; many of their families are being "messed about" and are told that they aren't in the system despite multiple referrals. One family have been on the waiting list since 2017 and were told that the child was discharged in August 2020, despite never even been seen.

Impact on workforce

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard about one hospital worker who has been off work with stress since Christmas and is struggling with the thought of going back to work.

EDUCATION

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard from a parent who was concerned about the impact on teachers if the government decided to open summer schools for children to catch up on their studies.

PUBLIC HEALTH

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard someone who was concerned about the amount of people in hospital who are overweight or obese, and their related deaths. They wanted the government to have a focus on tackling obesity in the long term.
- An organisation visiting rural communities in Canterbury told us about someone who was very pleased that they have been able to lose weight during lockdown, as the doctor had previously advised, *"Before, I could only walk to the end of the road, now I can walk a mile. I'm so pleased I did it!"*

COMMUNITY BEHAVIOURS

- An organisation working with young refugees told us that young people are very concerned about the "appalling treatment" of the refugees in the Napier Barracks during lockdown.
- An organisation visiting rural communities in Tonbridge told us that their community is feeling quite cautious although one person confessed to being more paranoid and frightened about the virus as she heard that the new variant was more infectious.

CARE HOME

- An organisation visiting rural communities in the Dover area told us that they have seen more people going into care homes; one person's mental and physical health was deteriorating over the past year and over Christmas they deteriorated rapidly and they moved into a care home. Another person's spouse died recently and they had moved in with their daughter however the daughter has noticed a deterioration in their parent's health and feels that they would be better cared for in a care home.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

- An Age UK in East Kent told us that they are still helping people who need to fill out forms, particularly if their circumstances have changed. For some people getting help over the telephone is difficult so staff are visiting their homes if necessary.
- An organisation supporting vulnerable elderly people in the community told us that many carers at home (unpaid carers) have been delaying accessing other support services, as they are waiting until the pandemic is over. This may mean that they don't get the support that they need now.

TECHNOLOGY

- *“I have PTSD from a series of traumatic incidents and feel unsafe. While the numbers shared by my mental health support group for confidential support and contact are valued, I still feel very isolated. I am not skilled enough in the use of computers and my phone for social contact such as Zoom, and so the lockdown has made me feel more isolated and vulnerable, because I can have no visitors”*
- An Age UK in East Kent told us that they have an online coffee morning chat group. Many of the clients who have “phone buddies” are asking for digital help, so staff are going out to homes to help people get set up.
- An organisation supporting bereaved children told us that they are doing Zoom sessions to support children however, many of the children are using Zoom and other video platforms for their schoolwork and they don’t want to use it outside of educational purposes, due to “zoom fatigue”.
- An organisation who supports young refugees told us that laptops and tablets are easier to get now, but the problem is accessing data; students have been missing lessons because their accommodation has no wi-fi, or they are charged a large amount to get access. In other cases, the amount of data that young people are given is nowhere near enough to allow them to attend all of their lessons. Social workers are reportedly aware of the issue, but nothing has been done to help.

LIFE EVENTS

- Through our social media insight gathering, we heard of a couple who needed life insurance in place to complete their mortgage application; the life insurance company have refused insurance because one of the couple recently had covid. The couple are concerned that the mortgage application will not be approved without insurance.

BEREAVEMENT

- An organisation supporting bereaved children told us that the number of referrals for their service has doubled in March 2020 to January 2021, compared to the previous year. In this third wave they have seen a large increase in referrals due to parents dying from Covid.



Thank You



Healthwatch Kent
Church Road, Seabrooke House
Ashford TN23 1RD

 info@healthwatchkent.co.uk

 @hwkent

 @HealthwatchKent

 @healthwatch_kent

 0808 801 0102