

Sledgehammer Lockdowns in Birmingham – when the increases are hyperlocal?

By John Clancy, Visiting Professor, Centre for Brexit Studies

Looking at the latest 7 day positive Covid-19 case figures for Birmingham from Public Health England (PHE), we find that over 50% of all the reported cases across a city of 1.1 million are, at worst, in just 22 of the city's 132 neighbourhoods of about 9,000 people each.

A third of the cases are in just 11 of the 132 neighbourhoods.

75% of cases are in 43 of those 132 neighbourhoods.

Almost half a million Brummies live in neighbourhoods of about 9,000 people each where there were 3 cases or fewer (and many of these had no cases) reported by PHE in the last 7 days.

750,000 people live in such 9,000 population Birmingham neighbourhoods where 6 or fewer people tested positive.

The problem with looking at Birmingham as a whole and reporting its cases per 100,000 is that you are not concentrating on where the increases are taking place. It's just happening 'in Birmingham'. That helps nobody.

I have been wary in any event of the quality of the testing figures over the summer, but we do need to know what actually is the testing regime now in place in Birmingham? And how that might be affecting these figures?

One of the reasons for the increase in cases will have come from the welcome extra resources for testing given to Birmingham three weeks ago when it was designated an area of concern. Testing has, therefore ramped up. Inevitably more cases will be found by dint of the suddenly increased testing.

We have to be clear, and we should be told, whether that testing has been equalised across the city, so we can establish how widely significant increases are spread across the city. The PHE figures as of yesterday suggest it has not. But that could be that testing has been focused on a third of the city.

Are the government and the city simply extrapolating (or guessing) what the wider spread is from those focused results? And that puts an unfair focus on those 22 neighbourhoods where there is the reported data.

We were told by the council a week ago that they are not making known all of the data they have in their possession. The public and academics do not, they say, have access to the data they have. Why? Is there a secret plan to fight Covid-19 in the city? Why is it secret? How many tests per neighbourhood were there to come up with the number of cases there?

If there has been a hyperlocal approach to testing, then we need to know that too. I would also welcome it.

In the meantime Brummies should continue to observe the advice to wash hands regularly, use face coverings and make at least the space the law requires. The new national guidelines applied to Birmingham will presumably calm some local nerves, too.

But until the actual open evidence suggests otherwise, the hyperlocal approach remains the best, and non-secret, way to fight Covid19 in Birmingham.

Disclaimer: The views expressed within this blog are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Centre for Brexit Studies and Birmingham City University.

	Neighbourhood (MSOA)	PHE Reported Cases - last 7 days	People	Parliamentary Constituency
1	Springfield & Hall Green West	40	11,032	Birmingham, Hall Green
2	Wake Green East & Moseley Bog	28	8,187	Birmingham, Selly Oak
3	Greet & Sparkhill South	27	15,682	Birmingham, Hall Green
4	Billesley Common	25	8,178	Birmingham, Selly Oak
5	Attwood Green & Park Central	25	9,587	Birmingham, Edgbaston
6	Edgbaston North	21	11,272	Birmingham, Edgbaston
7	Balsall Heath East	21	8,255	Birmingham, Hall Green
8	Moor Green & Cannon Hill	18	7,023	Birmingham, Hall Green
9	Hall Green Central	18	7,008	Birmingham, Hall Green
10	Sparkbrook South	17	7,576	Birmingham, Hall Green
11	Ward End & Bromford West	16	12,638	Birmingham, Hodge Hill
12	Yardley Wood East	15	7,949	Birmingham, Hall Green
13	Stetchford	13	8,652	Birmingham, Yardley
14	Sparkbrook North	13	8,195	Birmingham, Ladywood
15	Five Ways South & Calthorpe Park	13	7,430	Birmingham, Edgbaston
16	Saltley West	12	9,267	Birmingham, Ladywood
17	Little Bromwich	12	8,926	Birmingham, Hodge Hill
18	Acocks Green East	12	12,324	Birmingham, Yardley
19	Moseley	12	6,741	Birmingham, Hall Green
20	Saltley East	11	11,856	Birmingham, Hodge Hill
21	Bordesley	11	15,672	Birmingham, Ladywood
22	Brandwood End	10	8,159	Birmingham, Selly Oak
		390	211,609	
	Birmingham Total	787		