

Public health strategic framework for COVID-19

v9.0 15DEC21

Updates from previous published version

Version number	Update
9.0	Range of changes have been made to simplify the framework and update it based on changing circumstances relating to vaccination and circulating variants: Framework based on three rather than four indicative scenarios; additional content covering recovery and preparedness; removal of associated word document such that the framework is entirely contained within these PowerPoint slides; detailed summary of actions for children and young people and for borders removed, with actions incorporated into framework where appropriate; dedicated slide on aims and action areas to tackle the wider impacts of COVID has been removed, with relevant content incorporated into the framework.
8.1 and 8.2	Updated content on border management
8.0	Strategic framework updated to reflect context following moving to post step 4 on the government's roadmap out of lockdown
8.0	Update to indicative scenarios
8.0	Addition of framework identify key action areas to address the wider impacts of COVID-19
8.0	Addition of summaries of public health actions to address the needs of children and young people, and for border management
7.0	Updates to key aims and priority actions to reflect updated indicative scenarios. These include role of vaccination to maintain population immunity, role of border management, and support for the international response.
7.0	Added illustration of planned future updates, including expanding the framework to include more detail on the indirect effects of COVID-19
7.0	Updated indicative scenarios to better represent vaccination roll-out and changing levels of population immunity

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- The overarching aim of this framework is to set out the public health priorities for managing the COVID pandemic in different scenarios.
- The framework brings together national, regional, and local public health expertise and experience to summarise key elements of public health policy that can help to manage and recover from the pandemic. It is a live document that is based on public health expert consensus view and is regularly updated as circumstances and evidence change.
- The framework represents policies and approaches with the aim of improving public health and mitigating the impact of COVID on inequalities. It does not explicitly account for any potential issues of deliverability or acceptability of the policies or approaches described.
- The scope of the framework is focussed on what is required to respond to and recover from the COVID pandemic, excluding clinic management and treatment of individuals infected with COVID.
- Alongside the details of the framework, the following slides describe its goals, underlying public health principles, and its uses.
- Accountability for the framework is to the Strategic Response Group, UKHSA, chaired by the Senior Responsible Office for the incident response, Dr Susan Hopkins, Interim Chief Medical Advisor to the UKHSA. The SRG oversees and guides the development and content of the framework

Goals of the strategic framework

The goals of the framework are to:

- minimise excess mortality and morbidity from COVID, particularly those who are clinically vulnerable;
- reduce the risk that the adverse impacts of COVID are experienced disproportionately by populations and communities, including populations who are socio-economically as well as clinically vulnerable;
- protect the wellbeing and development of all, particularly children and young people;
- protect critical infrastructure including the health and social care system, utilities, supply chains and delivery mechanisms for essential goods, and the education system;
- minimise the impact of COVID on societal functioning;
- over time, integrate the COVID response into usual processes for funding and delivering health and care services;
- strengthen the resilience and preparedness of society to tackle major risks to the public's health.

Public health principles underlying this framework

based on Faculty of Public Health, Principles of Public Health

- 'health' includes physical, mental social health and is more than the absence of disease
- health, and access to preventive and therapeutic health and care, are universal rights
- reducing health inequalities through addressing inequalities in economic opportunity, educational attainment, and environmental conditions
- championing equality of opportunity and the rights of children and young people
- improving and protecting health through sustainable development principles
- promoting health as a fundamental economic resource that enables individuals, families and communities to thrive
- community health and resilience requires the harnessing of the strengths and capabilities of communities to improve and protect health, taking an asset-based approach
- promoting health in all policies

The five core elements of the strategic framework

Priorities are based on five core elements that underpin the framework:

- 1. Vaccination, virology and pharmacotherapy**, including vaccine development and delivery, surveillance, and viral genomics to maximise individual and population immunity to serious illness and death and pharmacotherapy for people at high risk of death and serious illness
- 2. Limit transmission through public health and social measures proportionate to the risks of harm**, reducing case incidence and prevalence to manageable levels, and strengthening public cooperation balanced with the need for a normally functioning society
 - Physical distancing, border management, ventilation, and other public health and social measures
 - Outbreak investigation, contact tracing, and testing
 - Consistent strategic communications
- 3. Minimising inequalities and socioeconomic harm** through protecting and supporting the most socioeconomically vulnerable, and the targeting of interventions
- 4. Recovery and preparedness** through improving health, care, and public health systems, and societal resilience
- 5. Continuous improvement and learning** through research, development, and evaluation

They are set out across **three indicative scenarios** based on changes to circulating variant of SARS-CoV-2 and impact on health and care services

Using the strategic framework

This framework can be used in a variety of ways to support the public health response to COVID.

The framework is to be used at local, regional, and national levels not only by individuals advising on the pandemic response, but also those making and implementing relevant policy to ensure that public health priorities are represented in decision making.

Examples of its use may include:

- A checklist for key aspects of local, regional, or national COVID action and recover plans
- To help decision makers prioritise different public health actions at different phases of the pandemic
- To support development of a shared understanding of recommended public health actions between decision makers in different parts of local and national government
- To signpost to relevant guidance, expertise, and other resources
- To promote dialogue between public health professionals and strategy/policy makers
- To communicate or amplify public health messaging
- To emphasise the need to proactively address inequalities as a core part of the pandemic response and recovery

More detailed or specific public health policy advice for COVID-19 that supports much of this strategic framework can be accessed through the Public Health Advice Guidance and Expertise Cell (phage@phe.gov.uk) or through the UKHSA knowledge and library services website (<https://ukhsalibrary.koha-ptfs.co.uk/>)

Feedback

The framework has been developed and is maintained by Adam Briggs and Nick Hicks, Consultants in Public Health and public health strategy advisors to the Interim Chief Medical Advisor, UKHSA.

For feedback, comments or questions, please email adam.briggs@phe.gov.uk and Nicholas.hicks@nhs.net

Public health strategic framework for COVID – illustrating changing priorities

High health and social care pressures from COVID, high case rates



Low health and social care pressures, low case rates

Indicative scenario

- Health systems unable to provide elective or non-urgent secondary care, with COVID as a significant cause
- Community transmission of variant for which vaccine effectiveness for risk of hospital admissions <60% or death <80%

Indicative scenario

- Health systems unable to provide normal elective and non-urgent care services due to COVID-19
- Community circulation of variant for which vaccine effectiveness for risk of hospital admission is <80% or death <90%

Indicative scenario

- Elective and non-urgent health services unaffected by COVID-19
- No known community circulation of variants of concern, vaccine effectiveness against dominant strain hospital admission $\geq 80\%$ and death $\geq 90\%$

Use of public health & social measures (PHSM)

Focus on recovery and community resilience

Role of rapid outbreak identification and control

Monitoring, community insight, and addressing inequalities

Public health strategic framework for COVID

High health and social care pressures from COVID, high case rates

Low health and social care pressures, low case rates

Indicative scenario

- Health systems unable to provide elective or non-urgent secondary care, with COVID as a significant cause
- Community transmission of variant for which vaccine effectiveness for risk of hospital admissions <60% or death <80%

Indicative scenario

- Health systems unable to provide normal elective and non-urgent care services due to COVID
- Community circulation of variant for which vaccine effectiveness for risk of hospital admission is <80% or death <90%

Indicative scenario

- Elective and non-urgent health services unaffected by COVID
- No known community circulation of variants of concern, vaccine effectiveness against dominant strain hospital admission >=80% and death >=90%

Public health priorities

- Evidence of negative test prior and/or vaccination to events where distancing is not possible
- Isolation of all close contacts irrespective of vaccination status or age, including people working in high-risk settings unless critical staff shortages and appropriate risk assessment
- Regular asymptomatic testing before meeting people outside of own household
- Strengthen action to reduce social contacts

Public health priorities

- Rapid cluster and outbreak identification and management, including the use of asymptomatic testing and wastewater surveillance
- Isolation of unvaccinated close contacts aged over 18 years
- 7 day daily LFD +/- PCR testing for vaccinated close contacts, isolating if testing positive or developing symptoms.
- Asymptomatic testing for people working in and visiting in high risk settings (e.g. hospitals, care homes, prisons)

Public health priorities

- Behavioural advice for close contacts (household, school, workplace) to be aware of possible symptoms and to avoid social contact if become unwell
- Enhanced support for places with ongoing high case rates
- Rapid outbreak investigation and management, particularly in high-risk settings with people who are clinically vulnerable
- Use of testing to support clinical management, including antiviral therapy, among clinically vulnerable or clinically unwell individuals
- If clearly unwell with respiratory symptoms, avoid social contact where possible (e.g. working from home if this is an option), do not visit places where vulnerable people are likely to be present e.g. care homes, and wear an appropriate face covering if unable to stay at home
- **Implementation of an inclusive socioeconomic recovery that focuses on the those most impacted**

Public health priorities

- Recommending public health and social measures in enclosed, crowded, and poorly ventilated spaces, including appropriate face coverings and physical distancing
- Working from home where this an option
- Ongoing testing of people with symptoms, with isolation pending results and when testing positive
- Use of digital technology (e.g. phone apps) to provide advice about how to reduce risk of infection and transmission, and to support outbreak identification and management, with appropriate digital security to protect individuals' identities

Public health priorities across all scenarios

- Vaccinate/boost to maintain population immunity, development of new vaccines against emerging VOCs, and continuous genomic monitoring for new variants (including providing international support for vax and genomics)
- Surveillance of population immunity levels and genomic sequencing for early identification of variants
- Advise on protection of clinically vulnerable and unvaccinated
- Social, economic, and practical support for people unable to work if unwell or needing to isolate
- Regularly review policies for international travel if potentially dangerous variants identified in other countries, with due consideration for the economic and societal impact on the countries involved
- Provide information to enable individuals to make informed choices about their behaviours and to create COVID safe spaces, including how to reduce environmental risks
- Improve indoor air quality by ventilation in enclosed, crowded places
- Clear, consistent communications from trusted sources at both local and national level
- Support and use community assets (e.g. social networks) to strengthen community engagement and response
- Minimise disruption to educational settings
- Adopt a locally-led approach to understanding and addressing local causes of ongoing transmission, including multi-agency work with the local community to identify and address local needs for additional public health and social measures
- Ensure all policies identify, seek to address, and are evaluated to understand their direct and indirect impacts on transmission and inequalities
- Understand and address long term health consequences, focusing on those most affected and including surveillance and management of the long term health consequences of COVID
- Adapt/prioritise actions based on impact on health and inequalities from COVID as well as non-COVID conditions/threats
- Keep COVID public health policy under review as epidemiology, immunity, evidence, and data change
- Incorporate COVID into usual health and care service planning to maintain sustainable health, care and public health systems
- Routinely use public health and scientific advice to support the development and implementation of workable COVID policy
- Work to improve community resilience to major health and socioeconomic shocks
- Develop and maintain a flexible capacity locally and nationally to respond to future outbreaks or pandemics
- Ensure emergency plans include rapid assessment of the potential impact of proposed policies on inequalities, and have mechanisms for how these can be addressed

Key

Vaccination, virology, and pharmacotherapy
 Limiting transmission through public health and social measures
 Priorities focused on inequalities
 Learning and improvement
 Recovery and preparedness