

# PM statement to the House of Commons on roadmap for easing lockdown restrictions in England: 22 February 2021

Mr Speaker, with permission, I will make a Statement on the roadmap that will guide us

cautiously but irreversibly –

towards reclaiming our freedoms while doing all we can to protect our people against Covid.

Today's measures will apply in England,

but we are working closely with the Devolved Administrations who are setting out similar plans.

The threat remains substantial, with the numbers in hospital only now beginning to fall below the peak of the first wave in April.

But we are able to take these steps because of the resolve of the British public

and the extraordinary success of our NHS in vaccinating more than 17.5 million people across the UK.

The data so far suggests both vaccines are effective against the dominant strains of Covid.

Public Health England has found that one dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine reduces hospitalisations and deaths by at least 75 per cent.

And early data suggests that the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine provides a good level of protection,

though since we only started deploying this vaccine last month, at this stage the size of its effect is less certain.

But no vaccine can ever be 100 per cent effective,

nor will everyone take them up,

and like all viruses, Covid-19 will mutate. So, as the modelling released by SAGE today shows, we cannot escape the fact that lifting lockdown will result in more cases, more hospitalisations and sadly more deaths.

This would happen whenever lockdown is lifted, whether now or in six or nine

months, because there will always be some vulnerable people who are not protected by the vaccine.

There is therefore no credible route to a Zero Covid Britain or indeed a Zero Covid World

and we cannot persist indefinitely with restrictions that debilitate our economy, our physical and mental well-being, and the life-chances of our children.

And that is why it is so crucial that this roadmap should be cautious but also irreversible.

We are setting out on what I hope and believe is a one way road to freedom.

And this journey is made possible by the pace of the vaccination programme.

In England, everyone in the top four priority groups was successfully offered a vaccine by the middle of February.

We now aim to offer a first dose to all those in groups 5 to 9 by 15 April,

and I am setting another stretching target: to offer a first dose to every adult by the end of July.

As more of us are inoculated, so the protection afforded by the vaccines will gradually replace the restrictions

and today's roadmap sets out the principles of that transition.

The level of infection is broadly similar across England, so we will ease restrictions in all areas at the same time.

The sequence will be driven by the evidence, so outdoor activity will be prioritised as the best way to restore freedoms while minimising the risk.

At every stage, our decisions will be led by data not dates,

and subjected to four tests.

First, that the vaccine deployment programme continues successfully;

second, that evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths;

third, that infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations which would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS;

and fourth, that our assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new variants of Covid that cause concern.

Before taking each step we will review the data against these tests and because it takes at least four weeks for the data to reflect the impact of relaxations in restrictions

and we want to give the country a week's notice before each change – there will be at least five weeks between each step.

The Chief Medical Officer is clear that moving any faster would mean acting before we know the impact of each step,

which would increase the risk of us having to reverse course and re-impose restrictions.

I won't take that risk.

Step one will happen from 8 March, by which time those in the top four priority groups will be benefiting from the increased protection they receive from their first dose of their vaccine.

Mr Speaker, all the evidence shows that classrooms are the best places for our young people to be.

That's why I've always said that schools would be the last to close and the first to reopen.

And based on our assessment of the current data against the four tests, I can tell the House that two weeks' from today pupils and students in all schools and further education settings can safely return to face-to-face teaching, supported by twice-weekly testing of secondary school and college pupils.

Families and childcare bubbles will also be encouraged to get tested regularly.

Breakfast and afterschool clubs can also re-open – and other children's activities, including sport, can restart where necessary to help parents to work.

Students on university courses requiring practical teaching, specialist facilities or onsite assessments will also return

but all others will need to continue learning online, and we will review the options for when they can return by the end of the Easter Holidays.

From 8 March, people will also be able to meet one person from outside their household for outdoor recreation – such as a coffee on a bench or a picnic in a park – in addition to exercise.

But we are advising the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable to shield at least until the end of March.

Every care home resident will be able to nominate a named visitor, able to see them regularly provided they are tested and wear PPE.

And finally we will amend regulations to enable a broader range of Covid-secure campaign activities for local elections on 6 May.

As part of Step one, we will go further and make limited changes on 29 March, when schools go on Easter holidays.

It will become possible to meet in limited numbers outdoors, where the risk is lower.

So the Rule of Six will return outdoors, including in private gardens

and outdoor meetings of two households will also be permitted on the same basis, so that families in different circumstances can meet. Outdoor sports facilities – such as tennis and basketball courts, and open-air swimming pools – will be able to reopen

and formally organised outdoor sports will resume, subject to guidance.

From this point, 29 March, people will no longer be legally required to stay at home

but many lockdown restrictions will remain.

People should continue to work from home where they can and minimise all travel wherever possible.

Step two will begin at least five weeks after the beginning of step one

and no earlier than 12 April, with an announcement at least seven days in advance.

If analysis of the latest data against the four tests requires a delay, then this and subsequent steps will also be delayed to maintain the five week gap.

In step two non-essential retail will reopen, as will personal care including hairdressers I'm glad to say, and nail salons.

Indoor leisure facilities such as gyms will re-open, as will holiday-lets, but only for use by individuals or household groups.

We will begin to re-open our pubs and restaurants outdoors

and Hon Members will be relieved there will be no curfew

and the Scotch Egg debate will be over because there will be no requirement for alcohol to be accompanied by a substantial meal.

Zoos, theme parks and drive-in cinemas will re-open

as will public libraries and community centres.

Step three will begin no earlier than 17 May.

Provided the data satisfies the four tests, most restrictions on meetings outdoors will be lifted, subject to a limit of thirty.

And this is the point when you will be able to see your friends and family

indoors – subject to the Rule of Six or the meeting of two households.

We will also reopen pubs and restaurants indoors

along with cinemas and children's play areas,

hotels, hostels, and B&Bs.

Theatres and concert halls will open their doors,

and the turnstiles of our sports stadia will once again rotate

subject in all cases to capacity limits depending on the size of the venue.

And we will pilot larger events using enhanced testing, with the ambition of further easing of restrictions in the next step.

Step 4 will begin no earlier than 21 June.

With appropriate mitigations, we will aim to remove all legal limits on social contact,

and on weddings and other life events.

We will re-open everything up to and including nightclubs,

and enable large events such as theatre performances above the limits of step 3, potentially using testing to reduce the risk of infection.

Mr Speaker, our journey back towards normality will be subject to resolving a number of key questions and to do this we will conduct four reviews.

One will assess how long we need to maintain social distancing and face masks.

This will also inform guidance on working from home – which should continue wherever possible until this review is complete.

And it will be critical in determining how Parliament can safely return in a way that I know Hon Members would wish.

A second review will consider the resumption of international travel

which is vital for many businesses which have been hardest hit

including retail, hospitality, tourism and aviation.

A successor to the Global Travel Taskforce will report by 12 April so that people can plan for the summer.

The third review will consider the potential role of Covid-status certification in helping venues to open safely

but mindful of the many concerns surrounding exclusion, discrimination and

privacy.

And the fourth review will look at the safe return of major events.

Mr Speaker, as we proceed through these steps we will benefit from the combined protection of our vaccines and the continued expansion of rapid testing.

We will extend the provision of free test kits for workplaces until the end of June

and families, small businesses and the self-employed can collect those tests from local testing sites.

Mr Speaker, in view of these cautious but I hope irreversible changes, people may be concerned about what these changes mean for the various support packages, for livelihoods for people and for the economy.

So I want to assure the House, we will not pull the rug out.

For the duration of the pandemic, the government will continue to do whatever it takes to protect jobs and livelihoods across the UK.

And my Rt Hon Friend the Chancellor will set out further details in the Budget next Wednesday,

Finally, Mr Speaker, we must remain alert to the constant mutations of the virus.

Next month we will publish an updated plan for responding to local outbreaks, with a range of measures to address variants of concern, including surge PCR testing and enhanced contact tracing.

We can't, I'm afraid, rule out re-imposing restrictions at local or regional level if evidence suggests they are necessary to contain or suppress a new variant which escapes the vaccines.

Mr Speaker, I know there will be many people who will be worried that we are being too ambitious and that it is arrogant to impose any kind of plan upon a virus.

And I agree that we must always be humble in the face of nature and we must be cautious

but I really also believe that the vaccination programme has dramatically changed the odds in our favour and it is on that basis that we can now proceed.

And of course there will be others who will believe that we could go faster on the basis of that vaccination programme

and I understand their feelings and I sympathise very much with the exhaustion and the stress that people are experiencing and that businesses

are experiencing after so long in lockdown.

But to them I say that today the end really is in sight and a wretched year will give way to a spring and a summer that will be very different and incomparably better than the picture we see around us today.

And in that spirit, I commend this Statement to the House

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## [Mass testing for secondary pupils as all schools and colleges fully reopen from 8 March](#)

The government has today (Monday 22 February) set out its plan for the return of all pupils to schools and colleges as part of the roadmap for leaving lockdown, published this afternoon on gov.uk.

The government has been clear that the return to face-to-face education is the national priority and that two weeks' notice would be given ahead of any change. The return to school for all pupils is being prioritised due to the significant and proven impact caused by being out of school to the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

All students will begin to return to face-to-face education on 8 March with the following testing measures in place:

- All primary school children will return on Monday 8 March. Primary school staff will continue to take two rapid COVID-19 tests each week at home.
- All secondary school and college students will take three COVID-19 tests as they return to the classroom from the 8 March at existing school testing facilities. Schools and colleges will have discretion on how to test students over that week to enable their return to the classroom. After the initial programme of three tests in school or college, students will be provided with two rapid tests to use each week at home.
- Secondary school and college staff will also be provided with two tests to use each week at home.
- University students on practical courses who need to access specialist facilities and equipment can return to in-person teaching and learning from Monday 8 March. Twice weekly testing will continue to be available

for all on campus.

Wraparound childcare for primary and secondary pupils will resume from Monday 8 March where necessary to enable parents to access work, education or medical care.

Staff and students in secondary schools and colleges are advised to wear face coverings in all areas, including classrooms, where social distancing cannot be maintained and as a temporary extra measure.

For the remaining university students, the government will review, by the end of the Easter holidays, the options for timing of their return. This will take account of the latest data and will then be a key part of the wider roadmap steps. Students and institutions will be given a week's notice ahead of any return.

All staff at private, voluntary and independent nurseries will have access to tests to use twice weekly at home, building on the testing already available to maintained nursery schools and school-based nurseries. Childminders can continue to access community testing, and the Department continues to work with colleagues across government to review the testing approach available for childminders.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

I know this is a moment that students and parents up and down the country have been waiting for, and I would like to take this opportunity to give my thanks to all education and childcare staff and parents who have worked so hard to make sure students have continued to receive a high-quality education throughout this lockdown.

The testing of staff and students ahead of their return to secondary schools and colleges, alongside strengthened safety measures, should reassure families and education staff that extra measures are in place alongside the existing bubble system, enhanced hygiene and COVID secure precautions.

We are all well aware that being back in school or college brings huge benefits to young people's education, development and wellbeing. The classroom is the very best place for education and the return of face-to-face teaching for all pupils will be a welcome move for pupils and parents across the country.

Testing in education settings is already well-established, as recent figures showed four million tests had been conducted across schools, colleges and universities.

Public Health England continues to advise that the existing range of safety measures in place in education settings remains appropriate – including

bubble groups, staggering start and finish times, increasing ventilation and hygiene, regular testing and maintaining distance between adults where possible.

Extending the use of face coverings to classrooms is a temporary measure until Easter, and as with all measures the government will keep it under review.

Teachers should continue to be sensitive to the additional needs of their students, such as deafness, in deciding whether it is appropriate to wear a face covering.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

We have rolled out rapid testing to schools and universities at great pace to help drive down transmission rates among school age children, college and university students. I am very pleased that regular testing is now supporting the reopening of schools and face-to-face education.

Around one in three people who have coronavirus have no symptoms and will be spreading it without realising it, so rapid regular testing offers a reliable and effective additional tool to help keep schools safe.

Professor Viv Bennett, Chief Nurse and Director of Maternity and Early Years, at Public Health England said:

We have always advised that schools should be the last to close and first to open. It is vital for children's wellbeing that we get schools open again.

Staff, parents and pupils can feel reassured by scientific evidence that shows transmission in schools is low and that children are not drivers of infection in schools or the wider community.

The system of controls and the introduction of rapid testing programmes in place in schools offer further reassurance in the measures taken to maximise the safety of the school environment.

Most importantly, we know that infection rates in schools are driven by transmission in the wider community. It remains essential that we all continue to keep our contacts to a minimum and follow restrictions outside the school gates so that schools can re-open and stay open.

The consensus view from SAGE continues to be that missing out on classroom-based education has severe impacts for children and young people, with clear evidence that further time out of schools and colleges is detrimental for

cognitive and academic development, learning, health and wellbeing.

Evidence from the Public Health England-led Schools Infection Study continues to show that infection rates in schools mirror infection rates in the wider community, suggesting schools are not the main driver of infections.

Testing sites already set up in secondary schools and colleges should remain operational for students who find it difficult to test themselves at home.

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## Minister Adams summons the Myanmar Ambassador: 22 February 2021

Press release

The Minister for Asia, Minister Adams summoned the Myanmar Ambassador to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.



A Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office spokesperson said:

Today the Minister for Asia, Minister Adams, summoned the Myanmar Ambassador, Kyaw Zwar Minn, to the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office for the second time this month.

The Minister for Asia condemned the response by the Myanmar Security Forces to the peaceful protests. He stressed that the use of violence and force against protesters, which has already led to death and serious injury, was completely reprehensible and must stop.

The Minister for Asia once again condemned the military coup and arbitrary detention of civilians, including State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, calling for their immediate release and a peaceful return to democracy.

He also said that the UK would continue to work closely with international partners to condemn the coup, support democracy and hold the military to account for their violent response to peaceful protests. We will maintain the international spotlight on human rights violations and use all diplomatic levers available.

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## [First real-world UK data shows Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine provides high levels of protection from the first dose](#)

Data analysed by Public Health England (PHE) shows the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine provides high levels of protection against infection and symptomatic disease from the first dose.

Early data from PHE's SIREN study shows a promising impact on infection in healthcare workers aged under 65. Healthcare workers in the study are tested for coronavirus (COVID-19) every 2 weeks – whether or not they have symptoms.

Data shows one dose reduces the risk of catching infection by more than 70%, rising to 85% after the second dose. This suggests the vaccine may also help to interrupt virus transmission, as you cannot spread the virus if you do not have infection.

PHE's analysis of routine testing data also shows that one dose is 57% effective against symptomatic COVID-19 disease in those aged over 80. This effect occurs from about 3 to 4 weeks after the first dose.

Early data suggests the second dose in over 80s improves protection against symptomatic disease by a further 30%, to more than 85%.

Hospitalisation and deaths rates are falling in all age groups – but the oldest age groups are seeing the fastest decline since the peak in mid-January.

Early data suggests vaccinated people who go on to become infected are far less likely to die or be hospitalised. Overall, hospitalisation and death from COVID-19 will be reduced by over 75% in those who have received a dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

The risk of dying in those aged over 80 is less than half (56%) in vaccinated cases compared to unvaccinated cases, at least 14 days after receiving the first dose.

Those over 80 who develop COVID-19 infection after vaccination are around 40% less likely to be hospitalised than someone with infection who has not been vaccinated.

These high levels of protection are also seen against the variant of concern (B.1.1.7) first identified in South East England in December 2020.

While the data on infection, hospitalisation and death is promising, PHE will continue to observe these trends closely over the coming months to ensure firmer conclusions can be made.

PHE is also monitoring the real-world impact of the AstraZeneca vaccine and will publish these findings in due course – but early signals in the data suggest it's providing good levels of protection from the first dose.

Dr Mary Ramsay, Head of Immunisation at PHE, said:

This is strong evidence that the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is stopping people from getting infected, while also protecting cases against hospitalisation and death. We will see much more data over the coming weeks and months but we should be very encouraged by these initial findings.

But protection is not complete, and we don't yet know how much these vaccines will reduce the risk of you passing COVID-19 onto others. So even if you have been vaccinated, it is really important that you continue to act like you have the virus, practice good hand hygiene and stay at home.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

This crucial report shows vaccines are working – it is extremely encouraging to see evidence that the Pfizer vaccine offers a high degree of protection against coronavirus.

Vaccines save lives, and so it is vital we roll out the vaccine programme as fast as possible, and that as many people as possible take the jab. This new evidence shows that the jab protects you, and protects those around you.

It is important that we see as much evidence as possible on the vaccine's impact on protection and on transmission, and we will continue to publish evidence as we gather it. As we roll out the jab, it is vital people continue to play their role in protecting the NHS by sticking with the rules.

This data shows clear protection from the first dose, particularly against severe disease, supporting the decision to maximise the number of people vaccinated with a single dose, as advised by the Joint Committee on

Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

The current dosing strategy will save more lives by ensuring more people receive protection from severe disease following the first dose.

There is also good evidence suggesting that giving the second dose of AstraZeneca later will lead to much higher levels of protection. Offering the booster at 12 weeks will therefore help to ensure longer lasting protection beyond the current restrictions.

## **Background**

The SIREN (Sarscov2 Immunity and REinfection EvaluatioN) study involves a sample of healthcare workers undertaking symptom questionnaires, respiratory swabs and serum samples.

For further information please contact:

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## **Transforming SLC to support the post-Covid economy**

The recently published Skills for Jobs white paper sets out an extensive suite of reforms for post-16 education.

In doing so it envisages a fundamental shift in the way further and higher education is accessed, and how student finance will need to be delivered by the UK Government. It will not be lost on many readers that the implications for the Student Loans Company and our administration of student finance in the coming years are potentially mammoth.

## **Loans for lifelong learning**

Right now, there is an urgent need to rebuild the pandemic-impacted economy and skills must be at the centre of that. Effectively and efficiently financing those skills is imperative and SLC exists to enable people to invest in their futures through further and higher education. But delivering the ambitions set out in the white paper will require extensive change for SLC. Building on the Prime Minister's "Lifetime Skills Guarantee" speech in September 2020, the white paper commits to implement a flexible Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE) to the equivalent of four years of post-18 education from 2025, to use over a lifetime.

The government's intention is that the LLE will support modular provision, so that learners can build up credits flexibly over a period of time through online and blended learning. This is a fundamental shift away from the qualification-based loan products currently offered to students. It will be a

shift for SLC's various systems, IT, operational structures and processes, which are currently predominately geared towards an academic year delivery cycle. It will be a major shift too in the way SLC currently conceives of and services its customers which is first as applicants, then students and then repayers; under the new model envisaged by the white paper, they could conceivably be all three at once.

## **Simplifying the system**

Notwithstanding the change and challenge it will bring, SLC sees that the introduction of LLE presents an opportunity to tackle existing complexity within the student finance system and simplify SLC's administration of funding. [SLC intends to support government from the earliest stage to ensure these proposals become user-centred-designed, efficient, and effective student finance products.](#)

SLC is perhaps now better positioned than it has been in a long time to deliver such significant reforms. [In 2020, despite the multitude of challenges brought by the pandemic, we performed strongly and the organisation showed itself to be thoughtful, adaptable and confident.](#) We processed more applications and paid more students than ever before. We also took significant and long-awaited steps to improve our customer experience – introducing a new online repayment service giving customers up-to-date balance information for the first time; and introducing a digital evidence upload function, removing some of the need for students to post hardcopy evidence, which we know is a significant pain point in the application journey.

But there are more improvements to be made – and I am determined that before we can deliver a new student finance model, we must finish the job of transforming how we currently deliver our services and simplify and stabilise our technology, because this will lay the groundwork for a better customer experience from the outset. In the coming months, we will take a significant step towards improving the student finance application service as we roll out a new customer engagement management system.

This is the first fundamental change to how our teams interact with customers, initially to enable more customer queries to be resolved via self-service or at first point of contact. Later in the year, we will start to proactively provide customers with real time status updates on their applications. We are also currently reforming the provision of Disabled Students Allowances to enhance the customer experience and improve value for money for the taxpayer.

Crucially, the changes we are making this year will enable us to upskill colleagues to focus, via a case-management approach, on the more complex customer cases – those who most need our support on their student finance application journey.

To ensure the voice of our customer is at the forefront of these changes, [we have recently launched a Student Finance Customer Panel.](#) The Panel will enhance SLC's understanding of the customer journey – it will inform, shape

and challenge us as we strive to deliver an outstanding customer experience.

We have made recent strides towards our ambition to be a modern, responsive and sustainable organisation for our customers, colleagues and shareholder governments – but there is more to do. 2021 will be a year in which SLC focuses on significantly improving our customer experience; but we are also already looking ahead to the changes, challenges and opportunities the white paper brings for us. If 2020 has taught me anything it is that SLC can be the agile organisation needed to deliver these changes, and we are up for the challenge.

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<https://wonkhe.com/blogs/transforming-slc-to-support-the-post-covid-economy/>