
Health Protection Annual Report

Report being considered by:	Health and Wellbeing Board
On:	6 th March 2025
Report Author:	Marisa Alexis (Public Health Principal and Health Protection Lead)
Report Sponsor:	Dr Matthew Pearce (Director of Public Health)
Item for:	Information



1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Health and Wellbeing Board with an update on Health Protection activities in West Berkshire for the 2023-24 financial year. This includes performance against key performance indicators at both system and local level.

2. Recommendation(s)

For the Board to be informed of the contents of this report.

3. Executive Summary

Health Protection is one of the principal domains of Public Health. It aims to prevent, assess, and mitigate risks and threats to human health at population level. These risks come from communicable diseases, cyber threats and exposure to environmental hazards such as chemicals and radiation. The effective delivery of local Health Protection services at local government level requires close partnership working between UK Health Security Agency, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System, voluntary services and other key stakeholders.

Local authorities are expected to fulfil core health protection functions. The priorities for Health Protection during 2023-24 included developing the governance structure which involved the establishment of a Berkshire West Health Protection & Resilience Partnership Board with the neighbouring boroughs of Reading and Wokingham. This report provides rates of healthcare associated infections, sexually transmitted infections, screening for the 2023-24 financial year.

4. Supporting Information

4.1 Healthcare associated infection

The term healthcare associated infection covers a wide range of infections. The most well-known include those caused by methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and *Clostridioides difficile* (*C. difficile*). Healthcare associated infection pose a serious risk to patients, staff and visitors both in acute settings and primary care.

They can exacerbate existing medical conditions, create long term disability and increase resistance to antibiotics and adversely affect quality of life.

To drive improvement of healthcare associated infection rates, annual thresholds are set by NHS England for individual healthcare provider trusts and systems including primary care. Reportable healthcare associated infection that are monitored for breaches include MRSA blood stream infections (BSI), C. difficile infection, Gram-negative BSI, including Escherichia coli (E. coli), Klebsiella spp., Pseudomonas aeruginosa, and Methicillin sensitive staphylococcus aureus (MSSA). Infection Prevention and Control strategies are vital to preventing HCAs.

4.2 Rates of Healthcare Associated Infection

The rates of healthcare associated infections are reported at system level where rates are combined with those of Reading and Wokingham and presented as Berkshire West. The table below shows rates of healthcare associated infections for Berkshire West compared to Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire.

Healthcare Associate Infection 12-month counts April 2023- March 2024						
	C. diff	E. coli BSI	Klebsiella spp. BSI	P. aeruginosa BSI	MRSA BSI	MSSA BSI
Buckinghamshire	109	403	113	59	4	105
Oxfordshire	169	500	156	81	10	139
Berkshire West	116	370	110	46	5	108
Total	394 ↑	1273 ↓	379	186	19	352

Table 1: Rates of Healthcare associated infections in Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire Berkshire West ICB. Source: Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Infection Prevention and Control Annual report 2023-34. ■ Over threshold ■ under threshold

The ICB report showed that healthcare associated infections reported that Berkshire West performed better than Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. Berkshire West was under the NHS England threshold for C. difficile infection. There was a notable decrease in rates of E. coli, Klebsiella spp. blood stream infections in last 2 quarters of the financial year. Whilst rates of P. aeruginosa remained stable but above the NHS England threshold. This was the same for MRSA BSI cases, while MSSA BSI cases reported were under the NHS England threshold.

Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire and Berkshire West reported below the national average for all reportable healthcare associated infections illustrated in table1, except for Pseudomonas aeruginosa BSI. There were also breaches in NHS England thresholds for C. difficile infection. To improve infection rates a C. difficile action plan was developed. It involves the piloting of a new data analysis tool and methods for monitoring antibiotic stewardship. To improve infection rates a gram- negative blood stream infection action plan was developed. This was to address rates of E. coli, P. aeruginosa and Klebsiella spp. BSIs. Key initiatives included: systemwide collaboration to implement the NHS England Catheter Passport to prevent catheter

associated urinary tract infections; implementation of a hydration of programme for at risk individuals >65 years in the community; and introduction of primary care Aseptic Non-Touch Technique training with the aim to improve aseptic technique practice.

4.3 Interventions to manage and prevent healthcare associated infections

Acute healthcare trusts are tasked with putting measures in place to prevent and manage healthcare associated infections. Preventing and managing healthcare associated infections in primary care requires strategic collaboration between key partners in the Integrated Care Partnership. The Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board provides strategic leadership to deliver improvements focused on reduction of the following HCAs. This includes reducing healthcare associated infections developing outside hospital settings and achieving antibiotic targets.

During 2023-24, the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board's Infection Prevention and Control Team provided the following support to care homes including residential homes and supported living settings in West Berkshire:

- Specialist support during outbreaks of infection
- Onsite visit for IPC training and auditing
- Monthly infection prevention webinar
- Urinary catheter management and quality improvement support
- Publication of a monthly IPC Newsletter
- Telephone consultation, to provide real time IPC advice
- Post infection reviews of reportable HCAs

4.4 Risks and areas of concern

The Integrated Care Board recently concluded a review of its operating model. The impact this had on the Infection Prevention and Control team was a reduction in staffing levels, which created limits to delivery of the service moving forward.

4.5 Communicable Diseases

Illnesses caused by micro-organisms such as viruses or bacteria are characterised as communicable diseases. They spread from one individual to one another through contact with contaminated surfaces, bodily fluids, blood products, insect bites, or through the air. Public Health plays a lead role in protecting the local population from infection through surveillance and monitoring, operational support, advice, education, training and research. The two main communicable disease of consequence in the South East during the 2023-24 financial year were Measles and Whooping cough.

4.5.1 Measles

The recent resurgence of measles cases in Europe, resulted in significant measles outbreaks in England, mainly in London and the West Midlands. The number of cases reported in the South East have been consistently below the national average. With less than 5% of cases reported when compared to the England rates. For the period January 2023 to December 2023, 14 confirmed cases were reported in the South East. The rate of transmission in West Berkshire was low. However, neighbouring boroughs like Reading reported several cases. Therefore, it was important to not be complacent and local action was taken. Local messaging was sent to schools and community groups to help them recognise and respond to measles to prevent onward transmission in education settings.

4.5.2 Whooping cough

There was a recent rise in Whooping cough (Pertussis) infection across England during the 2023-24 period. With cases in the South East rising by 83% when compared to rates of infection in the previous year. The highest rate of infection was reported in most deprived population areas. Despite the high number of cases across the South East, West Berkshire was among 3 boroughs who reported the lowest number of cases, less than 1% of the total. Whooping cough is a respiratory spread illness, therefore the risk of transmission to residents from non-residents is high and preventative action. Local messaging was sent to community groups.

4.6 Incidents and Outbreaks

During 2023-24, eight outbreaks were reported in West Berkshire. The table below shows types of outbreaks and locations. This figure is small compared to areas in the South East.

Location	Outbreak type	Counts
Care homes	Influenza	2
Care homes	Other respiratory tract infection	1
Care homes	Gastroenteritis	1
Schools	Varicella zoster virus (chicken pox)	1
Schools	Other respiratory tract infection	1
Nursery	Hepatitis A virus	1
Workplace	Tuberculosis (exposure incident)	1

Table 2: Incidents and outbreaks in West Berkshire 2023- 24

4.8 Vaccinations & Immunisation

Immunisation offers protection against some infectious diseases. Vaccines stimulate the body to produce antibodies that fight infection. A full dose of vaccination generally provides immunity similar to that provided by the natural infection, but without the risk of the disease or its complications.

To reduce the spread of infection and prevent outbreaks, achieving high levels of immunity against vaccine preventable diseases is vital. This can result in herd immunity, whereby the protection from immunisation programmes extends to individuals who cannot be vaccinated for a number of reasons.

4.9 Vaccine uptake in West Berkshire

4.9.1 Seasonal vaccines

The Flu vaccination programme came to an end on 31st March, with data available to end of February as below. BOB compared well with uptake, performing second best in the South East region. At local authority level, West Berkshire has consistently performed better than Reading and Wokingham in the past three financial years. See figure 1.

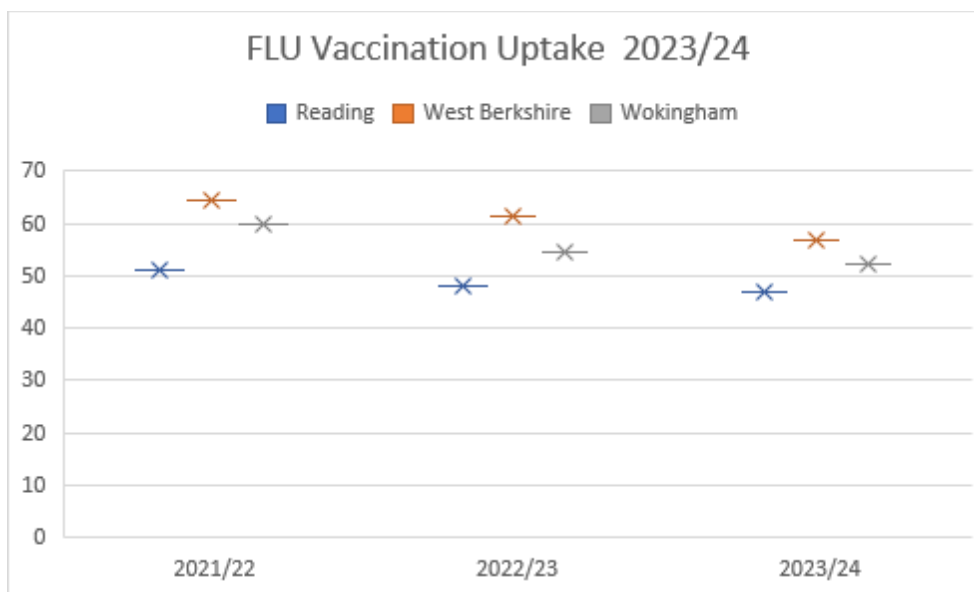


Figure 1: Flu vaccine coverage Reading, Wokingham and West Berkshire.

Source: ImmForm, collected from national surveys & collections down to practice level data 2023-24.

Focusing solely on West Berkshire, flu vaccine coverage rates reduced in all but one category in 2023- 24 compared to the previous financial year. There was a marginal increase in vaccine uptake for children aged between 2 and 17 years. The cohort with the lowest uptake was at risk adults between the ages of 16 and 64 years. See figure 2.

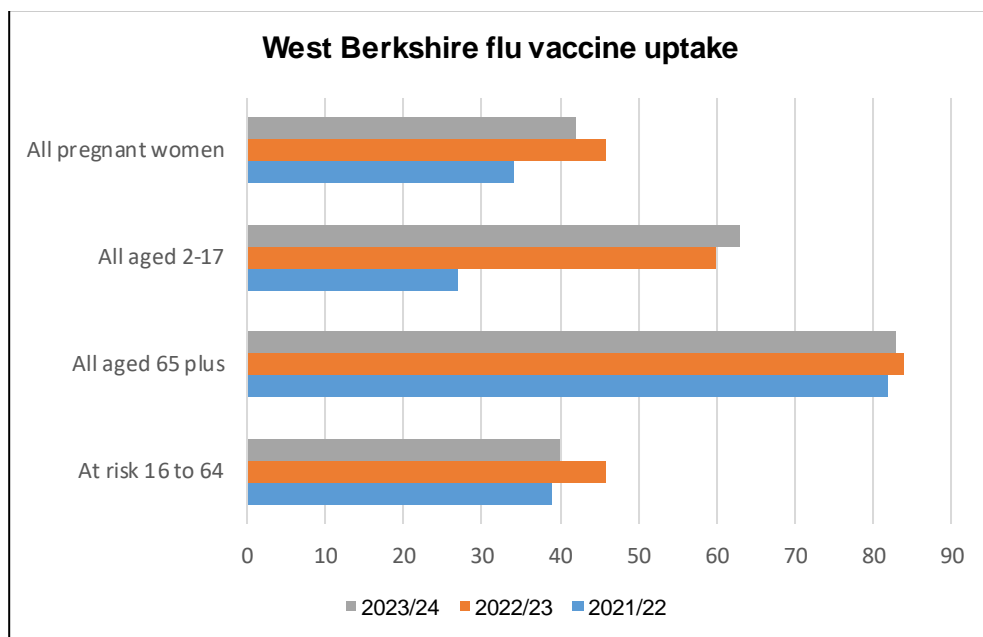


Figure 2: Flu vaccine uptake in West Berkshire

Source: ImmForm, collected from national surveys & collections down to practice level data 2023-24.

4.9.2 Childhood Vaccination uptake

During the 2022-23 financial year childhood population vaccination coverage for two doses of MMR was above the required target and both national and regional averages. Coverage for other routine school aged vaccines (Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis) during 2022-23 were also above the national average.

Adolescent vaccine coverage for Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) met the minimum coverage level but did not meet the target for 2022-23. Meningococcal ACWY coverage also the target for 2022-23. Overall, West Berkshire is a high performer in childhood vaccines in the South East.

Source: [Public Health Outcomes Framework](#)

Improving health inequalities in immunisation programmes

- A Health Needs Assessment on vaccine preventable illness in children is being undertaken to determine the root of cause of low vaccine uptake in both adults and children in West Berkshire.
- Although standards were met locally for breast screening, the programme is currently undergoing a national Health Equity Audit by NHS England.

4.10 Screening coverage in West Berkshire

Reports of screening coverage for bowel cancer screening, antenatal and newborn screening, breast screening showed that performance was significantly better than the England average and targets were met.

Source: [Public Health Outcomes Framework](#)

4.11 Sexual Health

Sexual health is not equally distributed within the South East's population. There is evidence to suggest strong links exist between deprivation and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), teenage contraception and abortions. The highest burden is borne by women, men who have sex with men (MSM), the trans community, teenagers, young adults and black and minority ethnic groups. Some groups who are at higher risk of poor sexual health, face stigma and discrimination, which can influence their ability to access services.

4.11.1 Sexual Health in West Berkshire

In West Berkshire, rates of new STI diagnoses (excluding chlamydia in <25s) is decreasing. HIV testing coverage has been similar to the national average but has been decreasing since 2022 and is now lower than the rate for England. West Berkshire has the lowest rates of both Gonorrhoea and Syphilis in England. Rates for new HIV diagnosis are also lower than the England rate.

The chlamydia detection rate in West Berkshire has been consistently lower than England since 2012. This may indicate that chlamydia testing is lower than it should be, and the positivity rates could be higher. Certain populations in West Berkshire are disproportionately at risk of sexual ill health and are also known to face challenges and barriers in accessing mainstream services, for example young people aged 24 and under.

Source: [Public Health Outcomes Framework](#)

4.11.2 Local Actions

- HIV Awareness and Testing Campaigns

The aims of this campaign were to reduce late diagnosis amongst heterosexual men and heterosexual and bisexual women; to increase repeat testing in men who have sex with men; to raise awareness in underrepresented cohorts.

- Mpox vaccination programme

Supporting service providers and high-risk population groups around awareness and vaccination.

- Audit and surveillance

Sexual Health Access audit and results showed that all providers are performing well against key performance indicators for testing and contraception.

4.12 Emergency Planning

The Berkshire wide Health Emergency Planning Group was re-instated in 2023 and the West Berkshire public health team is an active member. The terms of reference for this group are in development. This group feeds into the Thames Valley Local Health Resilience Partnership. The HEPG responsibilities include: -

- Facilitating the production of local sector-wide health plans to respond to emergencies and contribute to multi agency emergency planning.
- Provide support in assessing and assuring the ability of the health sector to respond in partnership to emergencies at a local level.

The following Berkshire West plans are on a schedule for review: -

- Heat health plan
- Pandemic plan
- Flood plan
- Adverse weather plan update

5. Conclusion and next steps

The following are the next steps for the public health team:

- Continue collaborative working with the BOB ICB around infection prevention and control and health resilience projects.
- Increase assurance for screening programmes and work with partners to improve delivery, coverage, and uptake, focusing on population groups at greater risk of poor outcomes or who face more disadvantage in accessing services.
- Continue collaborative working with commissioners, providers, community champions and communications team to raise awareness of Health Protection risks and locally amplify national communications.
- Focus efforts to prevent and reduce health inequalities, in particular health protection pathways for migrant and homeless communities
- Undertake a vaccine preventable diseases Health Needs Assessment to understand behaviours around vaccine hesitancy to focus initiatives for improvement.

Background Papers:

None

Health and Wellbeing Priorities Supported:

The proposals will support the following Health and Wellbeing Strategy priorities:

- Reduce the differences in health between different groups of people
 - Support individuals at high risk of bad health outcomes to live healthy lives
 - Help families and young children in early years
 - Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all children and young people
 - Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all adults
-