**15 December 2021**

**#StrongKindSafe**

**Get vaccinated, get your booster and look after each other through this difficult winter period – joint statement from the Directors of Public Health in Cheshire and Merseyside**

Our communities are once again being asked to step up to protect themselves and each other, and help to keep our fantastic front-line health and care services running this winter. As Directors of Public Health, we are supportive of measures to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and in particular, the new variant, Omicron.

We knew that there was always a risk of new variants, and it is clear that Omicron is spreading very rapidly. The UK is now at COVID-19 alert Level 4 because we have extremely high transmission and rising rates of Omicron. We especially want to keep those who are most vulnerable in our local communities safe and prevent more people going into hospital and dying.

Everyone is being asked to get vaccinated and get their booster dose as soon as possible. Demand for vaccination will be high and vaccination sites will be very busy, so please book ahead wherever possible, and be patient if you are queuing for your vaccine.

If you do experience symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, new continuous cough or loss/change of taste or smell), PCR tests can be booked by visiting nhs.uk/coronavirus or calling 119. If your test is positive, you must follow the guidance including self-isolating immediately.

It is also recommended you take lateral flow tests twice a week and also in advance of any social gathering/event. If you are notified that you are a close contact of a positive case of COVID-19 and you are **fully vaccinated**, you will be asked to do daily lateral flow testing for 7 days to check you are and remain negative. Children under 5 years old do not need a test and will not need to self-isolate. If you have not had two doses of the vaccine, you will need to isolate for the full 10 days.

Face coverings are required in most indoor public settings, except for pubs and restaurants or unless you are exempt. Office workers who can work from home should do so and from Wednesday (15 December), you will be required to show proof of full vaccination status, or a negative test in the last 48 hours, to enter certain venues such as nightclubs or major sporting events.

This is a time where we as a community need to **come together** and **support each other**. We need to continue to be kind to ourselves and others and carry on with the same steely determination to do the right thing that has kept us going since the beginning.

Building up your personal resilience is so important in times like this. Cheshire and Merseyside’s **Kind to Your Mind campaign** has plenty of resources to help you do just that. You can listen to podcasts, look at online therapies, download apps, and access helplines if you need them. There are plenty of options to suit you, all you need to do is visit [www.kindtoyourmind.org](http://www.kindtoyourmind.org)

Masks, hand washing, social distancing and ventilation are all vital measures to mitigate this disease, but none more so than being vaccinated against it. That is the number one tool we have. If up until now you have not taken up your offer of the vaccine, **please book your jab now.** The same applies to your booster. They are safe, effective and millions upon millions of people across the country have benefited from it. Visit [www.nhs.uk/covidvaccine](http://www.nhs.uk/covidvaccine) to book now.

Stay safe,

**Dr Matt Tyrer**

Director of Public Health for Cheshire East

**Ian Ashworth**

Director of Public Health Cheshire West and Chester

**Dr Ifeoma Onyia**

Director of Public Health for Halton

**Dr Sarah McNulty**

Director of Public Health for Knowsley

**Professor Matt Ashton**

Director of Public Health for Liverpool

**Margaret Jones**

Director of Public Health for Sefton

**Ruth du Plessis**

Director of Public Health for St Helens

**Thara Raj**

Director of Public Health for Warrington

**Julie Webster**

Director of Public Health for Wirral

**More information/notes to editors:**

Cheshire and Merseyside’s Directors of Public Health work together as the Champs Public Health Collaborative. To learn more about the Collaborative, please visit [www.champspublichealth.com](http://www.champspublichealth.com).

Anyone who gets a positive result from a rapid test can book a PCR test by calling 119 or visiting [www.nhs.uk/coronavirus](http://www.nhs.uk/coronavirus). Lateral flow test kits are still available from local pharmacies, some community testing sites and some schools and colleges.

Directors are also keen to stress how important it is for anyone with the Coronavirus symptoms of a new persistent cough, a high temperature or a loss of sense of taste or smell, to self-isolate immediately and book a PCR test by calling 119 or visiting [www.nhs.uk/coronavirus](http://www.nhs.uk/coronavirus). More information on self-isolating can be found at [www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19).

For those who need support during this difficult time please visit [www.kindtoyourmind.org](http://www.kindtoyourmind.org) which has details of 24/7 crisis helplines and resources to help mental wellbeing.