

Ceredigion County Council

COVID-19

Contact Tracing and Case Management



Cyngor Sir
CEREDIGION
County Council

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ceredigion County Council would like to thank the residents of Ceredigion, neighbours and friends beyond in playing their part in attempting to restrict and reduce the transmission of the Coronavirus.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tackling the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has meant major changes to the lives of people across the world. In Wales, one pillar of the Welsh Government's response, outlined in its 'Framework for recovery' to lead Wales out of the pandemic, is to enhance public health surveillance and response systems to enable the virus to be tracked.

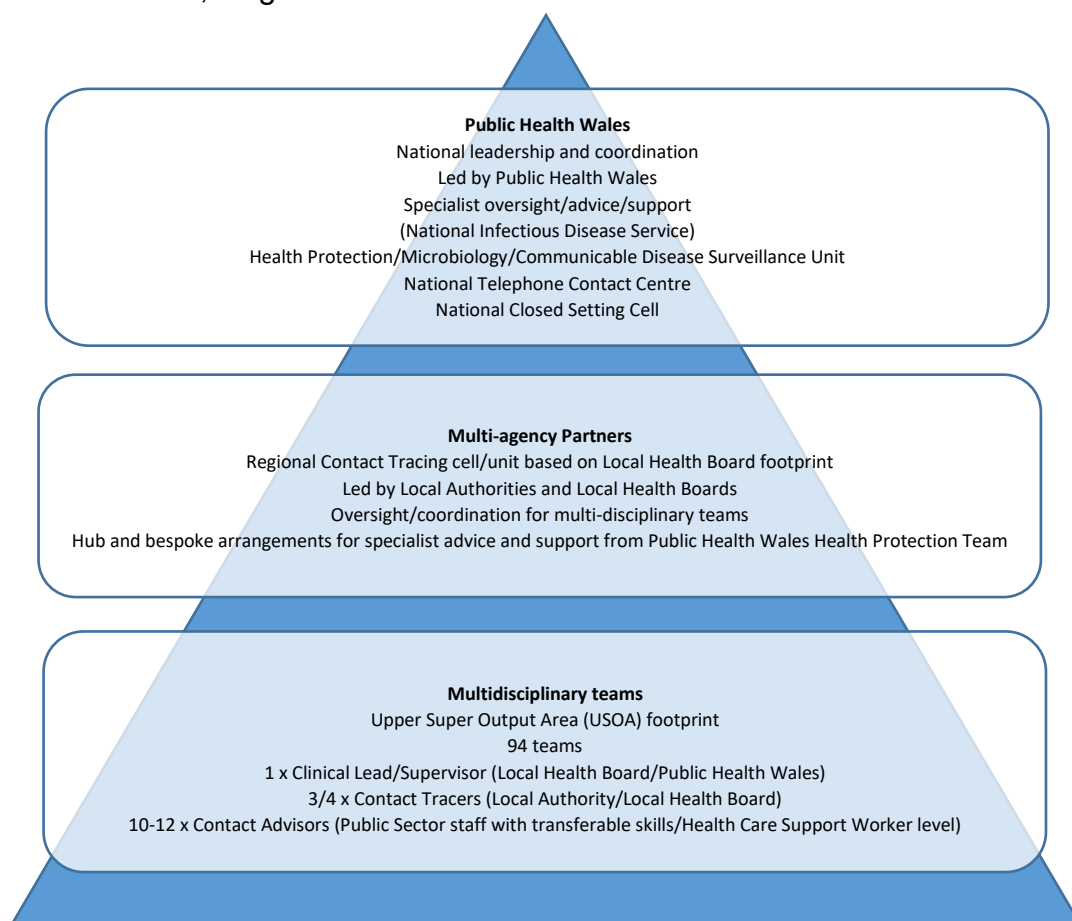
In support of the Welsh Government's vision Public Health Wales published its 'Public Health Protection Response Plan' setting out three methods that should be employed in the next phase of the response to the pandemic in Wales:

- Preventing the spread of infection through contact tracing and case management
- Population surveillance
- Sampling and testing

The Plan shared by Public Health Wales assumes that transmission of COVID-19 will continue until mass immunisation is available or there is enough acquired immunity in the population. It proposes a national effort to tackle the pandemic, in line with the scale of the emergency.

The Plan shares a three-tier model which defines the organisations required within the response effort. The model includes national, regional and local organisations.

Figure 1: National, Regional and Local Tier Model



Aim

The aim of Ceredigion County Council's COVID-19 Contact Tracing and Case Management document is to consider the local tier of the response in Ceredigion and its role within the Regional Response Cell alongside Hywel Dda University Health Board, as well as other local Authorities within the Health Board's footprint.

This document outlines the structure and functions of contact tracing and case management in Ceredigion. It discusses the evolution of Ceredigion's local tracing system to its successor, the Contact Tracing Service and how the service delivers contact tracing and case management.

Contact Tracing and Case Management

To restrict the spread of Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) intervention is required to break the chain of transmission from one person to another.

Contact tracing and case management is the system by which individuals that have been exposed to a virus are identified and advised to isolate in order to prevent further transmission.

Contact tracing and case management utilises available data and engages communities to find individuals that have tested positive for COVID-19, and aims to support these individuals to identify further people that they may have come into contact with in a bid to protect them, their peers and the wider community from contracting COVID-19.

When applied effectively contact tracing can reduce the spread of COVID-19 and in turn reduce the effective reproduction number, which is the number of secondary cases per individual tested positive for COVID-19 (also known as the 'R value').

2. CONTACT TRACING IN CEREDIGION

A local system of contact tracing

In response to the emergence of Coronavirus, on 3 April 2020 Ceredigion County Council's COVID-19 Gold Command Group requested that a Silver, tactical group be established in order to formulate a system for the Authority to play its part in preventing the spread of the virus.

The tactical group produced a local contact tracing system. It formulated a questionnaire that could be used to identify potential contacts, created an information management system to enable the collation of data and sought data protection and legal advice in order to compliantly start tracing locally.

The system established became operational on 15 April 2020. From its commencement every person that tested positive for COVID-19 in Ceredigion received a telephone call by the Authority's Contact Tracing Team. The Team was

comprised of Environmental Health Officers, drawn in because of their advanced knowledge of responding to communicable diseases.

The Team firstly carried out calls to people that had tested positive for COVID-19. These index cases of the virus were able to be identified through the Authority's access to Public Health Wales' Tarian communicable disease notification system and also through referrals to the service. Calls to these individuals utilised the questionnaire created, in order to guide conversations about individual's recent activities.

The information gathered was also utilised to attempt to identify further contacts that may have contracted the virus. From initial lines of communication secondary contacts were then able to be identified and called, to talk to them about their potential exposure. These contacts were then advised to self-isolate for 14 days in order to prevent further potential transmission.

Contact tracing was also carried out with all Council employees that indicated COVID-19 symptoms as a reason for absence from work on the Authority's human resources system.

Data in relation to all contacts was inputted on to the information management system created by the Authority. Further to the Authority's effective use of this system, it was subsequently redeveloped to enable other Authority's to utilise its capabilities and record information regarding their local authority areas. The system was also updated to be able to generate and dispatch emails to contacts each day during self-isolation, in order to check in with them on their condition and to allow for reporting of symptoms. If symptoms were reported, the Authority was then able to facilitate testing for these individuals through partners within Hywel Dda University Health Board.

Ceredigion County Council's local contact tracing system effectively carried out tracing work with every known case of COVID-19 from the establishment of the tactical group. Information in relation to the group's effective operation was shared with local Authorities within the Hywel Dda University Health Board region.

Contract tracing has subsequently developed differently across the Hywel Dda area, although learning from Ceredigion County Council's local contact tracing system has provided support to other Authorities.

3. TEST, TRACE, PROTECT

In May 2020, as Wales progressed into the next phase of the COVID-19 response the Welsh Government introduced the 'Test, Trace, Protect' strategy that provided further direction in order to enhance public health surveillance and response systems to enable the virus to be tracked.

The Test, Trace, Protect strategy aims to enhance public health surveillance, undertake mass contact tracing, and support people to isolate when required to in order to reduce the rate of transmission of the virus.

The Test, Trace, Protect strategy responds to scientific evidence to maintain a UK-wide approach to pursuing COVID-19, only differing when a specific context requires it, and only when supported by evidence. The strategy requires partnership working, pooling efforts and resources together with a unified purpose to reduce the rates of transmission. Furthermore, it aims to encourage people to play their part in limiting the spread of the virus by protecting themselves and others and to support and assist contact tracing efforts.

Sharing information and working in partnership are two of the main tenets of the Test, Trace, Protect strategy. Some of the main partners required in the strategy include: Welsh Government, Public Health Wales, Local Health Boards, Local Authorities, third sector, academia, local business and other partners.

In advance of the introduction of the Test, Trace, Protect strategy in Wales trials were undertaken in four university health board areas in Wales to investigate existing local contact tracing systems. These included: Cwm Taf Morgannwg, Powys, Betsi Cadwaladr and Hywel Dda. In the Hywel Dda region, observations were carried out in Ceredigion over a two week period looking at its existing local contact tracing system and capturing how work already carried out, practices implemented and learning could be utilised for the purpose of building a national system.

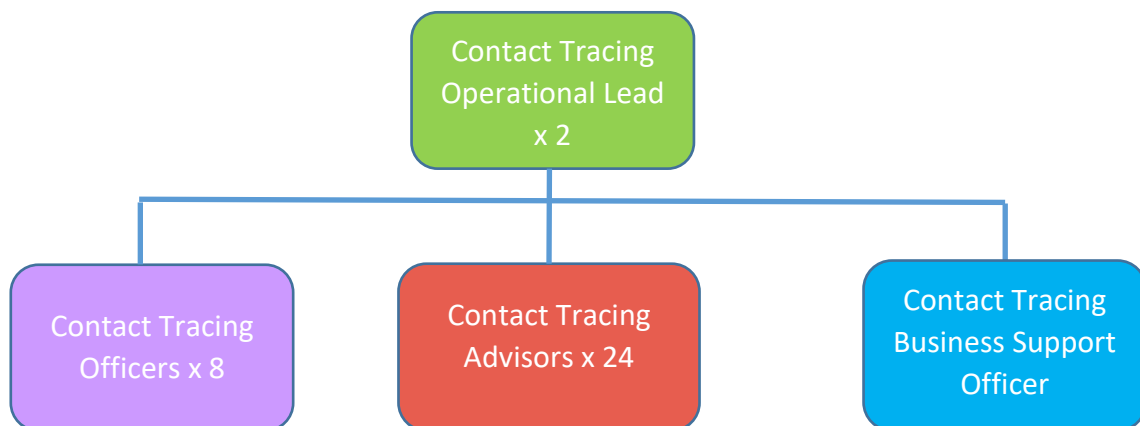
Because of the success of the local system in Ceredigion, it was agreed by Hywel Dda University Health Board that the existing system could be adapted to meet the needs of the national model. As such the Authority expanded its previous provision and created the defined Contact Tracing Service.

Ceredigion's Contact Tracing Service is an extension of the previous local contact tracing system and works in partnership with other local authorities and the local health board to assist in delivering contact tracing both regionally and locally.

4. CEREDIGION CONTACT TRACING SERVICE

The Contact Tracing Service is comprised of 12 Contact Tracing Advisors and 5 Contact Tracing Officers, employed on a 12-month secondment basis and a further 12 Contact Tracing Advisors and 3 Contact Tracing Officers, employed on a relief secondment basis. The Officers and Advisors along with a Contact Tracing Business Support Officer are managed by 2 Contact Tracing Operational Leads.

Figure 2: Ceredigion Contact Tracing Team Structure



The team is operational 7 days a week, from 8am to 8pm, including Bank Holidays in order to respond in a timely manner to cases and contacts identified. The aim of the structure and deployment of the team is to facilitate flexibility and sustainability. The service aims to stop the spread of the virus by breaking the chain of transmission. With this people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and others that may have been exposed to the virus are contacted and advised to self-isolate.

Individuals that have tested positive for COVID-19 are brought to the attention of the Community Contact Tracing Team through a live Contact Tracing and Case Management system. Once primary contacts are found communication is made with these over the telephone by Contact Tracers. Tracers will talk to individuals about where they have been recently and the people they have been in contact with. This information is then inputted on the live contact tracing and case management system on an online form. By gathering this information, the Contact Tracing Team can attempt to identify further people that may have been exposed to the virus.

Secondary contacts that may have been exposed to the virus will also be contacted if it is confirmed that they have been in close contact with someone that has tested positive for the virus. Contacts identified will be asked to self-isolate for 14 days to ensure that they do not spread the virus and will be asked to so even if they do not present symptoms.

Lines of communication will be maintained by Contact Tracing Advisors with contacts over the course of the 14 days while contacts are self-isolating. Communication is continued with contacts during this period for contacts to be supported, to be advised to follow Public Health Wales guidance and so monitoring can be carried out to see if contacts develop any symptoms of the virus. If contacts begin presenting any symptoms they will be advised and assisted to seek testing as soon as possible.

While the Plan published by Public Health Wales makes projections of the demands placed on contact tracing teams these are not associated to specific regions of Wales and does not consider local demographics.

Ceredigion covers an area of 696 square miles and currently has a population of around 75,000. In consideration of the population density, the Authority is deemed to have two Upper Super Output Areas (USOAs) within its local authority boundary. USOAs are geographies with a population range of between 27,000 – 43,000 people. In acknowledgement of local requirements the Authority has built resilience into its service by having the ability to scale up or down resources in line with local demands. By having a flexible structure capacity can also be drawn upon to provide mutual aid to other regions of Hywel Dda should outbreaks or clusters of the virus occur.

PERFORMANCE

The Contact Tracing Service considers direction provided by the Welsh Government, Public Health Wales and Hywel Dda University Health Board and will respond to performance expectations set upon it.

To date three key performance indicators have been identified by Public Health Wales concerning the effectiveness of Community Contact Tracing Teams. These include:

- Cases of COVID-19 detected
- Cases investigated by Contact Tracing Teams
- The number of cases failed to investigate by a Contact Tracing Team.

As the service is in its infancy it is difficult to formulate a conclusion regarding its current efficiency. However, there will be ongoing monitoring, regular detailed reporting to the Regional Response Cell and beyond, and the Service will continue to work towards improvements.

DATA PROTECTION

The Authority is committed to meeting its data protection and ethical obligations in accessing and handling information securely. A Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI) agreement has been made in order to facilitate mass contact tracing in Wales to ensure all organisations involved share personal information effectively and lawfully.

The Authority is committed to ensuring that data will be handled, stored and used sensitively in a clear and transparent manner for the purpose of contact tracing and case management to protect public health.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

It is perceived that Ceredigion's Contact Tracing Service will remain in operation until a time when the Coronavirus poses little or no threat to the population. Until that time, the service aims to continually develop and continue to attempt to reduce the transmission of COVID-19.

The field of investigating and responding to the pandemic is rapidly changing and with this scientific, technological and administrative advancements and efficiencies will likely be made in the way contact tracing and case management is delivered nationally, regionally and locally, as all parties get to grips with the emerging and developing situation.

One proposed advancement at the time of writing this document is the development of an NHS COVID-19 digital application to support the manual approach of contact tracing. It is stated that the app will advise people if they have been near someone who has reported coronavirus symptoms and will provide them with up-to-date public health guidance. The app will also enable users to apply for testing if they begin to present symptoms and provide the ability to input information directly on to the app about their contacts if they receive a positive test result.

It is envisaged that the manual approach to contact tracing will support the app, with Contact Tracers providing guidance and support in a verbal form to reinforce the requirement to isolate and assist those who can't use the app or might want to speak to someone over the telephone. Support will be available from Ceredigion County Council to support individuals that have come into contact with the virus.

The ethos of Authority's contact tracing efforts, from its early beginning as a 'homemade' system to the defined Contact Tracing Service, has always been to pursue the virus rather than follow it. While advancements are ongoing at a national level, efforts are continually being made within the Authority to find innovative ways to reduce its spread. Ceredigion County Council is committed to responding to this emerging situation and to ultimately support its inhabitants to adjust and recover from the Coronavirus pandemic.

Welsh Government has currently undertaken to fund additional costs for responding to COVID-19, including staffing and resources for contact tracing. The future direction of Ceredigion's Contact Tracing Service will be affected by the availability of continued funding for all aspects of the Welsh Government's Test, Trace, Protect strategy.

SOURCES

- Leading Wales out of the coronavirus pandemic: a framework for recovery
<https://gov.wales/leading-wales-out-coronavirus-pandemic>
- COVID-19 Public Health Wales Health Protection Response Plan:
<https://phw.nhs.wales/news/covid-19-public-health-wales-health-protection-response-plan-published/>
- Contact tracing
<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/contact-tracing>
- Contact tracing in the context of COVID-19
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/contact-tracing-in-the-context-of-covid-19>
- Test Trace Protect
<https://gov.wales/test-trace-protect>
- Contact tracing: your questions
<https://gov.wales/contact-tracing-your-questions>