

Key messages

COVID-19

Headline

The pandemic has retreated with vaccinations and natural immunity protecting the majority from severe disease / deaths. However, recovery from Covid is compounded by the cost-of-living crisis. Health services remain under strain and backlogs are still substantial. Particularly for CYP, indirect impact from Covid measures is contributing to ongoing challenges – see under Start Well. The natural history and impact of Long-Covid is still not fully understood.

Key statistics

Key statistics for COVID-19:

- Merton's all cause and COVID-19 mortality rates have been comparable to other SWL boroughs during the pandemic. Despite the large surge in Omicron cases in 2022, the COVID-19 mortality rate was much lower than earlier in the pandemic, due to the success of the vaccination programme and the lower rate of serious complications seen after Omicron infection.
- Uptake of the COVID-19 primary course of vaccination shows 51.5% are fully vaccinated (over 12 years, third/booster dose) but was unequal, with lower uptake in East Merton (71% v 73% first dose in the West,) and in some ethnic minorities.
- Many routine healthcare services were interrupted or cancelled to prioritize the pandemic response and the impact of this will be seen for a number of years to come.
- Nationally self-reported prevalence of long COVID is 3.5% in mid-2022 and is greatest in people aged 35 to 69 years, females, people living in more deprived areas, those working in social care, those not working, and those with an activity-limiting health condition or disability. The number of people with long COVID in Merton is estimated to be 7,500. Locally a Health Equity Audit will seek to identify inequalities in self-reporting and access to long COVID services by different groups.
- The Voluntary and Community Sector in Merton has had a key role in the pandemic response in Merton, including understanding the impact on our communities and promoting vaccination. There are currently two sets of Community Champion programmes in Merton, for under 18's, and 30+'s with over 300 Champions in the latter group. The programme continues to grow over time, with active participation of around 50 people each week and all Champions receive the resources and notes to share with their networks. These foundations can be built upon, as we live safely and fairly with COVID-19 and as we recover from the pandemic.

Conclusions to inform priorities

- **Living safely and fairly with Covid-19.**
- **Vaccination for ongoing protection, especially for the most vulnerable.**
- **Resilience and response readiness for other infectious diseases, jointly working with UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and their local Health Protection Teams (HPTs).**
- **Supporting people with Long-Covid, and more Long-Covid research.**
- **Learning from the pandemic: the community hub with the voluntary sector; solution-focused partnership working, especially with health; community champions for ongoing engagement.**
- **Responding to ongoing impact on children and young people's health – see under Start Well.**