

Q and A- Why Essex have moved levels

Why does Essex want to be in a higher level now~ when it lower than the governments national threshold?

Essex level of cases is increasing everywhere as it is nationally. The government threshold for action has moved upwards and upwards as cases increase. We are already at a level far higher than Leicester, Newcastle or Manchester where when they received intervention. We have strong evidence that cases are doubling every week to ten days. If this continues we will at some point reach the threshold for more intervention. We believe it makes sense to act now.

Additionally numbers of people in acute hospital beds while still low are now increasing quite steeply. There were often no beds with COVID patients in September, a week ago the number was 45 and yesterday was 89.

Why did we not stay with Rule of Six and Curfew

There is no strong evidence for the value of these measures. The Rule of Six is not mentioned in the SAGE report on what is likely to work (below). The Curfew is suggested may have marginal impact. Essex specifically requested alongside our submission that the Curfew was revoked locally on this basis but this was not agreed by government officers.

What does SAGE say about the Alert levels

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/925856/S0770_NPIs_table_pivot_.pdf

The link above is SAGE position on the likely benefits of interventions. It does not include or discuss the Alert levels. It outlines what measures would work and what are less likely to work. These have been translated by government into Alert Levels

Broadly much that works, full lockdown, school, college and university closures are not ones the government or most people would consider. Other things will not work including stopping people working in the home or stopping care home visits.

What do Essex want the approach to be locally

The Essex R value based on current growth rates in cases is 1.27.

It needs to be below 1 to reverse the disease spread.

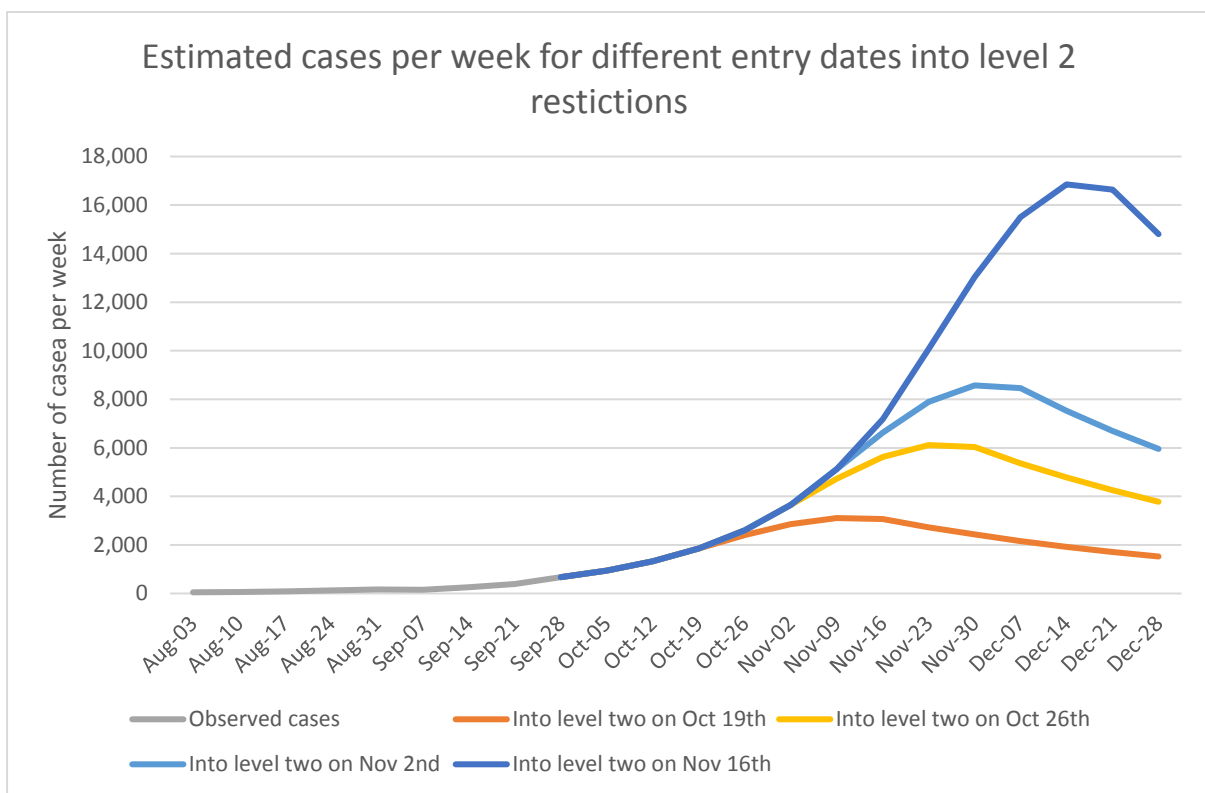
The two important interventions we need to have in place locally are

Work from Home wherever possible~ this will reduce R by 0.2 to 0.4. Some people are already working from home so we feel we need to assume the lowest level is possible in Essex ie 0.2 reduction in R. To achieve this it is very important you work from home if you possibly can and that

your employer allows this. There are some people whose jobs mean they cannot work from home, such as staff working in education settings and that is built into the assumptions. While the government have already urged people to work from home where possible, the key importance of this has been sadly lost in the discussions about different Alert levels. It is Critical that people do this where they can

Reducing contacts between members of different households within the home~ this will reduce R by 0.1 to 0.2. This will be the hardest ask of people but will be critical if we are to reduce the R value below 1 in Essex.

If people are able to play a full role in supporting us in this we should be able to reduce the R value to 0.92. The impact of doing this sooner rather than later is substantial. A car brakes much quicker at 20mph than 70 mph. The graph below illustrates the impact on increasing working form home and household restrictions to the maximum value at different dates



Why have we asked for Alert Level High then

We wanted to just seek agreement to restrict households meeting in line with the evidence but the only way to achieve this was to move to High Alert.

Sadly this includes other restrictions currently such as restricting visits to care homes that we do not feel are needed. We have approached government about this and understand work is underway to produce new guidance that will allow more visiting under the alert level. As above we asked about removing the curfew but were refused.

What do we need people in Essex to do

We feel what we are doing is in the best interest of everyone in Essex as we have the best chance of reducing the R number and getting cases down fast.

This will ONLY happen if people work from home wherever possible and agree to restrict household contacts. If we do not, cases will carry on increasing

Will it work, when will it stop

The evidence from SAGE is attached as well as the reasons we have chosen the interventions we have. It CAN work if everyone plays a part. The current system will not work and High Tier will not work without everyone who can working from home as already requested by the government.

The graphs illustrates the sort of trajectory we might follow should we be successful although it is hard to be sure how this will play out. As we asked to go in early we would ask to leave early as soon as we where convinced that hospital admissions for coronavirus where definitely decreasing.

We will not know if it is working for some while. The accurate data is always some days behind and already the cases that will present in coming weeks are incubating the disease. This means it is unlikely we will see change in rates for some weeks

Will this impact badly on the economy of Essex

Most businesses can continue to operate as always. It is recognised that the key harm will be to hospitality as people from different households will be unable to mix inside so while households can attend hospitality as long as they do not mix with others this will impact on trade. We recognise the harm this will cause but feel that by going earlier we have increased our chances of getting out quicker given that we believe we will be required to move to this level at some point

Wont it just go up again when we stop

As with the major lockdown earlier in the year we are likely to see an increase in cases again after restrictions have been lifted. This is because the disease is still with us and we are just suppressing its spread. When it gets to a low enough level it is hoped that effective track and trace will be able to contain it and reduce its spreading further but it is entirely possible it will increase again and we will need to consider further future action. This will need to continue until a vaccine is available.

What happens if it doesn't work

If cases do not reduce sufficiently to turn the curve it is possible that Essex would need to move to Very High alert although we hope this can be avoided. If we fail totally then Essex would likely spend 3 or so weeks more in the High alert level than would otherwise have been the case.

We will continue to monitor our progress over coming weeks

Why can Children mix with loads of people at school but not see their relatives

This is because we have chosen to try and keep schools open. In order to do this we need to make difficult trade-offs elsewhere. We NEED the household contacts restrictions to be adhered to if we are to allow the schools to stay open and reduce spread. This is all being done at the margins and every single contact avoided helps. So your child not seeing their relatives becomes a really important action in reducing the virus spread. We just need to reduce R to below 1. Closing the schools would help but is not something most people are willing to do.

Schools have implemented a hierarchy of protective measures, including increased cleaning, social distancing as much as possible and consistent groupings, to ensure that schools can remain a safe place for all children and young people and staff.

Why can I not have my children and grandchildren in the house but can have a plumber around and go to the hairdresser.

The restriction of households meeting is one of two key elements in what we need to do to reduce R below 1. It is very important then that it is adhered to.

Evidence suggests that the impact of closing hairdressers who are using full protection is very low as people only see them very infrequently. Similarly plumbers who work in a covid secure way observing social distancing do not severely impact on the R number.

We also all want to protect jobs and the economy as much as possible.