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UK



LIVE Booster campaign to be put 'on steroids' - government

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Summary

Prime Minister Boris Johnson announces that all adults will be offered a booster jab by the end of January

People will be worked through by age group - as at other stages of the Covid vaccine roll-out - he tells a news conference

"We will let you know when it's your turn," NHS England chief executive Amanda Pritchard adds
Health Secretary Sajid Javid meanwhile acknowledges the new variant is likely to be transmitting in the community

Face coverings are mandatory again on public transport and in shops in England to try and combat Omicron

Earlier, UK health security chief Dr Jenny Harries called on people not to socialise unnecessarily ahead of Christmas

But Johnson later clarified: "We are not changing the guidance on how you should be living your life"
Omicron was in Europe earlier than first believed, it emerges, with cases found in samples taken in the Netherlands

Live Reporting

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Edited by James Clarke

16:25

SHARED **Increased payments for vaccination sites, says NHS chief**

Amanda Pritchard gives some more details of what the NHS is doing to meet the challenge of expanding the booster programme in England.

She says community pharmacies and GP surgeries will be offered an increased £15 standard payment per delivered jab until January, with an additional £5 payment for jabs given at weekends.

She also says there will be a £30 premium payment for vaccinating people who are housebound.

She also says they are reassessing the recommended 15-minute wait after jabs, to see if they can get more people through vaccination sites more quickly.



18:15

Watch: Your questions answered



The BBC's Philippa Roxby and Ione Wells answer your questions on the new Covid variant.

After the UK government's latest update on coronavirus and booster jabs, BBC health correspondent Philippa Roxby and political correspondent Ione Wells answer your questions.



18:04

Who's entitled to a booster, and how do you get one?



The UK's Covid booster vaccine programme is being expanded amid concerns about the new Omicron variant.

The government has set a target to offer all eligible adults in England the chance to book a booster by the end of January.

A second vaccine dose will be offered to children aged 12-15.

When can I get my booster?

When you are contacted will depend on your age and whether you are in an at-risk group.

Vulnerable people will be contacted first, then over-40s and older people, then younger age groups.

However, people are being asked not to contact the NHS about their booster jab, and wait to be invited.

Across England, jabs will be rolled out at 1,500 community pharmacies, extra hospital hubs and pop-up vaccination sites.

Scotland and **Wales** have yet to finalise details of how boosters will be given out.

Northern Ireland has announced **extra vaccination clinics to meet demand**.

Read more [here](#).



17:51

BREAKING **Another 39,716 Covid cases in UK**

A further 39,716 confirmed Covid cases were announced in the UK on Tuesday.

The average number of daily confirmed cases has bounced around since mid-July and was rising again through November, but has dipped in recent days.

Another 159 deaths within 28 days of a positive Covid test were also reported.

The number of daily deaths has been falling steadily through November.



17:46

Where in the UK has Omicron been c

As we've been reporting, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is trying to establish where

exactly in the UK the Omicron variant is.

It's confirmed 22 cases have been detected, but as we've been reporting, the variant is likely to be transmitting in the community, so that number will grow.

Earlier, we told you the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) said that two cases had been detected in Nottingham. However, it has since clarified that the city **has only one case on record** – a student, who has been self-isolating since they were infected.

Here's a breakdown of cases in England confirmed by the UKHSA:

- London borough of Barnet – 2
- Brentwood, Essex – 1
- London borough of Camden – 2
- London borough of Haringey – 1

- Liverpool – 1
- North Norfolk – 1
- Nottingham – 1
- London borough of Sutton – 1
- London borough of Wandsworth – 1
- London borough of Westminster – 2

And as we've also reported, **there are 9 cases in Scotland**. Five are in Lanarkshire and four are in the Greater Glasgow and Clyde health board area.



17:35

Watch: PM on January booster offer target



PM: All adults to be offered a Covid booster by end of January

Prime Minister Boris Johnson says the government's target is for all adults to be offered a Covid booster by the end of January, with temporary vaccination centres to be opened up, as at other stages of the vaccine roll-out.



17:26

Which countries have given the most booster jabs?

At the Downing Street briefing just now, Health Secretary Sajid Javid said: "We've delivered more booster doses than any other country, with the exception of the USA and China."

He's right in terms of the **total number of booster doses** [↗](#) given.

China has given 66 million, the US has given 40 million and the UK is in third place with 18 million, according to Our World in Data.

In terms of the number of booster doses given per head of the population, the UK is in seventh place, behind Gibraltar, Israel, Chile, Uruguay, Iceland and the United Arab Emirates – according to the same organisation's figures.



17:16

What did we learn from the update?



Reuters

The Downing Street coronavirus briefing led by Prime Minister Boris Johnson has just wrapped up.

He was joined by Health Secretary Sajid Javid and Amanda Pritchard, the chief executive of NHS England.

In case you missed it, here's a quick round-up of what we learned:

- The PM revealed a target to offer all over-18s a booster jab by the end of January
- As with first vaccine doses, the NHS will administer boosters in priority order - starting with the medically vulnerable, over-40s and older people before getting to younger age groups
- While changes to booking system are put in place, the public are urged not to contact the NHS about their booster jab, and wait to be invited
- In England, booster jabs will be rolled out at 1,500 community pharmacies, extra hospital hubs and pop-up vaccination sites, with around 400 military personnel providing assistance alongside volunteer vaccinators
- Javid urged everyone to accept a booster when offered "to give ourselves the best chance of a Christmas with our loved ones"
- The PM disagreed with Dr Jenny Harries, the head of the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), who suggested earlier that people should reduce social contacts in the run up to Christmas
- He said that people didn't need to cancel Christmas parties or school Nativity plays, and insisted that it was not yet necessary to advise people to work from home
- Javid accepted it was likely the new variant was spreading in the community (at present, 22 cases have been confirmed)



17:09

How achievable is January target?



Nick Triggle
Health Correspondent

The target of offering booster jabs to all adults in England by the end of January (and that means giving them the opportunity to book jabs) is ambitious - but how achievable is it?

Crucially we have the supply. Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are going to come into the country and there will be enough to vaccinate the eligible adult population.

But at the moment, the NHS is not vaccinating at the rate it needs to if it is going to hit that target.

Currently it is doing about 2.5m boosters a week, so that would take until the end of February to reach all adults in England. The PM acknowledged it's got to get back up to the levels seen in the spring - when more than 4m doses a week were being given.

A third of the mass vaccination centres that were in place then have closed and GPs are back doing their day to day work. But what we've seen is pharmacies step up and we've heard about the military and other people coming in to help them.

There are about 30 hospitals currently vaccinating the public - but around 200 that could be opened up to do that too.

If they manage to do all that and do it quickly, then the end of January is achievable.



17:00

Analysis: Johnson reluctant to move to Plan B



Iain Watson
Political correspondent

The advice from the prime minister was clear - don't cancel your Christmas plans, and do get your booster.

He defended the government's reluctance to move to Plan B - which would involve advising people in England to work from home if they can (as they are advised to do in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).

The leader of the lockdown-resistant Conservative group of Conservative MPs – the former chief whip Mark Harper – says he gives the government "credit" for this.

But note, Boris Johnson refused to rule this out completely.

The best he could promise, choosing his words carefully, was this: "The kind of lockdown we had before is extremely unlikely."

It would seem that further restrictions will be dependent more on the progress of the pandemic than on politics.



16:54

Antiviral drugs are another weapon against Covid



Michelle Roberts
Health editor, BBC News online

The UK has bought hundreds of thousands of doses of a powerful antiviral drug that can treat Covid.

The treatment, **molnupiravir**, could help those who are most at risk of getting severely ill if they catch the virus.

In trials, the twice daily pills cut the risk of hospitalisation or death by about half.

The therapy works in a different way to current vaccines and should be very effective even against new variants, such as Omicron.

MERCK



16:50

Why are people not being told to work from home?

A question now from Bloomberg on working from home - and why England is out of kilter with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Boris Johnson says this is not something the government thinks is necessary - it has a package of measures to deal with the Delta variant and they've been working.

He says the reason for not implementing Plan B - a contingency to protect the NHS which includes guidance to work from home - is in order to take an approach that is "proportionate and balanced".

He will change things as necessary, but is looking for reassurance that vaccines are effective against Omicron.

And the PM ends the briefing with a mention of Storm Arwen, saying how sympathetic he is to people in the million or so homes that have lost electricity - and assuring those still without power that the government is doing what it can to restore it.



16:47

Will the pingdemic or local lockdowns return?

Next, the PM is asked if he can reassure businesses that are worried about another so-called "pingdemic".

Jasmine Cameron-Chileshe, from the Financial Times, says the government has ruled out a "Plan B" to tackle Covid, but can the PM confirm contingency measures like working from home won't be taken if there's a surge?

Johnson says he does not think a return to the "pingdemic" of July is likely to happen (where people were alerted to contact with Covid cases) because the numbers of cases of Omicron are small.

But that will have to stay under review.

"We haven't ruled out anything, I think another lockdown of the kind we've had before is extremely unlikely but we keep everything under constant review," he says.

On local lockdown measures he says: "We've settled pretty much on the view that moving together is the way to do it."



16:46

Don't cancel the Nativity, says PM

Is there community transmission of the new Omicron variant in the UK, the Daily Mail's Jason Groves asks Health Secretary Sajid Javid.

Javid replies that they are "not able to say" at the moment, but it's likely.

Boris Johnson is asked whether he would encourage people who are already scrapping school Nativity plays and Christmas parties in response to the government's new rules to "think again".

"We don't want people to cancel such events," the prime minister replies - and the "best place" for children to be is in school.



16:43

Isolation rules prompt bigger Tory rebellion than masks



Iain Watson
Political correspondent

Reuters

Around the time the Downing Street briefing started, MPs backed regulations making it mandatory to wear a mask in shops and on public transport in England by 434 votes to 23.

There was a bigger Conservative rebellion over isolation regulations, with fears these were "open ended" and could see healthy people confined to home at a cost to the economy.

A total of 36 MPs voted against but with the main opposition parties supportive, there was a government majority of 395.



16:39

When will this all end?

Now a few questions from LBC radio.

Does the UK have enough doses of Moderna and Pfizer to meet the targets?

I am reassured we do have the supply we need, says Pritchard.

The next part of the question is whether people should be advised to use medical-grade masks, as some other countries are doing.

Javid says there's already guidance, and he sees no need to change that.

The last question is for the PM - when is this all going to end?

Boris Johnson says the big question is - does this new variant beat the vaccines and the booster?

Answering his own, alternative, question, he says chances are that the boosters will continue to protect to some degree, but that needs to be checked.

"The measures we have put in place will not last a minute more than they are needed," he adds.



16:37

How will you get all adults jabbed by the end of January?

Emily Morgan, from ITV, asks if people should be limiting unnecessary social contacts.

She says, even giving 3.5m booster jabs every week, it would take until mid-February to get through all of those eligible. She asks how the government will do it before the end of January?

The PM says the guidance on social contact stays the same but he is toughening up the regulations in a specific way to deal with Omicron.

"I'm still confident that this Christmas will be better than last Christmas," he says.

There's no maximum to the number of jabs they want to give, week on week and things will change as they go along.

change as they go along.



16:36

MPs also wondering about mask rules



Iain Watson
Political correspondent

The question from the public on why face masks are mandatory in some settings and not in others was asked in a slightly different way by the Conservative MP Craig Mackinlay in the Commons.

He mused on the logic of having to wear a face covering "for 45 seconds in an off licence" while it was then legal to go unmasked 'to a house party of 100 people'

He denounced the government's approach as "infantile"

- What Covid rules are being toughened in the UK?



16:34

Guidance on socialising remains same, says Johnson

The BBC's Vicki Young asks about comments earlier made by Dr Jenny Harries, head of the UK Health Security Agency, who said people should not socialise unnecessarily ahead of Christmas.

Boris Johnson says government guidance "remains the same".

Asked whether the NHS in England will be able to cope with delivering the expanded booster programme, Amanda Pritchard says she has "absolutely no doubt" the service will continue to do an "incredible job".



16:30

What's being offered for clinically vulnerable?

A second question from a member of the on protection for people who are clinically vulnerable.

The health secretary mentions two anti-viral drugs - one of which has already been approved by the MHRA.

He says these work in very different ways to vaccines and he's confident they will provide a high degree of protection for the immuno-suppressed.



16:28

Why aren't masks mandatory in cinemas?

The Downing Street briefing is moving to questions from the public now.

Alex, from Surrey, asks - given that Omicron spreads more in crowded and indoor places why are you not introducing face coverings in cinemas and theatres as well as shops and public transport?

The PM says: "We are trying to take a balanced and proportionate approach of slowing down the spread of Omicron while we get to the bottom of the exact effect it has."

Javid says we still don't know enough about the variant to properly understand its spread against Delta but the government will share information as soon as it does.

- [Where do you have to wear masks now?](#)



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