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Covid-19: Liverpool's intensive care and critical care beds are “filling up fast,” health leader warns

Matthew Limb

Intensive care and critical care beds in Liverpool's hospitals are “filling up very fast” and could surpass the peak of the first wave of covid-19 within a week, a city councillor has warned.

Paul Brant, cabinet member for health and adult social care at Liverpool City Council, said that accelerating demand for hospital services in Liverpool was “crowding out anything other than dealing with covid.”

From Wednesday 14 October, Liverpool and neighbouring local authorities became the first area in England to have new tier 3 restrictions imposed, reflecting the highest level of risk, under the government's new three tier system of covid alerts.¹

Speaking on BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme on 14 October,² Brant said that Liverpool's hospital beds were already over 90% full, with covid-19 patients making up an increasing proportion of patients.

“Our acute hospital trusts have occupancy levels of covid positive patients of over 250,” he said. “At the current rate of increase, we would expect Liverpool to surpass the peak of the first wave probably within the next seven to 10 days.”

He also expressed concern at reports that local councils in England were being asked by the Department of Health to draw up a plan by the end of this week to allow people with a coronavirus infection to return to care homes in their area, in “designated settings” inspected by the Care Quality Commission.

Non-urgent operations

Brant told *Today*, “This seems to us to be repeating exactly the kind of activity that allowed the virus to rip through parts of our care home sector on the first wave.

“A much better solution would be to ensure that everybody who is discharged from hospital is only discharged at a point when they have had a negative test result.”

The *Health Service Journal*³ has reported that Liverpool University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is considering scaling back non-urgent operations to help cope with the surge of covid hospital admissions.

Brant warned that curtailing elective surgery and diagnostic procedures—which take up a lot of beds in hospitals—would have “negative consequences.” He added, “It's become clear that the intensity of demand on the hospital services in Liverpool is crowding out anything other than dealing with covid.”

At a press conference in Liverpool on 13 October alongside council leaders, Liverpool's director of public health, Matt Ashton, said that covid-19 was spreading throughout all age groups and that exposure to the virus was coming from many different sectors in the city.

He said that hospital beds were increasingly being taken up by patients with covid and that deaths would rise, as interventions take a couple of weeks to have an impact, the *Liverpool Echo* reported.⁴ He told the event, “It is absolutely essential we do everything in our power to control and stop the spread of the virus.”

Steve Rotherham, metro mayor for the Liverpool city region, warned of a “real and present danger that our NHS could be overwhelmed.”

- 1 Iacobucci G. Covid-19: Three tier alert system takes effect across England. *BMJ* 2020;371:m3961doi: 10.1136/bmj.m3961.
- 2 BBC. *Today* programme. 14 Oct 2020. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000nf2k>.
- 3 Dunhill L. Exclusive: covid-hit trust scales back electives and prepares staff for redeployment. *Health Serv J* 2020 Oct 12. <https://www.hsj.co.uk/liverpool-university-hospitals-nhs-foundation-trust/exclusive-covid-hit-trust-scales-back-electives-and-prepares-staff-for-redeployment/7028617.article>.
- 4 McCoid S. Refusing tier 3 restrictions is “not an option” says metro mayor Steve Rotherham. *Liverpool Echo* 2020 Oct 13. <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/refusing-tier-3-restrictions-not-19096527>.

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