

NHS Highland



Meeting: NHS Highland Board
Meeting date: 25 January 2022
Title: COVID-19 Update
Responsible Executive/Non-Executive: Tim Allison, Director of Public Health
Report Author: Tim Allison, Director of Public Health

1 Purpose

This is presented to the Board for:

- Awareness

This report relates to a:

- Emerging issue

This aligns to the following NHS Scotland quality ambition(s):

- Safe
- Effective
- Person Centred

This report relates to the following Corporate Objective(s)

<p>Clinical and Care Excellence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving health • Keeping you safe 		<p>Partners in Care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in partnership • Communicating well 	
<p>A Great Place to Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning from experience • Improving wellbeing 		<p>Safe and Sustainable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In control • Well run 	
Other (please explain below)			

2 Report Summary

2.1 Situation

COVID-19 continues to circulate in the community within NHS Highland at high levels and there have been steep rises recently with the Omicron variant. The risk to health from COVID remains significant and is included within the corporate risk register. The risk includes both direct effects on health and the indirect effects that

are caused by isolation and absence from work. The principal control measure for COVID is vaccination. This report and especially the accompanying presentation outline the current position for COVID and for vaccination.

2.2 Background

COVID has affected NHS Highland since early in 2020 and has had a significant impact especially on vulnerable people. While the size of the impact has remained very large, the nature of that impact has changed. Daily cases were in single or double figures for most of the pandemic, but enhanced testing and the increased infectivity of the Omicron variant have meant that many hundreds of cases have been diagnosed each day in NHS Highland. The impact of the huge rise in cases has been mitigated by vaccination which has had a great effect on disease severity and has also impacted on virus spread. COVID continues to have a large impact on mental health and overall wellbeing and will continue to have effects through long COVID for many years.

2.3 Assessment

The profile of infection can change quickly and so this is best covered within the accompanying presentation. Cases have been prominent during the second half of 2021 with peaks at the end of August, start of November and a large rise from the end of December. COVID is still causing serious illness and the need for hospital admissions, but its main impact recently has been on staffing of health and social care services with staff needing to isolate because of either a COVID diagnosis or contact.

Vaccination with COVID boosters in NHS Highland started relatively slowly and aspects of communication were poor. However, performance markedly improved both in absolute terms and relative to other boards. Staff were mobilised and assistance was gratefully received from among others general practice, volunteers and the military. The Scottish Government target of giving a booster to 80% of those eligible by the end of 2021 was achieved before Christmas. The latest vaccination figures are included within the presentation.

The changing impact of COVID and the significant effects on staffing reduce the level of assurance that can be offered on the ability of the Board and partners to address the effects of the virus.

2.4 Proposed level of Assurance

This report proposes the following level of assurance:

Substantial	<input type="checkbox"/>	Moderate	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Limited	<input type="checkbox"/>	None	<input type="checkbox"/>

3 Impact Analysis

3.1 Quality/ Patient Care

COVID-19 has had significant impacts on healthcare, especially in the availability of staff. Quality of care may be compromised by staff shortages and some services may need to be suspended with consequent impacts on patients. Quality of care is also important in judging the delivery of the vaccination programme. High staff vaccination rates will improve quality of care.

3.2 Workforce

Many staff have been affected by COVID and this has had a considerable negative impact on their health and wellbeing. The effects of COVID on staff availability have also been great.

3.3 Financial

Funding for COVID including vaccination is provided by Scottish Government.

3.4 Risk Assessment/Management

COVID and vaccination risks are included in the board's risk management process.

3.5 Equality and Diversity, including health inequalities

COVID has the greatest adverse effects on more deprived communities and this has been recognised in the approval of the social mitigation strategy and action plan.

3.6 Other impacts

COVID has It is important to recognise the impact of COVID on wider society including education, employment and transport.

3.7 Communication, involvement, engagement and consultation

There have been regular communications to staff regarding COVID through the usual communication channels. Specific events have been arranged for briefing elected members. Communication with the public has been through a variety of media including radio, newspapers and social media.

3.8 Route to the Meeting

The contents of the paper have been shared with the Executive Directors Group.

4 Recommendation

Board members are asked to note and discuss the information in this paper and the accompanying presentation.