

Breaking

COVID-19: Face masks, vaccine passports, and work from home in 'plan B' for winter

The government said it needs to be ready to deploy stricter measures if the NHS is going to come under "unsustainable pressure" from the pandemic.



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The COVID 'plan B' for winter



Mandatory face masks, vaccine certificates, and work from home orders could return this winter as part of a "plan B" to deal with the pandemic, the health secretary has announced.

Sajid Javid said if the data shows the NHS is likely to come under

This will include:

- Making face coverings legally mandatory in certain settings
- Asking people to work from home if they can, for a limited period

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- Introducing mandatory vaccine certificates for nightclubs, indoor settings with 500+ attendees likely to be close, outdoor settings with 4,000+ people likely to be close, and any setting with 10,000+ attendees such as sports and music stadia

- Communicating clearly and urgently the level of risk has increased, so more caution needs to be taken

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Face masks have not been legally required in England since 'Freedom Day'

Lockdowns will also be considered "as a last resort" if plan B does not work.

Mr Javid told the Commons: "Any responsible government must prepare for all eventualities, and although these measures are not an outcome anyone wants, it's one that we need to be ready for just in case."

Downing Street said there was no metric for triggering plan B measures, with Boris Johnson's spokesman saying a new variant or benchmark of new cases per week would not necessarily mean a move to the back-up plan.

He said a range of data would need to be considered, including the number of patients in hospital, increase in hospital admissions, ratio of cases to hospital admissions, and the trajectory of new cases.

"All of those sorts of things would need to be factored in alongside vaccine effectiveness, waning immunity, etcetera," he said.

"It is right to look at a range of metrics and not be overly prescriptive and consider the latest advice we are getting from experts, like Professor Whitty (England's chief medical officer) and others."

Safer Behaviours and Actions



Get vaccinated



Let fresh air in if you meet indoors. Meeting outdoors is safer



Wear a face covering in crowded and enclosed settings where you come into contact with people you do not normally meet



Get tested, and self isolate if required



Try to stay at home if you are feeling unwell



Wash your hands



Download and use the NHS COVID-19 app

Measures included in the autumn and winter plan

The health secretary was announcing the government's **autumn and winter plan** for dealing with COVID-19, which includes **booster doses for**

the first nine groups that were offered vaccines at the end of last year and the beginning of this year.

He suggested people meet outdoors if possible during winter and wear a face mask in crowded, enclosed spaces, which was met with jeers by maskless MPs from his own party.

And the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) has said the government must "leave no stone unturned" in its bid to keep the economy open.

Mr Javid suggested PCR tests for double-jabbed travellers will be scrapped in favour of lateral flow tests, but said the transport secretary will be making a statement on travel ahead of a 1 October review. The travel traffic light system is also set to be scrapped.

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Mr Javid added it is "highly likely" frontline NHS staff and social care settings will be required to have COVID-19 and flu vaccinations to work following an ongoing consultation.

Despite the potential return of some measures, the government will remove some coronavirus powers, including the ability to temporarily close schools and universities.

Meanwhile, people who have to self-isolate will continue to receive statutory sick pay.

Elsewhere, no changes are due to be made to COVID restrictions in Scotland. First Minister Nicola Sturgeon told the Scottish Parliament there were signs that a recent spike in cases was now on a downturn.

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