

Vaccine update: issue 311, August 2020

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New measures to support development of safe COVID-19 vaccines for UK

- Measures will allow UK-wide rollout of vaccine to save lives and bring pandemic to an end
- Proposals to bolster safeguards and improve access to protect the public ahead of the winter
- COVID-19 vaccines will only be given to UK patients if proven to be safe and effective

A raft of measures to allow the safe future mass rollout of a COVID-19 vaccine have been outlined by the government today (Friday 28 August).

The new rules and safeguards will strengthen the UK's ability to successfully deploy a UK-wide vaccination programme, which will be crucial in saving lives and bringing the current pandemic to an end.

The measures include:

- reinforced safeguards to support the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to grant temporary authorisation for the use of a new COVID-19 vaccine – provided it meets the highest safety and quality standards
- expanding the trained workforce who can administer COVID-19 and flu vaccines to improve access and protect the public
- clarifying the scope of the protection from civil liability for the additional workforce that could be allowed to administer vaccinations

If a vaccine is discovered before 2021, the proposals will bolster existing

powers that allow the MHRA to consider approving its use, before a full product licence is granted, provided it is proven to be safe and effective during robust and extensive clinical trials.

The measures are necessary because during the transition period, a new potential COVID-19 vaccine must be granted a licence by the European Medicines Agency (EMA).

The regulations will permit the MHRA to consider giving temporary authorisation allowing patients to benefit while it undergoes the full licensing process, with reinforced conditions attached to ensure safety, quality and efficacy.

This is a precautionary measure and will be used as a last resort if there is a strong public health justification for widespread use of a vaccine before it has been granted a product licence.

From 2021, MHRA will have a national licensing system in place and will be responsible for granting licences for potential COVID-19 vaccines and treatments once they meet high standards of safety and effectiveness.

Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Professor Jonathan Van-Tam, said:

We are making progress in developing COVID-19 vaccines which we hope will be important in saving lives, protecting healthcare workers and returning to normal in future.

If we develop effective vaccines, it's important we make them available to patients as quickly as possible but only once strict safety standards have been met.

The proposals consulted on today suggest ways to improve access and ensure as many people are protected from COVID-19 and flu as possible without sacrificing the absolute need to ensure that any vaccine used is both safe and effective.

The MHRA has the power to grant an unlicensed medicine or a vaccine temporary authorisation where a product is proven to be safe and effective and is in the best interest of the patient on the basis of available evidence.

A [consultation](#) is being launched today, which will look to amend the Human Medicine Regulations 2012 and will last 3 weeks, seeking the opinions and advice on the proposals from health experts and key stakeholder groups.

The measures could come into force by October, ahead of the winter season.

Dr Christian Schneider, Director of National Institute for Biological Standards and Control (NIBSC) – part of the MHRA – said:

Protecting health and saving lives is at the heart of all our work.

Throughout the pandemic, the MHRA has prioritised work to ensure rapid approval of robust clinical trials to test a range of medicines and vaccines, whilst maintaining the highest quality and safety standards.

Whilst the existing licensing system, or a new UK one from next year, is the preferred and expected route to supply any vaccine, these new measures will strengthen the regulatory regime and our ability to protect public health.

The proposals will also allow more fully trained healthcare professionals to administer vaccines under NHS and local authority occupational health schemes, as well as enable an expanded workforce that can administer vaccinations to the public. This will make it easier and quicker for patients to access the vaccines they need, protecting them against potentially serious and fatal diseases.

The expanded workforce will undergo a robust training programme, and could include a wider range of existing NHS staff, as well as groups such as student doctors and nurses.

The consultation will also look at clarifying the scope of the protection from civil liability, which the regulations already give to healthcare workers and manufacturers, to ensure it applies to the companies which order the medicines and the additional workforce that could be allowed to administer vaccinations.

This will establish a fairer and more equal footing and encourage companies to place cutting-edge medicines on the markets as soon as possible, ensuring UK patients can be the first to benefit.

[Find the full consultation here.](#)

Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick Sees Dstl's Police Innovation

Press release

The Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Dame Cressida Dick, has visited the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory to see the latest innovations being trialled in support of the police and judicial system.



Dstl Chief Executive Gary Aitkenhead, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Dame Cressida Dick and Dstl's Mike Smith

Dstl, the science inside UK defence and security, designs and develops new technology to keep the UK and its people safe from harm, and improve evidence-gathering techniques to aid criminal prosecutions.

During the visit the Commissioner was updated on the progress of a variety of physical and electromagnetic technologies being trialled for future use. These included the detection of concealed metal objects to help reduce knife crime, improvements in the design of body armour to provide increased protection for the wearer while making it lighter, cyber-crime, and Chemical, Biological and Radiological capabilities.

The Commissioner also toured Dstl's new state-of-the-art Energetics Analysis Centre, the UK's centre of excellence for explosives detection, forensic analysis and other critical counter-terrorism science and technology. The facility includes the Forensic Explosives Laboratory, which provides evidence to the Criminal Justice System as part of criminal and terrorist investigations that involve explosives.

Chief Executive of Dstl, Gary Aitkenhead, commented:

Since the integration of the Home Office's science services into Dstl, we have continued to deliver enhanced S&T to the police service, with access to the full range of our specialist capabilities and synergies such as military and policing body armour. The Commissioner's visit has been a valuable opportunity to demonstrate the breadth of current innovations and examine ways we can work even more effectively with the police.

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Government accelerating pothole mapping project to support motorists and cyclists ahead of school return

- crackdown on potholes launched through a new data-driven review following acceleration of road repair during lockdown
- review will be supported by pothole mapping data from businesses including Deliveroo, Uber, Tesco and Ocado to help identify hotspots for repairs
- quieter roads during lockdown have led to 319 miles of resurfacing works, including potholes
- ahead of schools going back next week, review will drive forward work to make roads safer for cyclists and motorists

A first-of-its-kind audit into the mapping of potholes in England has been launched today (28 August 2020) by Transport Secretary Grant Shapps, aided by data from on-road businesses such as Uber and Deliveroo, to better target improvements so that roads are in top condition as people return to work and school.

The Department for Transport will work with Gaist, a highway data and mapping company, businesses such as Deliveroo, Uber, Tesco and Ocado, alongside local highway authorities to identify 'pothole hot-spots'.

Combining collated data on current potholes held by nation-wide businesses and the most up-to-date bank of roads imagery in the country from Gaist, the department will be able to paint the most comprehensive picture ever of where funding is most needed to make sure roads are not plagued by potholes. It will make roads as safe as possible as more commuters and students undertake journeys in the coming months. The plan will help cyclists and motorists get back to school and work.

The government has already committed £2.5 billion in funding for pothole repairs in the biggest nationwide programme ever announced. The launch of the review comes as new data reveals that highway maintenance works undertaken in the past months when roads were quieter during lockdown has led to 319 miles of resurfacing, making sure that roads are in better condition so that people can get back to work and school safely.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

I want our roads to be as safe as possible, so during the lockdown we've resurfaced hundreds of miles of road. But now I want to go further by identifying critical potholes and ensuring these are fixed as quickly as possible.

We're teaming up with delivery companies, who know the roads well,

in order to map out where remaining potholes exist and then relentlessly target them with our record £2.5 billion to pothole repair fund.

Better road surfaces benefit motorists and cyclists alike ensuring the back to school and work environment is safer for everyone.

Charlie Wren, Director of Operations at Deliveroo, said:

Deliveroo riders go above and beyond to bring people the food they love and this is a great way to make sure they and other road users are safe on the road. We're looking forward to working with the government on this important scheme to help make the roads safer for Deliveroo riders and others.

Since 2010, the government has provided over £1.2 billion solely to help repair potholes on the local highway network, including £500 million from the £2.5 billion announced in the Budget earlier this year. Safe roads have never been more important, with the government urging commuters, parents and school children to choose to cycle or walk for part or all of their commutes to help ease demand on public transport and travel safely as the country recovers from the pandemic.

Better quality roads will also make it easier, safer and more convenient than ever for people to cycle. The government has previously announced plans to deliver a cycling and walking revolution by investing £2 billion over the next 5 years to support more people to choose active travel and through the launch of our most ambition [Cycling and Walking plan](#) ever.

With potholes posing a problem to all road users' safety, the pothole mapping review will allow for the government to ably target the worst-affected areas, levelling up road quality across the country.

[Providing rapid humanitarian relief to the people of Syria](#)

Thank you, Mr President, and we're grateful as ever to Mr Rajasingham and for his briefing today.

The humanitarian situation in Syria clearly remains bleak. And it's clear from the briefing that the decision by some members of this Council to veto on the 7th and the 10th of July resolutions that would have authorised sufficient humanitarian border crossings, crossings that the UN told us were desperately needed, that that decision has had the impact that we all feared.

As OCHA has made clear, access has been reduced and this has resulted in more costly, higher risk, less timely and ultimately less effective humanitarian aid. And the people of Syria are suffering as a result.

It's also clear that the increasingly fragile north-west ceasefire and the worrying rise in Covid cases has left Syria once again on the brink of humanitarian disaster. The reports from inside Syria of increasing numbers of Covid deaths and that hospitals in Aleppo are running out of body bags are shocking.

The temporary postponement of the Constitutional Committee talks within Geneva due to members of all three delegations testing positive for Covid illustrates just how widespread the disease is and shows both the human cost and the impact on work to create a future Syria.

Yet we should not be surprised that this disaster is unfolding and that healthcare capacity within Syria is so greatly overstretched. The Syrian regime's brutal pursuit of the conflict has left the whole of Syria ill prepared for a pandemic.

It is disturbing that there are now only 57 fully functioning public hospitals in the whole of the country. To address the threat of Covid across Syria, it is essential that the World Health Organization has unfettered access and is able to deliver a coordinated response.

Amongst all of this, health care workers continue to put their lives at risk to help those who need it most in the face of bombs and violence. And the deadly virus, where official figures suggest they account for 5% of the confirmed number of Covid cases, these brave individuals continue to do all they can to save those most in need. The UN commends them and the UK commends them for the incredible work that they've done.

Now, as I said earlier, there can be no doubt that the impact of the decisions this Council has made to restrict cross-border aid has hampered the efforts of health and relief workers in the north-west. As the Secretary-General mentions in his report, this has resulted in the more costly, higher risk, less timely and ultimately less effective humanitarian response I referred to earlier.

In the north-east, we were shocked to hear of the eight children who died within just one week at Al Hol, largely due to the issues faced by the health facilities within the camp not being sufficient to help them. We understand that a significant part of the problem is a direct result to the failure of this Council, or rather those Council members who vetoed access, to approve that continued cross-border access through Yaroubiya.

The statistics are clear and stark: the UN submitted 251 requests to the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to conduct missions in June and July, of which only 138 were approved. 138 out of 251. Of these, UN agencies were only able to conduct 93 missions due to Covid-19 considerations. That's 37 percent of the UN's original ask. With Covid complicating the UN's ability to conduct missions, it is all the more vital that Damascus provides timely approvals.

For cross-line access to truly work, the UN must be given unfettered access and be allowed to deliver aid to those who need it, when they need it, without obstruction. This includes those in Rukhban Camp. The regime and Russia must allow UN convoys to enter and give medical aid to the 12,000 residents there.

Lastly, on rising food insecurity, 9.3 Million people are currently food insecure. And there has been a 261 percent increase in food prices from July 2019 as a result mainly of exchange rate volatility and the regional banking crisis and, of course, the knock-on effects of Covid-19. We are deeply concerned that the World Food Programme was only able to reach 4.4 million of those 9.3 million who needed help in July. This problem will be further exacerbated if we fail to respond to the threat of Covid properly. These people cannot just be left to starve.

In line with the Secretary-General's call, the UK urges parties to adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law. Rapid aid relief is desperately needed to prepare for and respond to the Covid crisis across Syria. If Damascus continues to prevent the UN from delivering adequate cross-line aid in a safe and timely manner, then the Council will undoubtedly need to revisit the issue as soon as possible.

Thank you, Mr President.