

Sandwell Health Protection Annual Report 2024-25



Foreword

I am pleased to introduce Sandwell's first Health Protection Annual Report, covering 2024–2025. The report brings together key intelligence from the Council, UKHSA, NHS England, the Black Country ICB, and local NHS Trusts to provide assurance that strong systems and partnerships are in place to protect the health of Sandwell residents.

Over the past year, Sandwell has responded to a range of public health challenges, including outbreaks of measles, pertussis, and seasonal winter illnesses. We strengthened vaccination programmes, enhanced infection prevention in care settings, and improved surveillance across infectious diseases to reduce the likelihood of future disease too. Our response has been shaped by collaboration, resilience, and a shared commitment to reducing health inequalities.

While progress has been made, particularly in areas such as vaccination engagement and TB screening pilots, this report highlights ongoing challenges—including low vaccination uptake, high TB incidence, and rising pressures in sexual and environmental health.

This report sets out clear priorities for 2025/26, including developing an Oral Health Strategy, a focus on Vaccination and Immunisation, monitoring TB incidence and extending latent TB screening, and strengthening pandemic preparedness. I look forward to seeing the results of this work as we do all we can to improve health protection in the Borough.

I would like to thank all the partners and frontline teams whose dedication ensures we work together to protect the health of our population, with a focus on the most vulnerable people. Together, we will strengthen this health protection work, putting prevention, preparedness, and rapid response at the centre of our approach to improving health and well-being here in Sandwell.

Dr Frances Howie
Director of Public Health
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council



Executive Summary:

The 2024–2025 Health Protection Annual Report provides assurance to the Director of Public Health and the Sandwell Health and Wellbeing Board that strong governance, partnerships, and systems are in place to protect the health of Sandwell residents. The report brings together intelligence from the Council, UKHSA, NHS England, the Black Country ICB, primary care and local NHS Trusts to outline performance, risks, and priorities for the year ahead.

Challenges in this year included outbreaks of measles, pertussis, and seasonal winter illnesses, and persistently low vaccination and screening uptake rates. Strengthened vaccination programmes, improved infection prevention in care settings, and enhanced surveillance supported the local response and reduced the likelihood of further disease. System partners continued to prioritise equity, resilience, and action on health inequalities.

Vaccinations and Immunisations:

Childhood vaccination uptake improved in several areas but remains below the 95% herd immunity target across many programmes. Measles outbreaks prompted GP weekend hubs and school-based catch-up clinics, with 27% uptake in GP clinics and 18% in education settings. School-aged flu vaccination increased for the third consecutive year, supported by improved parental engagement and reminders.

Tuberculosis:

TB rates in Sandwell remain significantly higher than regional and national averages, with 20.6 cases per 100,000 in 2024. A three-month pilot offering latent TB screening for new arrivals through ESOL clinics identified a 22% positivity rate and strong engagement, leading to an extension of the programme.

Sexual Health:

Syphilis rates increased to 16.7 per 100,000, higher than the West Midlands and similar to England. Gonorrhoea diagnoses fell to 98 per 100,000 but remained above regional levels. Chlamydia detection declined among 15–24-year-olds in line with national trends.

Care Settings and Infection Control:

The Health Protection Team managed 42 care home outbreaks, the majority respiratory-related. Infection prevention audits showed high compliance, with 69 homes achieving over 95% and no homes rated inadequate. Sharps safety emerged as a key area for improvement.

Environmental Health & Air Quality:

The team carried out 948 food hygiene inspections, issued enforcement notices, closed unsafe premises, and responded to over 1,400 service demand cases. More than 500 sporadic gastrointestinal infections were investigated, including campylobacter, salmonella, cryptosporidium, and E. coli. Sandwell's first smoke control area was introduced in 2024, with a new Air Quality Action Plan to be published in 2025.

Key Strategic Recommendations for 2025/26:

- Develop a life-course Oral Health Strategy that spans the life course.



- Establish a Vaccination and Immunisations subgroup to increase uptake rates.
- Strategic focus on TB, consideration to extend latent TB infection screening due to rising incidence.
- Live-test pandemic preparedness through Exercise Pegasus.
- Review the Pandemic Flu Plan in line with forthcoming national guidance.

Sandwell remains committed to evidence-based, equitable, and collaborative health protection, ensuring residents remain at the centre of prevention, preparedness, and population-level protection efforts.

A change of government in July 2024 meant that changes in the NHS started to be shaped. A period of consultation from October 2024 and publication of the 10 year plan in July 2025 have meant that change will take place at place, region and national levels. Revised ICB cluster arrangements and changes to NHS England will bring change and new opportunities but the assurance system for health protection will ensure that all partners will work together in new ways protect the public's health with a particular focus on narrowing health inequalities.

Introduction:

Sandwell continues to face a complex and evolving landscape of infectious disease threats, environmental hazards, and public health challenges. As one of the most deprived local authorities in England, with higher levels of vulnerability to poor health outcomes, the borough requires a coordinated and resilient approach to protecting its residents' health. Health protection plays a vital role in safeguarding individuals and communities from communicable diseases, environmental risks, and other threats, and an important part of this is ensuring that robust surveillance, preparedness, and response systems are in place.

This is the first Health Protection Annual Report for Sandwell and covers 2024–2025. It provides assurance to the Director of Public Health and the Sandwell Health and Wellbeing Board that effective plans, partnerships, and governance arrangements are in place to protect the population. It brings together evidence and intelligence from across the local authority, the NHS, UK Health Security Agency, and wider system partners to highlight key achievements, areas for improvement, and emerging risks.

Over the past year, Sandwell has responded to a range of challenges—including measles, pertussis, winter illnesses, and rising rates of sexually transmitted infections—while continuing to strengthen vaccination uptake, infection prevention in care settings, and preparedness for future public health emergencies. This report sets out those actions and outlines strategic priorities for the year ahead, ensuring that residents remain at the centre of prevention, protection, and resilience efforts.



Background

The purpose of the Health Protection Annual Report is to provide assurance to the Director of Public Health that plans are in place to protect the population's health; a mandated function for the local authority of the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

The report comes from the Health Protection Board which is a sub-group of the statutory Health and Wellbeing Board and will focus on the Director of Public's Health statutory oversight and assurance role of health protection plans to protect the health of the population of Sandwell. Assurances will be provided on the delivery of health protection plans, including outbreak management, infection prevention and control, public protection and performance of immunisation and screening programmes.

Sandwell is the 19th most deprived Local Authority in England out of a total of 296, according to the Office of National Statistics. Deprivation is a significant risk factor for infectious disease and also impacts on access to services. Deprivation is a key determinant of health and is linked to poor outcomes across the whole health protection programme locally.

Sandwell Health Protection Programme Priorities:

- Control of communicable diseases
- Control of novel and emerging diseases
- Emergency preparedness, resilience, and response
- Investigation and control of incidents and outbreaks
- Surveillance of communicable diseases
- The prevention and management of infections in health and social care environments.
- Assurance of local immunisation programmes and cancer screening programmes
- Reducing TB burden

Sandwell Health Protection Board & Governance

Board meetings are held quarterly with membership drawn from:

- Public Health - Health Protection (SMBC) (Chaired by Service Manager, Health Protection)
- Resilience Management (SMBC)
- Adult Social Care (SMBC)
- Environmental Health (SMBC)
- Air Quality (SMBC)
- UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA)
- NHS England (NHSE)
- Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospital Trust
- Black Country NHS Foundation Trust

This board reports annually to the Sandwell Joint Health and Wellbeing Board, see figure1.



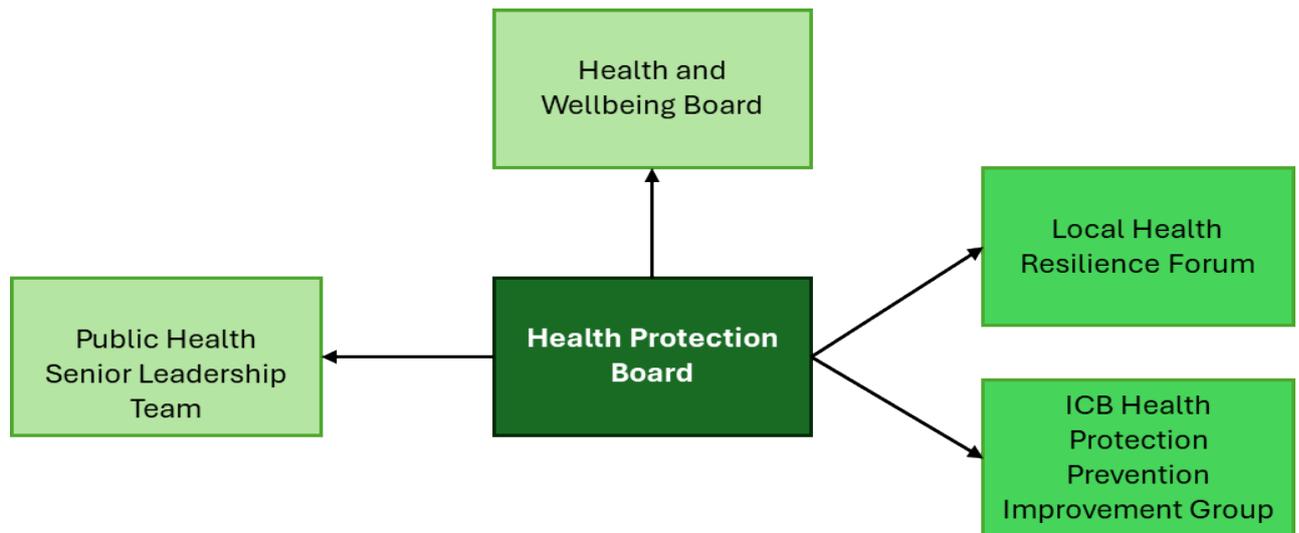


Figure 1. Health protection governance arrangements

Emergency Preparedness, Resilience & Response

Pandemic preparedness

Sandwell has an existing Influenza Pandemic Plan 2019-2024. The development of a new pandemic plan will be implemented following the release of new National Guidance anticipated in 2025/26. Whilst the national guidance will provide a footprint for the local plan other considerations will be included following the UK Covid-19 inquiry, which produced the first set of recommendations in July 2024.

To test organisational preparedness and response to the threat of a pandemic the government have planned a national exercise for 2025, Exercise Pegasus, where a multiagency response will be tested to threat of a new and emerging disease.

Extreme Weather Health Plan

Sandwell Local Authority's Extreme Weather Plan was updated in August 2024. This reflects the changes to national surveillance and alert system. The Plan includes action cards for key service across the local authority and governance arrangements across the system.



Children & Young People

Infectious Disease & Outbreaks:

Measles

Measles is a vaccine-preventable disease, which is highly contagious and spreads rapidly when an infected person breathes, coughs, or sneezes. Young unvaccinated children and pregnant women are particularly vulnerable. Measles can lead to complications such as ear and chest infections, fits and diarrhoea and dehydration in younger children. On rare occasions measles can also lead to infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) or brain itself (encephalitis) which can lead to long term disabilities or even death.

Sandwell and the Black Country saw an increase in cases from 1 January to 31 December 2024, following an outbreak in Birmingham and surrounding areas which saw 562 confirmed cases in West Midlands. Between April 2024 and March 2025 there were 14 confirmed cases in Sandwell.

In response to the increased cases across the region, Sandwell council worked with local partners across the system to promote Measles Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccination in education settings, primary care and local communications channels.

Pertussis (whooping cough)

Pertussis is a vaccine-preventable illness that can cause serious complications including mortality. Pregnant women are eligible for vaccination, which provides passive protection for the baby until 8 weeks of age, when the 6-in-1 vaccination can be given. Sandwell has had challenges, ranging from residents not taking the vaccination to complications with health professional vaccine administration.

Between April 2024 and March 2025 Sandwell had reported 32 confirmed cases of pertussis. Working with maternity services will be critical in the future to increase the uptake of the pertussis vaccination.

Winter illness

Winter illnesses are a group of infectious diseases that circulate at higher levels during colder months, often peaking between November and March. Winter illnesses tracked by UKHSA include Influenza, COVID-19, Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), norovirus and other respiratory viruses.

Between August 2024 and March 2025, seven primary and/or secondary education settings had outbreaks of norovirus and respiratory illnesses with a total of 203 children affected. A small number of settings made the difficult decision to close the setting, however it should be noted that in all cases this was due to health and safety requirement around staffing levels and not as a measure to control the outbreak.



Vaccinations

Childhood vaccinations

Immunisation rates for children aged 0 to 5 in Sandwell have gradually increased in recent years, however, they fail to reach the 95% needed to attain herd immunity.

Age Vaccine Due	Vaccine	Q1 %	Q2%	Q3 %	Q4 %	Target %	England %	West Midlands %
8, 12 and 16 weeks	12 m DTaP/IPV/Hib3/Hep B%	89.8	92.1	90.6	88.7	95	91.4	91.1
8 and 16 weeks	12 m MenB%	90.2	91.6	90.5	88.7	95	91	90.6
12 weeks	12 m PCV1%	92.1	93.6	92.2	90.2	95	93.1	92.8
8 and 12 weeks	12 m Rota%	86.1	87.4	86.1	86.1	95	88.8	92.7
8, 12 and 16 weeks	24 m DTaP/IPV/Hib3/HepB%	91.3	91.1	91.1	93.2	95	92.5	92.6
12 months	24 m Hib/Men C%	87.1	89.4	87.3	88.5	95	88.6	88.2
12 months	24 MenB Booster%	84.8	88	85.6	86.7	95	87.4	86.9
12 months	24 m MMR1%	87.3	89.7	87.6	88.2	95	88.9	88.6
8, 12 and 16 weeks	24 m PCV Booster%	86.4	89	86.8	87.5	95	88.1	87.7
8, 12 and 16 weeks	5 y DTaP/IPV/Hib3/Hep B%	92.1	92.1	91.2	92.7	95	92.8	93
3 years 4 months	5 y DTaP/IPV Booster%	76.8	77.4	75.5	79.1	95	81.4	82
12 months	5 y Hib/ MenC Booster%	89.3	88	88.8	91.3	95	88.9	90.5
12 months	5 y MMR1%	90.4	91.2	90.9	92.9	95	91.9	91.9
3 years 4 months	5 y MMR2%	79	79.9	77.4	81.1	95	83.7	83.6

Table 1: provides coverage of childhood immunisations in Sandwell between 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025. Data provided through Black Country ICS Immunisation Board.

DTaP	Vaccine for diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (whooping cough)
IPV	Inactive polio vaccine
Hib	Haemophilus influenza type b vaccine protects against this disease which causes serious infections and complications
Rota	Rota virus vaccine
Hep B	Hepatitis B vaccine
Men B	Meningitis B vaccine
Men C	Meningitis C vaccine
MMR	Measles, mumps and rubella vaccine

Table 2: provides a list of vaccine terminology.



The 6-in-1 vaccine (DTaP/IPV/Hib3/Hep B) is given to children at 8, 12, and 16 weeks old and protects against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, hepatitis B, poliomyelitis (polio), and haemophilus influenzae type b. Sandwell vaccination coverage remains below the West Midlands and England average.

The measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccination remains behind the West Midlands and England uptake. There was an increase in quarter four in 2024-25 for MMR1 and MMR2 at 5 years. This increase is likely attributed to an increase in measures to encourage parents to have their children vaccinated following a regional outbreak of measles.

Collaboration through projects, engagement and communications among NHS England, Public Health Health Protection, and Black Country ICB has resulted in increasing immunisation rates.

To improve uptake of childhood vaccinations in Sandwell, training to health care professionals was offered to those who work with children and young families. Over 60 Sandwell Family Hub staff attended vaccination education seminars to provide staff with knowledge to be able to talk to parents around vaccines. Session feedback highlighted it was both informative and thought-provoking. More than 50 Health Visitors and Nursery Nurses were provided with vaccination training which was around immunology, vaccine scheduling, and challenging conversations.

In response to the increase in measles cases in the West Midlands a set of initiatives were put in place. General Practice (GP) vaccination hubs were set up at weekend to increase the uptake of MMR vaccinations using call and recall. 576 GP appointments were made available across three sites during a 16-week period. 195 appointments utilised with 44 slots not attended (27% of eligible patients were vaccinated). Only 25% were white ethnicity while 75% were from other ethnicities.

NHS England selected Sandwell to be a catch up site for MMR vaccination. This was based on being an area with lower uptake rates and being close in distance to the local measles outbreak. Catch up MMR clinics were put on in 15 selected primary and secondary educational settings. Settings were based on data of current MMR uptake. 1746 students were eligible and 291 children and young people were vaccinated this equated to 18% of eligible students vaccinated.

During this period of the West Midlands measles outbreak a number of challenges were found in particular there were a reduced number of primary care staff trained to administer vaccinations; system issues with call and recall; and low confidence in motivational interviewing techniques. The BC ICB responded with provision of additional training for primary care staff.

Young People

In Sandwell, Vaccination UK are commissioned to deliver the vaccine programme for young people aged between 13 to 15 years in the secondary school setting. Local performance is improving but still low, and significantly lower than England averages:



Age Vaccine Due	Vaccine	Sandwell Value 2023%	Sandwell Value 2024%	Target (%)	England Value %	West Midlands Value %
14 to 15 years old	MenACWY % *	45	60.1	95	73	71.9
13- to 14-year-old	HPV female % **	54.4	64.2	95	72.9	70.8
13 to 14 year old	HPV males %**	52.5	63.3	95	67.7	66
14 to 15 years old	Td/IPV %***	45	65.3	95	74.1	71.8

Table 3: provides coverage of childhood immunisations in Sandwell for 2024. Data provided by Vaccination UK.

*England value data is from 2023/24, not available for 2024/25

** England value data is from 2023/24 HPV one dose value, not available for 2024/25

*** England value data is from 2022/23 data, not available for 2024/25

Men ACWY	Meningitis vaccines that protect against typing A, C, W, Y.
HPV	Human papillomavirus vaccine
Td/IPV	Combined vaccine for diphtheria, tetanus and inactive polio

Table 4: provides a list vaccine terminology.

Prior to 2025, Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine was administered with two doses. Since January 2025 this changed to a single dose. The most recent data reports that Sandwell has increased vaccination rates in all teenage vaccines from 2023 to 2024 (see table 3 and 4), particularly in meningitis (MEN ACWY) and diphtheria, tetanus and inactive polio (Td/IPV). These vaccines are the last doses needed to ensure lifelong protection.

Influenza

Vaccination UK are commissioned by NHS England to deliver school-age influenza (flu) vaccines in Sandwell. Vaccination UK uses existing platforms to promote vaccinations in school, such as faith leaders, education attendance lead meetings, and headteacher briefings hosted by the local authority. A multiagency approach between vaccination UK, Public Health and Education is adopted to engage with school and parents.

Age Vaccine Due	Vaccine	Sandwell Value 2023 %	Sandwell Value 2024 %	Target (%)	England Value %	West Midlands %
Reception to Year 11 5 to 16	Influenza (flu) %	39.2	39.89	95	55.1	52.8

Table 5: Influenza (flu) uptake data for school-aged children from ICB ICS Immunisation Board 08.01.2025.

Sandwell's flu vaccination rates for school-aged children have increased only very slightly in 2024 and are still below average for the West Midlands and for England as a whole. (see



table 5). Vaccination UK attended end-of-day school pick-ups to collect consent forms and to engage with parents and carers to myth bust and address any concerns. A new approach for 2024 saw Vaccination UK introduce of text message reminders to parents to prompt the completion of consent forms.

Adults

Tuberculosis (TB)

The three-year average TB incidence rate between 2022-24 in Sandwell was 17.9 per 100,000 population. This was significantly higher than the rate for the West Midlands (10 per 100,000), and also higher than the rate for England (8.5 per 100,000). In 2024, 73 cases of TB were notified in residents of Sandwell, a rate of 20.6 per 100,000 population. This was significantly higher than the rate for the West Midlands (11.5 per 100,000), and also significantly higher than the rate for England (9.4 per 100,000). The 2024 TB rate for Sandwell represents an increase compared to 2023, when it was 14.4 per 100,000. In Sandwell 13% of adults with TB (aged 15 years and older) had at least one social risk factor. The number of people with TB born outside of the UK in Sandwell in 2024 was 63 (86%).

Proportion of patients that first presentation to healthcare less than 3 weeks from symptom onset was 56% in 2024. Those seen by specialist services within two weeks of referral from NHS/primary care 75% in 2024. These numbers remain relatively stable to previous years. Treatment completion rates of 86% of people with TB in 2023 completed treatment in less than 12 months; this was higher than the average for the West Midlands (83%). The local trust is observing an increase in multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis, which is also been seen at a national level. This will continue to be monitored through the Sandwell Health Protection Board and including the local Black Country TB Network.

Sandwell is an area of high incidence of TB, along with only 3 other areas in the West Midlands. This means that TB incidence is over 10 people per 100,000 of the population. New entrant screening (Also known as Latent TB Infection (LTBI)) is targeted screening in areas of high incidence across England. LTBI screening identifies TB during its dormant phase and provides better outcomes for the individual through treatment and protect the public by reducing the risk. Sandwell offers LTBI screening through the New Entrants TB Screening Programme commissioning by NHS England.

Sandwell Local Authority commissioned a three-month pilot to screen for latent TB in new arrivals to Sandwell. Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust TB Service delivered three clinics at English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) at Sandwell College. The pilot was funded by public health at just under £9,000. 33 appointments available, 11 per clinic and all clinics were full book. The clinics were promoted by the ESOL college and engagement was high with the Sandwell TB Service. In those screened, a 22% positivity rate was identified. One person didn't attend, and one had previously screened positive for TB. Those who tested positive for TB were referred into their local TB service for treatment. All those who were screened through the ESOL college had previously been offered LTBI screening through the national new entrants screening programme using flag 4 data once



registered with a GP, however all declined this opportunity. Due to the high positivity rate, further funding was approved to extend the pilot for a further 12 months approved by the Public Health Commissioning Board. A poster presentation on this work was presented at the Infection Prevention Society Conference in November 2024.

Complex cases of TB require dedicated time and resource to support the needs of the resident. Treatment compliance, housing needs and no recourse to public funds (NRPF) can impact treatment outcome. Sandwell has a multiagency NRPF pathway to ensure positive cases can receive the support and treatment they require. This includes housing and social support to increase compliance and therefore improve their health outcomes which further reduces the risk to the public.

Sexual Health

Sexual Health Services are a mandated service commissioned by the local authority by its Director of Public Health. Sandwell council currently commissions Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust to deliver this service.

Syphilis

Syphilis rates are rising across Sandwell, the West Midlands and in England.

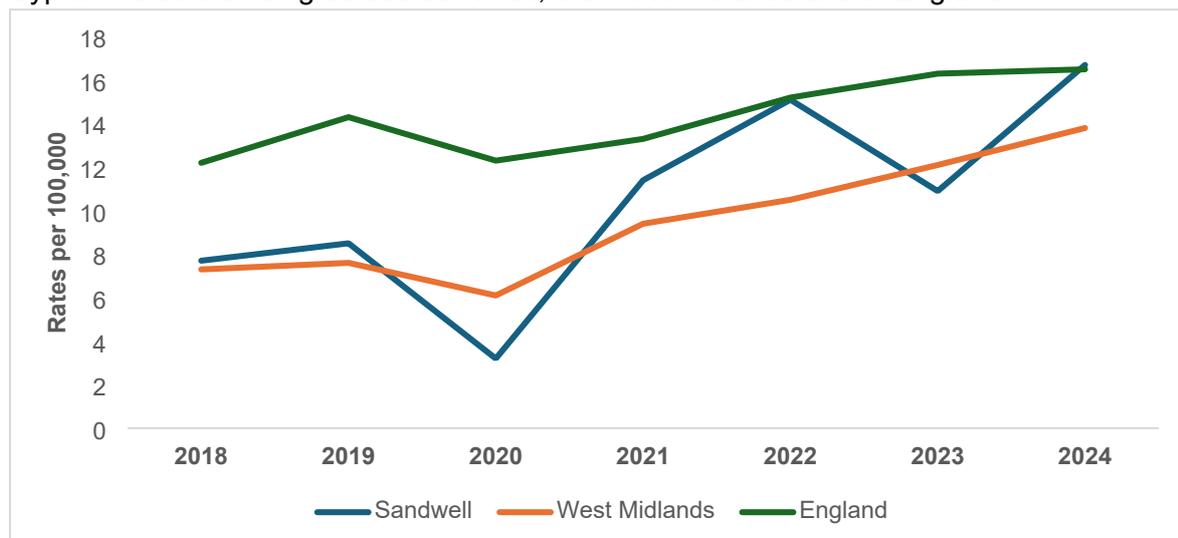


Figure 2: shows Sandwell's syphilis trends from 2018 to 2024. Source: Fingertips Public Health Profiles (Department of Health and Social Care).

In Sandwell in 2024, the were rates (16.7 per 100,000) higher than in the West Midlands (13.8 per 100,000) and similar to those in England (16.5 per 100,000). In the period 2014 to 2024 (figure 2), Syphilis rates in Sandwell have gone through periods of fluctuations with rates in 2020 returning to 2014 levels and rising sharply in 2021 and 2022.

Gonorrhoea

There have been increases in gonorrhoea diagnosis rates nationally over recent years. Rates in Sandwell have since been reducing to 98 per 100,000 in 2024. Sandwell rates are above the West Midlands average (84 per 100,000) and below the England rate (124 per 100,000), figure 3.



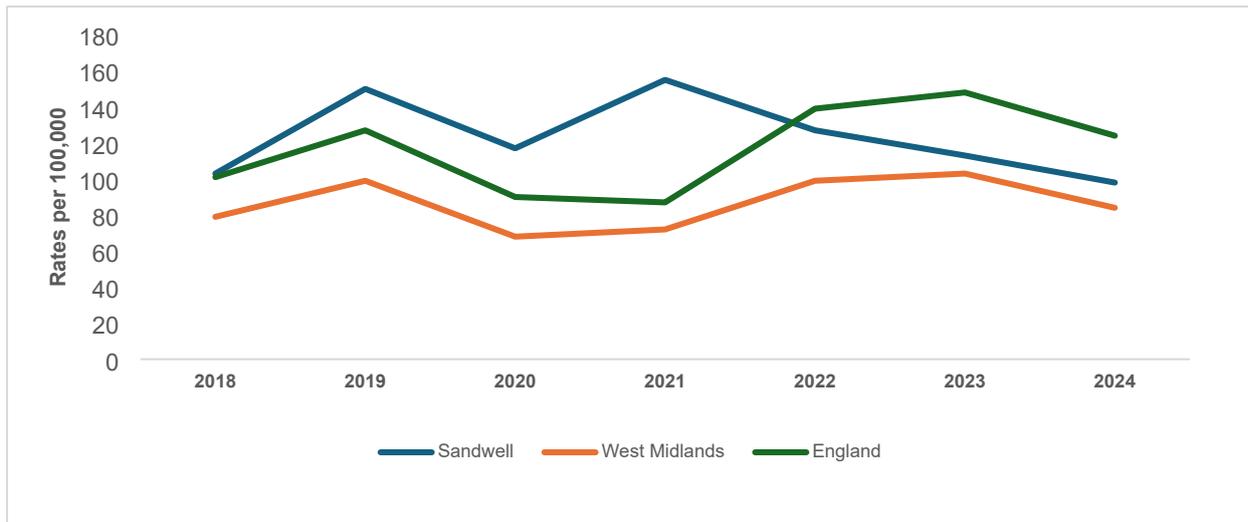


Figure 3: demonstrates Sandwell's gonorrhoea trends from 2018 to 2024. Source: Fingertips Public Health Profiles (Department of Health and Social Care).

Chlamydia Screening

Chlamydia detection rates have been decreasing among 15-24-year-olds nationally, regionally and in Sandwell between 2019 and 2024 (figure 4a).

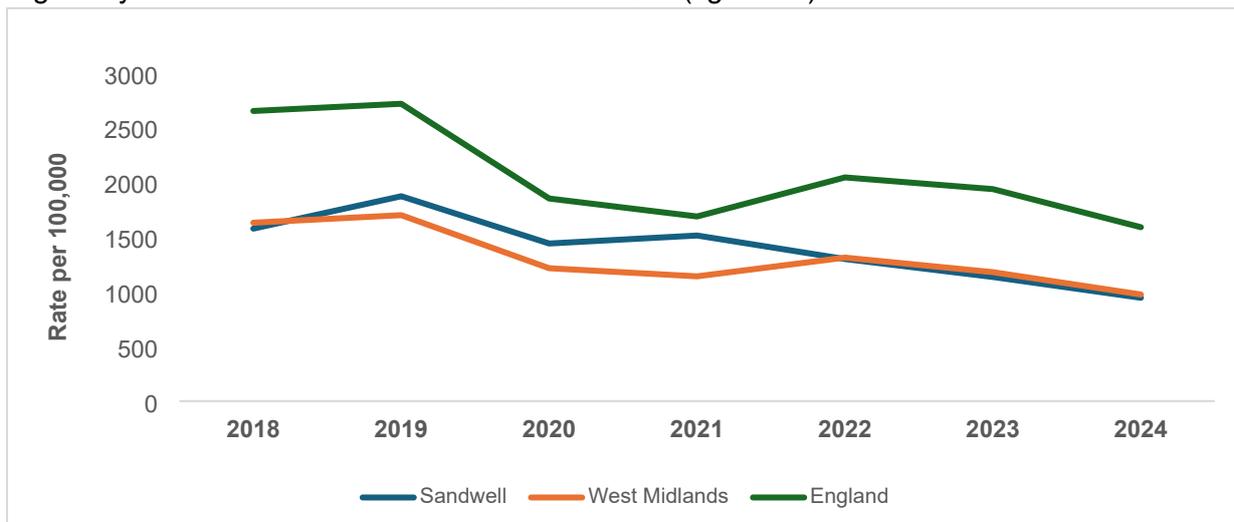


Figure 4a: shows Sandwell's chlamydia detection rate in 15-24 year olds from 2018 to 2024. Source: Fingertips Public Health Profiles (Department of Health and Social Care).

In 2024, detections rates (944 per 100,000) were lower in Sandwell, than in the West Midlands (974 per 100,000) and England (1250 per 100,000). Chlamydia detection rates among females have also been decreasing among 15-24-year-olds females since 2019 but still remain higher than West Midlands.



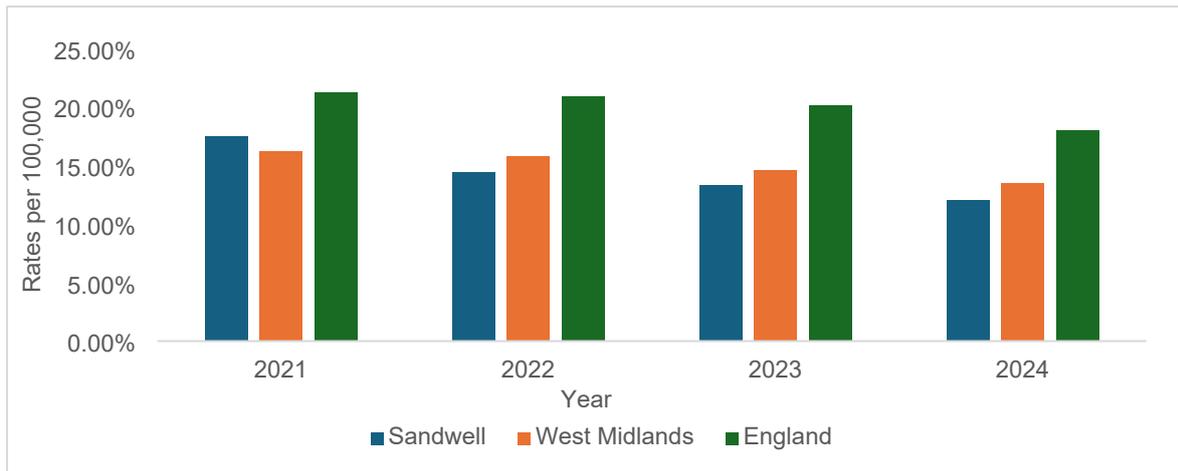


Figure 4b: demonstrates Sandwell's chlamydia screening in females ages 15-24 years old from 2021 to 2024. Source: Fingertips Public Health Profiles (Department of Health and Social Care).

Females are considered to be more susceptible to the impact of untreated chlamydia infections, and it is detection rates for females that are the new indicator on the Public Health Outcomes Framework since 2021. There has been a decrease in chlamydia screening uptake in Sandwell, the West Midlands and England since this new indicator has been implemented, figure 4b.

Vaccinations

Maternal vaccination: Pertussis

Maternal vaccinations in Sandwell are provided by Birmingham Women and Childrens NHS Trust.

Age Vaccine Due	Vaccine	Apr -24	May -24	Jun -24	Jul -24	Aug -24	Sep -24	Oct -24	Nov -24	Dec -24	Jan -25	Feb- 25	Mar -25
Maternal vaccine	Pertussis (whooping cough)	13 2	18 1	22 2	25 2	14 7	15 5	10 5	81	12 3	11 8	126	88

Table 6: shows Pertussis uptake data from ICB ICS Immunisation Board meetings 12.02.25, 12.03.23 and 09.07.2025. NB, data is number of pregnant women vaccinated and not percentages.

Maternal vaccination: RSV

In Sandwell, pertussis vaccinations are provided by maternity services. Vaccination rates have fluctuated due to limited access to vaccinators (table7).

Age Vaccine Due	Vaccine	Sep- 24	Oct- 24	Nov- 24	Dec- 24	Jan- 25	Feb- 25	Mar- 25
Maternal vaccine	Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)	6	78	50	80	93	82	69



Table 7: provides information for Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) uptake data from ICB ICS Immunisation Board meetings 12.02.25 and 09.07.2025. NB, data is number of pregnant women vaccinated and not percentages.

In September 2024, NHS England launched a new vaccination programme for Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) for pregnant women (and people aged 75 to 79). One of the most common viruses that causes colds and coughs in the winter is the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). While RSV often causes minor symptoms, some newborns, elderly individuals, and those with long-term medical issues may experience severe symptoms. Pregnant women were to be vaccinated by maternity services (see table 7), while people aged 75 to 79 were to be vaccinated by primary care.

Maternal vaccination: Influenza

Maternal vaccinations are delivered by Birmingham Women's and Childrens NHS Trust.

Flu vaccination in pregnancy	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25
Eligible population (SWBH)	524	530	405	522
Maternal Flu vaccine delivered	124	59	66	66

Table 8: provides information for influenza (flu) vaccine uptake data from ICB ICS Immunisation Board meetings 08.01.25 and 12.03.2025. NB, data is number of pregnant women vaccinated and not percentages.

Adult Vaccinations:

Influenza

Influenza vaccinations across all eligible cohorts have been in decline since 2020. Influenza vaccination uptake in 2024-25 for those age 65 and over in Sandwell was 61.4% compared to the West Midlands at 73.5% and England at 74.9%. Influenza vaccination uptake rates have been decreasing nationally and locally. Sandwell has the lowest uptakes in the West Midlands for this age range.

A similar trend follows for the influenza vaccination uptake those at risk. Uptake in Sandwell is 29.9%, almost 10% lower than the West Midlands and England average.

For the autumn and winter 2024/25 Flu and Covid-19 programme only less than half of Sandwell Primary Care Networks chose to deliver vaccinations to care homes and housebound patients.

Black Country ICB commissioned Central Health to provide a roving model to deliver Flu and Covid in the community.



Age Vaccine Due	Vaccine	Vaccine and activity Sept 2023 to Jan 2024	Vaccine and activity Sept 2024 to Jan 2025
	Clinics Held	75	20
Over 18's	Covid	748	303
Over 18's	Flu (Influenza)	347	178

Table 9: provides information for influenza (flu) vaccine uptake data from ICB ICS Immunisation Board meetings 08.01.25 and Central Health's weekly reported data.

To determine the ideal location for clinics, Public Health Health Protection supplied localised intelligence based on need and high areas of footfall. The vaccination vans are positioned in underprivileged neighbourhoods and where we are aware of poor uptake, this strategy offers equity and reduced inequality. Due to a reduction in funding, Sandwell saw a decrease in the number of clinics available 2024–2025 compared to the previous year (see table 9).

RSV

The RSV vaccination is offered to adults aged 75–79 in England. In Sandwell 4,883 people are eligible, 1108 received their vaccination, this is an uptake rate of 23%. This is an increase on the previous year but still remains lower than West Midlands and England uptake.

Shingles

The shingles vaccinations are for those aged 70-79 years in England. 2022-23 is the most recent data available for shingles vaccination update. In Sandwell uptake is 35.7% compared to 46.9% for West Midlands and 48.3% for England. The Sandwell rates remain low and relatively unchanged in recent years.

Screening programmes

NHS England (NHSE) are responsible for commissioning screening programmes. This responsibility will be redelegated to Integrated Care Boards (ICB) and is anticipated to change in 2025/2026. Through the Health Protection Board, NHSE provide quarterly screening reports for Sandwell. The Black Country ICB (BC ICB) provide further intelligence and data through its Cancer Prevention, Screening, and Early Detection Group.

Breast

England aims to test at least 70% of eligible women within six months of their initial appointment. Except for May 2024, September 2024, and January 2025, when the rates were higher than what was desired, the take-up rates in Sandwell continuously fell short of the 70% target between April 2024 and March 2025 (67%).

Bowel

In April 2025, the age range for bowel screening will be expanded from 54 to 74 years old to include those between the ages of 50 and 53. Although 52% is the lowest acceptable acceptance rate, 60% is the ideal goal. Sandwell's, uptake was 61.7% for 2024 which sits slightly higher than the ideal rate.



Cervical

Cervical screen is reported in two age categories 25 to 49 and 50 to 64. The West Midlands average is 65.2% for 25–49-year-olds compared to Sandwell's 62.8% and for women over 50–64-year-olds 73.7% compared to Sandwell's 70.2%. Sandwell's uptake rate is lower than the national target. The prevalence of cervical screening is greater among those aged 50 to 64 than among those aged 25 to 64.

Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm Screening Coverage

The NHS Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) Screening Programme in England offers a free, one-off ultrasound scan to men during the year they turn 65 to detect potentially fatal aortic swelling. It is designed to reduce mortality through early identification, with surveillance or surgery offered if a large aneurysm is found. AAA screening uptake in 2024-25 for Sandwell was 72.9%. Whilst this is lower than the West Midlands and England rate, 81.7% and 82.2% respectively, the recent trend shows uptake is increasing.

Oral Health

For people and communities, oral health is essential to their physical, emotional, social, and financial well-being. Effective oral care in care homes is essential for preventing pain, infection and malnutrition. NICE guidance outlines care homes must assess resident's oral health upon admission, documenting daily and staff are trained to ensure daily toothbrushing through a person-centred routine.

The Public Health Team, in partnership with Birmingham Community Healthcare Dental Nurses piloted a new project. The 'mouth care matters' initiative aimed to improve oral health standards in Sandwell's residential, nursing, and learning disability homes. The project focused on empowering care staff through training, auditing care practices, and ensuring the presence of policies, assessments, and appropriate oral care documentation. This project was undertaken between April 2024 and March 2025. Each setting had a pre and post oral health audit to see if the programme was effective.

Following training there was an improvement in all areas:

- Policy presence improved from 70% to 100%.
- Oral care plans increased in quality and completeness 94% to 100%.
- Assessment completion rose from 79% to 90%.
- Twice daily cleaning remained static at 60%, indicating a need for further improvement.
- Toothbrush replacement improved to 70% but still requires monitoring.

Initial findings found that the programme saw changes on policy and recording of toothbrushing. Challenges identified include training and capacity to ensure toothbrushing is carried out regularly and effectively.

Oral health remains underdeveloped in Sandwell across the life course. It requires both strengthened strategic commitment and effective operational implementation to drive sustainable improvement.



Infection Prevention and Control in Care Settings

Sandwell Council’s Public Health team provide infection, prevention and control to care and residential settings in Sandwell. This provision includes prevention through educations and auditing and specialist advice in response to incidents and outbreaks in these settings. The service helps maintain discharge flow between hospitals and care home settings, minimising the impact that care and residential setting outbreaks can have on the system through outbreak management and prevention of onwards transmission. Providing assurance that care homes are complying with all infection prevention and control measures and ensuring residents are safe. Collaboration and partnerships with local partners include the Councils Adult Social Care team, safeguarding, CQC, NHS partners and UKHSA. This work aligns to the Better Care Fund and the Council Plan 2024-27.

Care Setting Outbreaks:

Sandwell Public Health Health Protection Team have a localised understanding and work in partnership with UKHSA to support all care home outbreaks. UKHSA will be notified, will lead if necessary, and act as a point of escalation.

In 2024-25 the Public Health Health Protection team managed 42 outbreaks in care home settings (figure 10).

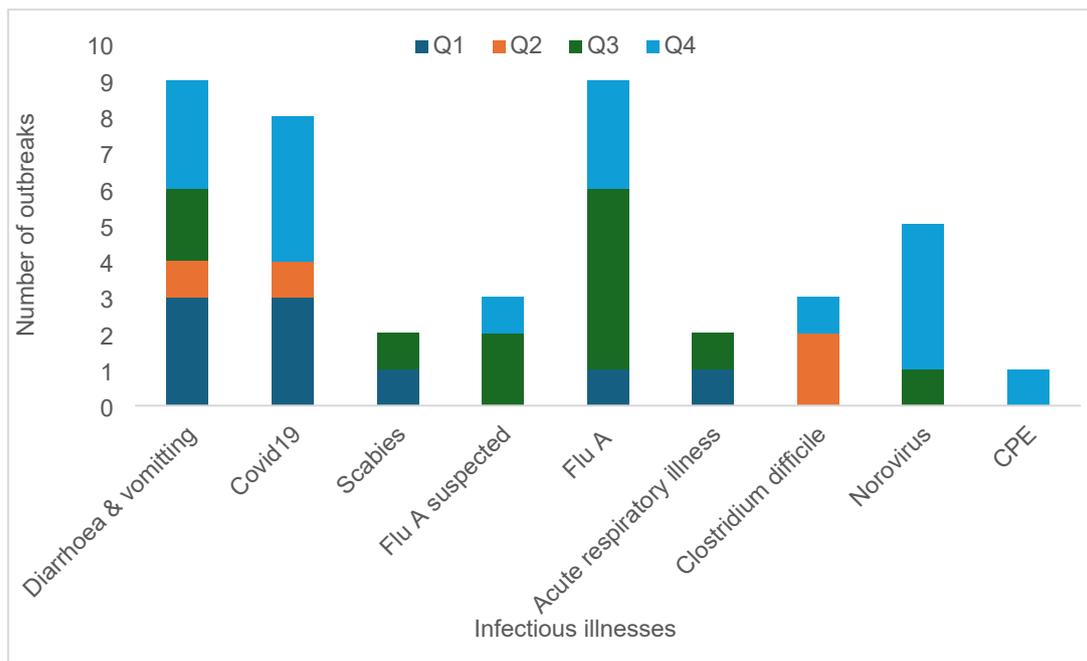


Figure 10: Number of outbreaks and the various infectious disease experienced between April 2024 – March 2025.

Diarrhoea and vomiting outbreaks were seen in each quarter. Over half of infections were respiratory related and influenza A (Flu A) started earlier than anticipated in Q3 (see figure 10). Flu A relate to all confirmed cases where cultures taken whereas suspected refers to probable flu A cases with no cultures taken.

Public Health Health Protection Team follow up to ensure all infection prevention and control measures are in place for example isolation, cohorting of staff, personal protection



equipment in place and visitors are aware of outbreaks. On occasions the team have undertaken supported visits to provide assurance to the system that measures are in place.

Infection Prevention Control Auditing:

Sandwell care home audit tool assesses the setting environmental include, managerial support, environmental, waste management, hand hygiene procedures and decontamination of manual handling equipment. The audit employs a RAG rating system, with green above 95%, amber between 85%-94%, and red below 84%.

		Number			Percentage			
24 -25	Quarter	Green	Amber	Red	Green	Amber	Red	
	Apr - June	1	25	4	0	28.74%	4.60%	0.00%
	July - Sept	2	21	2	0	24.14%	2.30%	0.00%
	Oct - Dec	3	10	3	0	11.49%	3.45%	0.00%
	Jan - Mar	4	13	2	0	14.94%	2.30%	0.00%
	Totals		69	11	0	79.31%	12.64%	0.00%

Table 11: shows the number of care homes visited between April 2024 to March 2025.

Table 11 shows 69 care homes had achieved over 95% and were compliant with all infection prevention measures. No care homes received an inadequate score. Settings scoring less than 90% are provided with action plans and re-audited. The audit scores are shared with partners through the Adult Social Care Quality & Safety Team and performance escalation group. Emerging themes and patterns are identified from audits. In 2024 a pattern identified was sharps safety, which involves appropriately placing used needles in clinical bins, closing them, and dating them. The team emphasised the necessity of sharps safety and enhanced compliance.

In Sandwell, routine vaccinations, influenza and covid-19, for care home residents are delivered through two models commissioned by Black Country ICB. They are a roving community team, and community pharmacy offer. In 2024, only two Primary Care Networks opted to deliver these vaccines therefore other options needed to be commissioned to ensure the most vulnerable residents were offered protection from vaccines.

Care home staff and carers vaccination status recording is inadequate and non-mandated therefore we do not have a good understanding of uptake within this cohort. Anecdotal evidence suggested vaccination uptake of influenza and covid-19 is low and should be an area of future focus.

Care Home Setting Education

Prevention of infectious diseases in settings with vulnerable people is extremely effective. Education to carers on infection prevention and control in care homes, using data and evidence base, can prevent infectious diseases and onward transmission, reducing the impact outbreaks have in the settings. Education sessions provide opportunities to engage with carers on topics including vaccinations, oral health and hydration. Throughout the year, 91 delegates attended three in-person education sessions throughout Sandwell.



Every Sandwell care home is invited to attend these free educational sessions emphasising infection prevention and control or health protection. Delegates attended sessions on new and emerging infections such as Carbapenemase-Producing Enterobacteriaceae (CPE), new UK infection prevention and control guidance, urological care including catheter maintenance, oral health, Covid-19 Medical Delivery Unit (CMDU), quality and safety, immunisations and vaccination for all ages, outbreak management including Care OBRA.

Environmental Health

Food Hygiene

The Environmental Health (EH) team carried out 948 food hygiene inspections in 2024-25 to ensure that businesses are producing safe food and worked with businesses where poor conditions found to make them broadly compliant. Following inspections, 15 Hygiene Improvement notices were served to deal with breaches of food hygiene legislation and service of 1 remedial action notice at an approved premises. Action was taken to close 16 food businesses where officers found an imminent risk of injury to health at the premises using voluntary and formal closures.

The team worked with the Catering team at the new Midland Metropolitan University Hospital before opening of the hospital including carrying out visits prior to opening and reviewing processes, workflow, and equipment on site and undertook an inspection of all the catering areas at the hospital.

The Environmental Health Team processed 604 new food business registrations and prioritised for inspection based on risk. They received and investigated, as necessary, 1427 service demand cases covering both food safety and health and safety.

Health & Safety

Enforcement of Health & Safety in workplaces is split between the Health & Safety Executive and Environmental Health team. The team received notifications of 83 accidents in workplaces, with 10 on-going accident investigations.

The team also took action under Health & Safety legislation and served 20 Prohibition Notices where there was a risk of serious personal injury covering electrical safety, gas safety, falls from heights, unsafe machinery, and safety risks from fireworks.

The team carried out a project looking at outdoor electrical safety in hospitality settings with mailshots to 50 businesses. Visits to 23 new skin piercing premises and registered 40 practitioners were registered and inspected throughout 2024-25.

Additionally, the Environmental Health and Public Health team led on the funeral director reassurance visits as requested by Central Government. 33 visits were undertaken in total.

EH Infection Control

The Environmental Health team receive notifications from UKHSA of sporadic gastrointestinal infections linked to food and water and investigate reports of outbreaks linked to businesses. The team follow up notifications to investigate the source of any infection and to prevent the spread within the household/ close contacts and the wider community. This may



lead to informal and formal exclusion of the infectious person and high-risk contacts from workplaces, schools and nurseries until microbiological clearance is completed and provision of infection prevention control advice.

In 2024-25 the team received 522 notifications of sporadic GI infections, of which 348 were reported as Campylobacter, 66 cases of Salmonella, including typhoid and paratyphoid, 42 cases of Giardia, 28 cases of Cryptosporidium, 23 cases of E coli, including E. coli O157 and 9 cases of Shigella, 2 cases of Listeria and 2 cases of Hepatitis A. The team were also notified of 1 case of Legionella and were requested to send a request for co-operation letter to a Tuberculosis patient.

Air Quality

Air pollution is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK and can cause and worsen health effects, particularly in the most vulnerable groups of society including children, the elderly, individuals with existing cardiovascular or respiratory diseases, pregnant women and low-income communities. There is also often a strong correlation with equalities issues because areas with poor air quality are also often less affluent.

Air quality has been a significant public health concern with rates of mortality attributed to particulate air pollution in Sandwell remaining at 6%, higher than England rate at 5.3%. However, a decline from 8.3% in 2019 in Sandwell to 6% in 2024 should be noted although the rate of decline has slowed, in line with the England trend. Sandwell has one of the highest rates of mortality attributed to particulate air pollution in England outside of London. Data also shows a similar pattern for fine particulate matter, Sandwell's concentration was at 8.0 µg/m compared to 7.1 µg/m³ for England in 2024, following a similar trend line to England but consistently higher.

The end of this year saw the completion of the 2020-2025 Air Quality Action Plan. On 1st July 2024 the first smoke control area in Sandwell became operational. A smoke control area is an area where people and businesses must not emit smoke from a chimney or buy or sell unauthorised fuel for use in a smoke control area unless it is used in an 'exempt' appliance.

The UK Health Security Agency (formally Public Health England) has estimated that the costs of air pollution in England to health and social care services could reach between £5.3 and £18.6 billion between 2018 and 2035. Sandwell Council is committed to reducing the exposure of people in Sandwell to poor air quality in order to improve health.

To address the challenges, we are seeing in Sandwell an Air Quality Action Plan will be published in 2025 outlining the key recommendations required for action. The action plan will highlight the risks and mitigations to reduce the impact poor air quality is having on local residents.



Conclusion

The report outlines clear recommendations for the coming year, including strengthening vaccination uptake, extending latent TB screening, and continuing support for care homes and migrant health. Sandwell remains committed to protecting its population through evidence-based, equitable, and collaborative health protection strategies.

Key strategic recommendations for consideration for the board moving into 2025/26 include:

- Development of a Sandwell Oral Health Strategy than spans across the life course.
- Introduction of a subgroup to the Board dedicated to vaccination and immunisations. This group will seek assurance from the system that addresses the low uptake of vaccinations in Sandwell.
- Continue to monitor the increase of TB rates and consideration to extending LTBI pilot.
- Live test the Local Authorities' pandemic preparedness and resilience through national Exercise Pegasus.
- Review of the existing Sandwell Pandemic Flu Plan following the release of the new national guidance due in 2026.

Over the next year the NHS reforms will see key changes within the NHS with the introduction of the NHS 10 year plan. There will likely be changes for key partner organisations and movements across place, region and national levels. The new ICB cluster arrangements and changes to NHS England will introduce a period of change and see new opportunities. All partners will continue to work together in new ways while still continuing the protect the publics health from threats of infectious diseases for the residents of Sandwell and the reduce inequalities. Aligning the key priorities of the NHS, UKHSA along with the Council Plan should see residents are put at the centre of prevention, preparedness and management of potential threats and harms to the public's health.

END

