

The pandemic and us

This is a time when restrictions are gradually easing, and life is beginning to look more normal. The roads have cars busily driving about, and for many people, something like normal life has returned.

At the same time, the Covid virus is still 'out there' in the form of the highly contagious Delta strain, and new cases are occurring all the time. Many people will know of friends or associates or of children at our schools who have contracted the virus recently. So where are we with it?

We have been studying the virus and its impact on Bracknell and surrounding areas since March 2020. The history is not important, as it has taken twists and turns as the pandemic has taken hold and changed, so here is a summary of where we are.

As of now, the Bracknell area of about 120,000 people is contracting 40-50 new cases a day. The surrounding area has much the same incidence. This level of new cases is fairly constant. The Reading Festival at the beginning of September was expected to create a 'blip' in the form of temporarily rising new cases, and it did, but the general trend to stability quickly returned – and the trend is continuing down

That is the general position – we co-exist, with increasing normality, with a disease that will continue to be present for some time.

We can do this because the disease in our area is reasonably well contained. The primary and most important factor is the high level of vaccination, which to a large degree reduces the infectiousness of Covid, and, even more importantly, controls the severity of the illness when contracted. By far the greatest percentages of Covid hospitalization and deaths are of people who have not been vaccinated.

The treatment of the disease in hospital is also greatly improved as a result of the 18 months of experience; so death rates are far fewer and the control of severe symptoms is more successful

The fact of the matter that we should not forget is that Covid-19 is a horrible disease, that can kill by slow suffocation, and, for all too many survivors, it causes 'Long Covid' that can affect many parts of the body for months or even years. Just now, vaccination and effective treatments reduce the incidence of such disasters.

We all must, as parts of our communities maintain our joint defences by:

- Being vaccinated if possible, and having boosters as available;
- Being prudent in taking precautions such as wearing masks and social distancing, particularly in circumstances where the disease may be present and easily passed on;
- Keeping down exposure to such circumstances (e.g. travelling).

Precautions create a statistical defence, not a certain defence, that we must balance with engaging with a full life. The more people who use such practical precautions, the less the disease can spread, and the fewer people will catch the disease. Taking precautions is not a 100% defence against an individual catching the disease, but it is a defence that is 100% certain to benefit the community in which we live.

Covid has evolved, and it may evolve again, so we all must be ready to embrace stronger precautions if it strikes in a new virulent form. We must do this on behalf of our communities as well as behalf of ourselves as individuals, particularly if a new and even more severe Covid strikes.

Meanwhile celebrate and enjoy your life, while staying alert!