Cornwall business owners say covid spike down to large visitor numbers and lack of social distancing measures

Business owners in Cornwall have said that a "perfect storm" of large visitor numbers and a lack of social distancing measures has led to a spike in coronavirus cases across the county.

The county has seen a sharp rise in cases in recent weeks, with large numbers of holiday makers visiting for summer breaks.

Figures calculated by the PA news agency using health agency data show that both Devon and Cornwall have 500 cases or more per 100,000 people in the seven days to August 18.

A week before, the figure was 300 or less per 100,000 people.

Mayor of Newquay Louis Gardner, who is also the Conservative councillor for Newquay Central and Pentire and owns a deli in the town, said he has been speaking to other businesses this week and they believe the rise in cases is due to a number of different issues.

Mr Gardner told the PA news agency: "We're seeing a spike in Cornwall because we've got the highest number of visitors we've ever had.

"Our accommodation is at 100% capacity, our hospitality venues are full, there's no social distance in place, but I think those factors all added in all together are having an effect. It's a perfect storm."

Mr Gardner said he would like to see more venues in Newquay, in particular nightclubs, insisting its customers provide vacciatination status or evidence of a negative lateral flow test.

Mr Gardner said: "I do speak to people who are concerned about the rise in the number of cases, but we don't have huge numbers in hospital. What we're saying to people is, if you come to Newquay, you have to be respectable to the people who live here.

"Don't come down here thinking that you're on holiday and it's not gonna affect you because it absolutely is. You've got a higher chance of getting Covid by coming here than you have by staying at home."

It comes after health officials said on Monday (August 23) that nearly 5,000 cases of the virus have been potentially linked to the Boardmasters Festival, which took place from August 11 to August 15 at Watergate Bay and Fistral Beach.

Deputy director of public health for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, Ruth Goldstein said the authorities will not know the complete picture for another few days, but confirmed there have already been 4,700 new positive cases of Covid-19 in people who attended Boardmasters. Around 800 of those are believed to be in Cornwall.

The latest data on Covid-19 clusters in Cornwall show the areas with the highest number of confirmed cases of

coronavirus are located very near the Boardmasters Festival site.

Veryan Palmer, director at the family-owned Headland Hotel in Newquay, said seven of her staff out of 211 in total are currently isolating after going to Boardmasters and testing positive.

Ms Palmer added the independent business has a strict isolation policy and testing procedures in place for staff, which so far has proved successful in remaining largely open throughout this year.

Ms Palmer told the *PA news agency:* "We're very, very busy. We've got a lot of people who are missing going abroad and so have discovered Cornwall for the first time.

"The county is very busy at the moment and lots of businesses are closed because their staff are off isolating and recruitment for the hospitality.

"We've got a lot of space in our hotel so they can social distance within our grounds. I don't think there's necessarily any increased risk. We're quite ruthless with our staff — if someone has tested positive, we make it mandatory for the staff that were around them to be off."

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A spokesperson for Boardmasters told *Business Live's* sister website *Cornwall Live* : "Since the government allowed live events to return, we have worked closely with Cornwall Council's public health team, putting in place risk management measures above and beyond national guidelines.

"These included use of the NHS Covid Pass as a condition of entry, which was introduced during the Government Events Research Programme earlier this year and is being recommended as best-practice at other large events.

"The system detected over 450 people who would otherwise have been at risk of passing on the virus and as a result did not attend our Watergate Bay site or left the festival early. We are grateful to them and everyone else who took the extra steps this year.

"No event is able to eliminate risk entirely and the latest Test & Trace data includes reported infections among the 76,000 people who visited the festival or related activities at Fistral Beach, in Newquay and the wider area during the week of Boardmasters.

"We will continue to work with our public health partners to

understand the extent to which attendance at the festival has contributed to the figures.

"We look forward to sharing our experience with our local authority partners and other large events so we can all continue to provide much needed economic benefit to our communities and entertainment to our loyal audiences."

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