

News Release



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Barrow COVID-19 infection increase prompts new “six people, two households” advice

The number of COVID-19 cases in Barrow-in-Furness have increased rapidly over the past 10 days.

Local leaders are now taking action to slow the spread of infection, with the aim of avoiding national Government intervention and more restrictive local lockdown measures.

There is already a legal limit of 6 on the number of people that can meet in groups indoors or outdoors. In addition, in the Barrow Borough Council area people are now being **strongly advised** that groups of 6 should be limited to people from no more than 2 households at any one time.

This is to reduce the level of social contact between different people and reduce the risk of infection spreading, as well as helping improve the effectiveness of local contact tracing efforts.

Public Health leaders are clear that similar measures could be implemented in other parts of the county if the rate of infection continues to increase in these areas.

Further to this public advice, additional measures are being advised in hospitals, care homes and schools. These are:

- Visitor restrictions at Furness General Hospital (already in place)
- Visitor restrictions in care homes (from Monday) to minimise risk to vulnerable adults and people living with physical and/ or learning disabilities

- Restrictions on all non-essential visitors to schools (from Monday)

The new measures have been put in place following publication of data from week ending 11 September which showed Barrow had the highest number of new positive cases in Cumbria (29) for the second week running, up from zero cases just a few weeks ago. Considering initial data from the current week as well, the infection rate is now at nearly double the national average, at around 60 per 100,000. Furness General Hospital has also seen an increase in COVID-19 patients with 15 currently receiving treatment. In tandem with local contact tracing information which shows many of the positive cases are unconnected to one another, this data has prompted today's decision.

Full data is available on www.cumbria.gov.uk/stopthespread

Colin Cox, Cumbria's Director of Public Health, said:

"The number cases in Barrow has risen rapidly in the last 10 days, and in combination with the way we are seeing infection spreading, this is very concerning. Barrow is not yet seeing the level of infection in places like Oldham, but without action this is clearly where we are heading.

"The new local action we are taking today is aimed at protecting local people and stopping Barrow having local lockdown measures imposed upon it by Government.

"I strongly encourage people to follow this new advice. The advice will be in place for the next two weeks, after which it will be reviewed. My hope is that it will not be necessary to keep it in place for longer."

The new guidance was this morning agreed by local political leaders at a meeting of the Local Area Outbreak Board, following recommendations from the multi-agency Health Protection Board.

Councillor Stewart Young, Leader of Cumbria County Council and Chair of the Area Outbreak Board, said:

"The threat from this virus has not gone away and if we have learnt anything from the last six months it is how quickly infection can spread once it gets hold in an area. The signs in the Barrow area are all pointing in the wrong direction. It may not look right now that huge numbers of people are being infected, but without action we know where this will end up. No one wants to restrict people going about their business if it can be helped, but if people don't take notice now and follow this new advice I fear that far more restrictive measures will be imposed as has happened elsewhere in the country. I urge people to take note and help keep the community safe."

Simon Fell, MP for Barrow-in-Furness, said:

“This action is designed to limit the spread of the virus and protect the most vulnerable people in our community. Working together we can limit the spread of this virus, protecting each other by being sensible, careful and cautious.

“The last thing we want is a full local lockdown in Barrow, so I would urge everyone to follow this advice for the good of your friends, family, neighbours and the local community.”

Councillor Ann Thomson, the leader of Barrow Borough Council, said:

"The rapid increase in the number of cases here in our borough in such a short amount of time is a serious concern. These new measures are absolutely necessary if we are to avoid the level of infections seen in other parts of the country where local lockdowns have been introduced.

"Every single one of us has a part to play in this. Please follow the advice and make sure you are meeting up in groups of six from no more than two households to keep our communities as safe as possible."

ENDS

Notes for Editors

- It is important to note that the increase in positive cases is NOT simply a result of the high number of employees being tested by BAE Systems. Discounting testing at BAE Systems the infection rate is still high and a cause for concern.

For further information contact Cumbria County Council's communications team on 01228 221008.

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