

People urged to get booster as UK approaches 20m top-up jabs

- Booster programme is being accelerated with more vaccination centres and military support
- All eligible over-18s will be offered a jab by the end of January
- UK will celebrate one-year anniversary of first vaccine being administered next week

People have been urged to get a coronavirus (COVID-19) booster vaccine to top-up their protection this winter as 20 million people in the UK are expected to have had their third jabs today (Sunday 5 December 2021).

As of 2 December, a total of 19.4 million people have had their booster or third doses in the UK. 51 million have had a first dose and 46.4 million have had a second dose. The COVID-19 dashboard will be updated at 4pm with the latest figures.

Vaccines are the best way to protect people against COVID-19 and, in light of the new Omicron variant and following advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), the government is expanding the booster programme to all adults over 18, with all those eligible being offered a top-up jab by the end of January, as well as halving the gap between doses to protect more people more quickly.

More than one million appointments (1,077,514) for a booster vaccine were booked in England in just 4 days between Monday and Thursday this week.

To speed up the vaccination programme, around 400 military personnel will be drafted in to support deployment, with 1,500 community pharmacy sites, additional hospital hubs, and pop-up sites opening in convenient locations across the country. Extra financial support to GPs, community pharmacies and primary care staff will help boost capacity and encourage more visits to those who are housebound.

Our priority remains to protect the most vulnerable first so everyone over the age of 40 who had their second dose at least 3 months ago will soon be able to book an appointment for their booster jab. Younger age groups will be invited by the NHS in order of age in due course.

On Wednesday 8 December, the UK will celebrate one-year since it became the first country in the world to administer an approved COVID-19 vaccine to Margaret Keenan in Coventry.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Christmas is around the corner and it's absolutely crucial that everybody who is eligible gets their booster jab to top-up their immunity before spending time with loved ones.

While our brilliant scientists learn more about the new Omicron variant, we need to do everything we can to strengthen our defences and vaccines are the best way to do that.

This is a national mission and we all have a role to play – so roll up your sleeves and get protected as soon as you can.

The first real-world study on the effectiveness of booster vaccines against the Delta variant by the UK Health Security Agency shows top-up jabs boost protection back up to over 90% against symptomatic COVID-19 in adults aged over 50 2 weeks after being vaccinated. Data from the CovBoost trial, published on Friday [3 December], shows the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines being used in the UK as boosters give the best overall immune response.

It is not yet known whether existing vaccines are less effective against the Omicron variant, but it is unlikely they offer no effectiveness against serious disease.

Vaccines Minister Maggie Throup said:

Another brilliant milestone – thank you to all the GPs, pharmacists, NHS staff and volunteers who are working tirelessly to save lives.

Getting your booster vaccine is the most important thing you can do ahead of Christmas to protect yourself and your family.

Please take up the offer and come forward for your first and second doses too if you haven't already.

The government's Vaccines Taskforce has signed new contracts with Moderna for 60 million doses in and Pfizer/BioNTech for 54 million doses for 2022 and 2023 to future proof the country's vaccine programme. The deals include access to modified vaccines if they are needed to combat Omicron and future Variants of Concern, to prepare for all eventualities.

Data published last week by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) shows COVID-19 vaccines are safe for mothers and their babies, with good birth outcomes for vaccinated women who had their babies up to August this year. There were no consistent differences between vaccinated women and all women in the figures for stillbirths, low baby birthweights and premature births. Pregnant women have been urged to get their jabs to protect themselves and their babies as data shows that almost 1 in 5 COVID-19 patients who are most critically ill are pregnant women who have not been vaccinated.

Amanda Pritchard, NHS England's chief executive, said:

This latest milestone shows just how hard the NHS is working to ensure that every person can receive a life-saving booster, and in the last week alone, over 1 million people booked their first, second or top-up jab.

But the emergence of the new variant is obviously a concern for us all and we are entering the most complex and challenging phase of the vaccination programme.

NHS staff are continuing to pull out all the stops to boost the most vulnerable as quickly as we possibly can and our message is clear.

If you are currently eligible for the booster or you have not yet had your first or second dose please do come forward for your jab. It will give yourself and your loved ones vital protection as we enter the festive season.

Flu is another winter virus that can be serious. To give people the best protection over winter, those eligible for a free flu vaccine should come forward and book an appointment at either their GP practice or their local pharmacy, or take it up when offered by their employer or other healthcare provider.

The government has launched a nationwide advertising campaign, encouraging people eligible to get their booster and flu jabs to protect themselves and their loved ones and help reduce pressures on the NHS. This includes outdoor billboards, broadcast and community radio and TV.

The offer of a first and second COVID-19 vaccine remains open to anyone who is eligible. Vaccines are available free of charge and from thousands of vaccine centres, GP practices and pharmacies. Around 98% of people live within 10 miles of a vaccination centre in England.