



COVID related Public Feedback for Kent

**Monthly Summary report
March 15th-31st
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 last two weeks of March, **71** 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!



ACCESS TO PRIMARY CARE

- *"I had a phone appointment which was really easy to arrange and I got one for two days' time. The Dr rang slightly early and we had a brief chat. They asked me to pop down to the surgery within the hour. I rang the bell and they came to let me in. The Dr was in full PPE including scrubs and asked me to sanitise my hands. They examined me and I went on my way. It was all very efficient and felt very safe"*
- We heard from a mental health support group about a man who didn't understand why their GP was still reluctant to have face to face appointments considering that the vaccine is being rolled out and people are allowed to meet one other person safely.
- *"I can't get hold of my GP surgery. The automated queue system tells me where I am in the queue. After 40 minutes I got to position 9 and then the automated voice said "no more calls" and cut me off. It has happened a few times in the last week. I tried not to call the GP surgery for an appointment because of Covid, but now I really need to see someone"*
- *"I was born in the UK but lived in a different country when I was a child. I returned to the UK in October 2020 and I have been quarantined in a hotel since then, and I am still looking for somewhere to live. I can't get registered with a GP, a few surgeries told me they can't register me as I'm not British (when they hear my accent)."*
- An organisation supporting elderly people in East Kent told us that their members have reported difficulties in accessing GP appointments and arranging call backs.
- An Age UK in Kent told us that some people are still having problems accessing GPs. Many people do not have a computer and are unable to complete a webform. People are reporting that they are very frustrated, that the receptionists are unhelpful, and that they feel they aren't being listened to.

MEDICATION

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard about two people who were unhappy with their GP surgery and accessing their medication. One person told us that their pharmacy hadn't received a signed off prescription from the GP, because the GP is reportedly running 3 weeks behind when issuing repeat prescriptions. They eventually got a rapid prescription from 111.
- *"I needed to try some medication that would help with my mental health condition so I put the request through my pharmacy as directed by my Dr who said it would be sorted out for me ASAP and to await a call to let me know I could collect it. I waited and waited but nothing. 12 days later I went into the pharmacy to ask about it and it had been ready and waiting for days but nobody had told me!"*
- An organisation supporting elderly people in East Kent told us that two of their clients are having trouble getting correctly prescribed dosset boxes from their pharmacies.

LEARNING DISABILITY HEALTH CHECKS

- An organisation supporting people with learning disabilities told us that everyone has their disability registered with their GP, and are therefore falling through the net. We heard about one person who is 52 years old and was not registered. Because they are not registered as having a learning disability, they have not been receiving an annual health check. This will also affect their vaccine call up.

HOSPITAL TREATMENT

General Surgery

- *"I have been refused a medical procedure at XXXXX. I was booked in and they asked for a covid test to be completed. I have refused to take the test as I think it is invasive and I know by law that they have no right to force a test on me or refuse me treatment. They called me and said that their policy is "no test, no procedure". They hung up on me"*

A&E

- *"Even though I was fearful of wasting the time of the staff in the A&E department at XXXXX yesterday, my GP spoke to me on the phone and insisted I go there to get my chronic chest pains assessed. From the moment I arrived, to my departure 4 hours later the attention and analysis I received was exemplary and very efficient. The staff were charming and very reassuring. I barely had time to read my book before I was invited for another test, X-ray etc. Considering the pressure they must have been under recently I cannot thank them enough. I was even offered tea and biscuits TWICE! Everyone I saw was terrific"*
- *"A family member was taken into hospital by ambulance as they were very ill. We were left in the dark even though we were told multiple times we would get an update as soon as one was available. I called that evening and still nothing. It wasn't until the next evening I got a call to say that our family member had an operation. I know Covid-19 restricts visitors but updates are very important at this time and I waited so long for one"*



Haematology

- Through our insight gathering on social media we heard about someone who hasn't been able to access appointments to have blood taken and there were no appointments available via the online booking system. They were told by their GP that the department was short staffed, but they cannot travel to a different site.

ENT

- *"My GP referred my son to ENT back in July 2020, ENT sent us an acknowledgement of the referral and said we would receive a call within 3 weeks. We didn't get a call until November 2020, and we were invited into the hospital for an appointment the next week, on a Saturday. The ENT surgeon saw us and the plan was to try a nasal spray for 2 weeks, to have a blood test to see if my son had any allergen markers in his blood, and he was going to arrange a sleep study for some time in January. The ENT surgeon sent a letter that was also cc'd to the GP confirming the treatment plan. Since then we have had no communication; I have called ENT to find out the blood test results but I was told that I would be able to discuss it with the Dr at the next appointment. I asked about the sleep study during the same phone call and was told that the surgeon had arranged it and I would be contacted in due course to collect the equipment. It is now the end of March and I am still waiting for blood results, a sleep study and a follow up appointment. I even called the GP surgery and they don't know anything other than what I know. My son still has problems and we have had no resolution. Really poor communication from ENT"*

Dermatology

- *"The letter for my son's dermatology appointment said it was an 'outpatient' appointment, we went there with 20mins to spare (just in case) and were told we were in the wrong place and should be in the other side of the hospital. The signage inside the hospital was unclear and we had to stop a member of staff to ask directions. We were now late for our appointment. The department was not equipped for visitors who needed support with them- and we sat in a tiny, very hot consultation room. The doctor was lovely but addressed me, not my son for most of the meeting and was clearly out of her comfort zone when she did address him. My main concerns are that the letter for the appointment was not clear, nor accessible. They were addressed to my son who is on the learning disability register and they wouldn't have been remotely accessible to him. The hospital is not equipped or welcoming for patients who need a supporter with them"*

Radiology

- *"I'm 88 and I care for my friend who is 85 and has mixed dementia and Alzheimer's. My friend needs a chest x-ray, but the hospital has sent her an appointment for 7pm on a Saturday night. I am unable to drive in the dark and the buses don't run down our way at that time of night. I think it is disgusting that they expect people of our age to attend appointments at these hours - these should be offered to younger people so I can take my friend during the day"*

Maternity

- *“My grandchild was born in December and was breastfed, although he dribbled milk constantly. My daughter was struggling with a new baby and home-schooling etc, so decided to switch to bottle feeding. The baby still dribbled when feeding, despite using various bottles and teats. The GP confirmed that the baby had a tongue tie. A feeding assessment was carried out and the lactation nurse had a phone consultation and they said that clinic would not accept the referral because the baby was bottle fed. They then recommended that my daughter sourced the money to go privately for the operation to rectify the tongue tie, at a cost of £450. I am outraged that a decision was made not to help a baby with a simple and quick operation “*

Communication issues

- *“I went to the optician to have an NHS eye test which I have every two years. I am diabetic and have an annual retinal screening test. During the examination the optician needed a slit lamp test done which had been done two months ago under the diabetic screening service at XXXXX Hospital. The optician could not access the results of this test and had to arrange for me to travel to a partner optician to have another. It transpired that there is no transfer of information between the optician and the hospital. The optician cannot access a patient's records or be told of the results if the optician has referred his client to the hospital for further investigations. Surely there are missed opportunities here, if only in terms of integration of services, cost saving, and making life easier for the patient/client. Opticians are part of the NHS are they not?”*
- An Age UK in Kent told us that communication with the hospital has been poor, especially when loved ones are taken into hospital with dementia.
- An organisation supporting people with learning disabilities told us that in some cases, a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) notice is put on hospital records without a discussion with the patient or their family.
- An organisation supporting stroke survivors in Kent told us that clients have experienced poor communication with local hospitals; one person went into hospital (alone, due to covid) with an infection and their spouse received a call to say that they one had suffered a stroke. This was a mistake, and the stroke had occurred a year previously but the hospital miscommunicated the previous medical history.
- An organisation supporting stroke survivors in Kent told us that there are currently no volunteers on stroke ward to help patients make phone calls to their families.



111 SERVICE

- *“I have suffered with mental health issues for years. Over Christmas 2020 I had a turn for the worse and I was able to recognise that my mental health was declining again. Initially I tried to contact my doctor to discuss my issue and my options with medication, but it was difficult to get through on the phone. I used the website to complete an electronic consultation request where the doctor would then get back to me. Whilst going through this form of questions, like the questions used to assess mental health, I answered a question about thoughts of harming myself as “sometimes” this then flashed up with a message saying I should contact the doctor immediately or call 111. As I knew I couldn’t get through to the doctor I called 111 and discussed with them my problem. The operator at 111 was very helpful and understanding. She talked me through how I felt and what I needed to do. She referred me to the 111 mental health team and said they would call me within 72 hours. She also gave me a contact number for the mental health crisis team in case I needed them in the meantime or if I felt any worse. The next day I received a call from the 111 mental health team for an assessment. This was a 20-30 minute telephone call during which I felt listened to and reassured that there was help available if I needed it”*

DENTISTS

- *“My relative is not registered with a dentist. They have been having issues with their teeth since a fall last year. They are now in pain to the point of tears. They have called several local dentists and then tried Dentaline - they cannot get an emergency dental appointment until next Saturday. This is in Dartford which is a long way from their home in Tunbridge Wells and they do not have transport”*
- Our helpline spoke to nine people in two weeks who were all looking for help to get dental treatment; one person said that their tooth had snapped but can’t find an NHS dentist, and another person said that their child needs to have braces fitted soon but can’t find an NHS dentist to take them on. One person told us that they have family in North England who haven’t got any problems accessing a dentist, and wondered if the problem was isolated to Kent?



MENTAL HEALTH

Wellbeing

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard about one person who was struggling with lockdown. They live with three flatmates far away from their family and haven't seen them in months. They don't get on with their flatmates and feel very isolated.
- *"I was working everyday as a keyworker in a secondary school before Christmas. We had two positive Covid results within the students. This was the first time we have had any cases within the school. I was in lessons with one of these students and I wasn't sent home to isolate. This added extra stress onto me as my husband is clinically extremely vulnerable and I have diabetes, we also have 2 children (one of these has autism and attends a special needs school). Due to the added pressure of now been exposed to a positive person and not being told to isolate it was the final thing for me. I called my GP who signed me off work."*

Autism

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard about one person who was told by their GP that an adult assessment could take up to 4 years. The referral was made and they received their diagnosis within 6 months and are now looking for talking therapy for autistic adults.
- *"I am worried that I've not heard from the specialist Autism service, since receiving a letter from them in January. The referral was from my GP because the CMHT did not have the resources for this. It's been a number of years now that my mental health has possibly been misdiagnosed because of my autism. Yet this seem to be another long pause, when I thought things were moving along."*

FINANCE

- Community Hubs across Kent told us that there is an increase in calls from people who need to discuss their finances; some of the calls are desperate and many people discuss their debt. Another 30 call handlers have been recruited to manage the need.

ACCESS TO FOOD

- Community Hubs across Kent told us that the need for food continues; one Food Bank has seen an increase of 50% on last year.



EDUCATION

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard stories from three people about their return to education. One person is autistic and is concerned about the rapid covid testing in college, due to their sensory issues. Another person is concerned that they have paid a lot of money for university education and local accommodation, but still haven't been able to get back into the learning building for face to face lessons. One parent spoke about their frustration because their child, who is autistic, has refused to attend school because of their anxiety; the school have refused to allow any continuation of home-schooling. The parent has considered withdrawing them from school but can't afford a tutor.

CARE AT HOME

- An organisation supporting elderly people in East Kent told us that some people have been reluctant to have in-home care services as they are concerned about covid. Many of these people live alone and need care and support, and their relatives are concerned that they are refusing the care that they need.
- An organisation supporting carers told us that many people are wanting to be discharged from hospital, but they need more care than is currently available.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

- An Age UK centre in Kent told us that they are still receiving calls from people asking about the reopening of the day centre; people are reportedly keen to get back to a normal routine again.

IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN

- An organisation supporting elderly people in East Kent told us that carers are concerned about their loved one's increasing lack of mobility because they have not been able to get out and about for the past 12 months.
- An organisation supporting carers told us that carers are still apprehensive about meeting face to face. More tablets are being brought to keep connected with carers as they are struggling and are dependent on phone calls to keep their spirits up.
- An organisation supporting elderly people told us that many clients have expressed their continuing feelings of loneliness and isolation.

RELAXATION OF RULES

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard about one person who is concerned about how busier shops are since parents have returned to the school run.
- A voluntary organisation in Kent who help people in their homes, told us that people are asking for confirmation of the lockdown rules changing. Clients are very keen to see volunteers face to face and get the support that they have been missing for so long.
- Community Hubs across Kent told us that there are concerns about what happens to vulnerable people when shielding ends; many people haven't left their homes for a year. The transition from shielding to "normal" life might be difficult for people.

COVID VACCINES

Concerns around post vaccine illness

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard about from someone who had a pre-existing cancer diagnosis. They received the AstraZeneca vaccine and went on to develop a cough. The GP was concerned about them and sent them for a scan which showed that they had a clot in their lung.
- An organisation supporting stroke survivors in Kent told us that they are aware of four people who have had the AstraZeneca vaccine and a couple of weeks later had a stroke.

Vaccine Centres

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard about four people who had received their vaccines; one person recommended the site that they visited and commented on the helpful staff. Another person was not happy that they waited for 2 hours in a queue for their booked vaccine. A third person was concerned that Faversham residents are being offered out of town locations, around 15-20 miles away, at a time when people are told not to travel unless necessary. The last person said that they were standing outside for 45 minutes when the weather was particularly bad, and they really struggled to cope with the wait.
- A mental health support group told us their clients had waited in a vaccination queue at XXXXX. They told us the signage was poor and people joined a long queue which turned out to be for giving blood, then they had to join another queue towards the back of the building for their vaccination. This resulted in the service user being late for their appointment which heightened their anxiety. They were extra anxious because they had travelled a long way and weren't familiar with the building.

Booking Vaccines

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard about three people who had issues when booking their vaccines; one person in Faversham was given a suggested site in Surrey, London and Stoke-on Trent, however they called 119 who managed to arrange a more local appointment. Another person living in Faversham booked their appointment online and the app said that the nearest site was Westcliffe, however it turns out that it was actually booked for Westcliff-on-Sea in Essex; the person decided to make the drive to Essex anyway as they were afraid to cancel the appointment. The third person changed their postcode when booking their online appointment and found a closer site than was originally shown; they were concerned at how easily abused they system could be.
- *"My husband and I received our letters in the post, inviting us to receive our covid vaccines. We logged on to the page to book our appointments but there was nothing near us! We live in Sittingbourne, and the website directed us to vaccination hubs in Ramsgate, Essex and Croydon. I haven't booked any of these sites, I don't think that any of them are reasonable for me to travel to. I work full time, and I'm not taking the day off to travel to Essex for a vaccine! This isn't accessible to people like me. I've decided to wait for a week or so and see if I can the website updates with any other sites"*

Booking Vaccines

- An Age UK centre in Kent told us that they are getting calls from people asking when they will get their second vaccine. The area was later than the rest of the county to have the initial rollout of vaccines, so they are now due their second vaccine.
- An organisation supporting elderly people told us that some of their clients are very confused over their second vaccination. When they had their first vaccinations done, some of them were given cards with next dates on and some weren't. They talk to each other, so those that didn't get a card don't know when their next jab should be or if they need that card to show the proof that they have had their first jab. They also don't know what the rules are about contacting their GP to find out about their second jab. A lot of these clients are coming up to the twelve week period since their first jab and still haven't heard anything from their GPs.

Not had the vaccine

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard about one person who has not received the vaccine, through their own choice. Their friend told them that they were selfish for declining a vaccine and now they feel guilty, even though it is their personal choice.
- A service user from a mental health support group told us, *"I received a phone call from my GP surgery to go for my vaccination at XXXX at 8.10am on a Wednesday morning. I was very anxious about having to attend such an early appointment. On the day I left home without my glasses as I was in such a rush and couldn't find the surgery. When I did arrive there was a long queue and I tried to join the queue but I couldn't cope with all the people around me in the queue so I went home without my vaccination"*
- An organisation supporting people with learning disabilities told us that some people have not received their vaccine because they are not registered as having a learning disability with their GP.



COVID EXPERIENCES

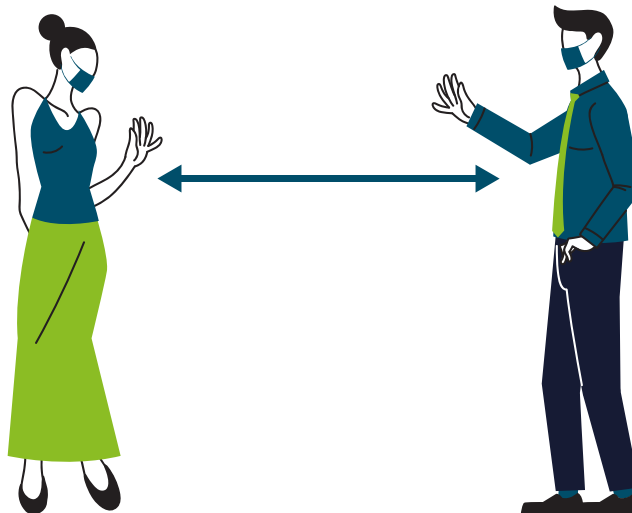
- Through our insight gathering on social media we heard stories about three people who were struggling with Long Covid; one person has developed prominent spider veins on their ankles and legs and the second person spoke about a constant “brain fog” and said that they are a totally different person now after having covid. The other person said that they don’t test positive anymore but that doesn’t mean that they have recovered.

HIGH STREET

- An organisation supporting elderly people in East Kent told us that one of their clients struggled to access their bank recently; their spouse has dementia, and they were both requested to attend the bank. However, the branch’s policy has a “one person at a time” policy, which was very difficult for the person with dementia and caused a lot of stress.

COMMUNICATION & TECHNOLOGY

- *“I have issues with my own body language so prefer face to face support so that people understand me rather than misinterpret me over a zoom call”*
- *“I prefer to speak to somebody in person rather than over the phone or online video call as there could be mis communication which can cause problems”*
- *“My cared-for has been provided a single channel tablet device to ensure that they can have face to face contact with the mental health team and myself at times that they have an emergency. This has provided the family with a sense of security”*



Thank You



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