

Surge testing to be deployed in areas around Manchester in connection to new variants

News story

Further targeted areas will have additional testing made available to control and suppress the spread of COVID-19 variants.



Working in partnership with the local authority, additional surge testing and sequencing is being deployed to targeted areas around Manchester in M14 4, M14 7, M15 5, M15 6, M16 7 and M16 8 where a COVID-19 variant has been found.

Surge testing is in addition to existing extensive testing, and in combination with following the lockdown rules and remembering Hands Face Space, will help to monitor and suppress the spread of the virus.

Positive cases will be sequenced for genomic data to help understand COVID-19 variants and their spread within these areas.

People living in this targeted area with these locations are strongly encouraged to take a COVID-19 test this week, whether they are showing symptoms or not.

People with symptoms should book a test in the usual way.

People without symptoms should visit their [local authority website](#) for more information.

Published 8 February 2021

Impact of Covid-19 on food fraud incidence

News story

Members of the Government Chemist team collaborated in the publication of an article on the impact of Covid-19 in the numbers of food fraud incidents



The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are being felt across the world and it is reasonable to expect that they have the potential to impact on the vulnerability of the global food supply chain to food fraud. Recent reports suggest the potential for increased food fraud in global food supply chains due to the impact of COVID-19.

The [Food Authenticity Network \(FAN\)](#) and Mérieux Nutrisciences have collaborated to undertake a detailed assessment of the data to establish whether food fraud incidents are indeed increasing. [Selvarani Elahi](#), Deputy Government Chemist and Executive Director of the Food Authenticity Network contributed to the article published in the [Institute of Food Science and Technology journal](#).

The analysis conducted identified a small increase in official food fraud alerts since the onset of the pandemic (19 more official reports) and a more significant increase in the number of media reports (81 more media reports) in January to June 2020 compared to the same period in 2019).

It is not clear how significant the observed increases are considering the availability of a relatively small number of global official food fraud alerts and the variability in the type of data available from different countries and sources, making it difficult to undertake statistical comparisons.

The Food Authenticity Network, in consultation with its members concluded that the conditions created by the pandemic have increased food fraud vulnerability but that there was insufficient evidence of 'dramatic' increases in specific COVID-19-related food fraud incidents. This study

supports that conclusion.

However, it is likely that the true impact of COVID-19 on the incidence of global food fraud will not be known until full resumption of regulatory surveillance world-wide and at this point, it is possible that more evidence concerning pandemic-related factors may emerge.

Published 8 February 2021

Health and Social Care Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 8 February 2021

Good afternoon and welcome back to Downing Street for today's coronavirus briefing.

I'm joined by the Deputy Chief Medical Officer Professor Jonathan Van-Tam, and by NHS England's Medical Director for Primary Care Dr Nikki Kanani.

Before I update you on our coronavirus response, I'd like to take you through the latest data.

There are still 29,326 patients with COVID in hospital across the UK – still more than at either the April or November peaks.

And sadly, 841 deaths have been reported on average each day over the past week.

My thoughts are with everyone who has lost a loved one to this deadly disease.

Today, I'd like to update you on 3 important parts of the coronavirus response.

Vaccines

First, the next steps on the vaccination programme.

It's now 2 months since that wonderful day when Margaret Keenan got her first jab, the first person in the world to be vaccinated with a clinically authorised vaccine for coronavirus.

We've now vaccinated as of today more than 12.2 million people.

That's almost one in 4 of all adults across the United Kingdom.

Take-up of the vaccine so far has been significantly better than we hoped for.

Based on the work we'd done before the vaccination programme started, and looking at the surveys, we knew that the UK had one of the most positive attitudes to vaccine uptake.

But even so, we thought we'd get take-up of around 75%.

I'm really pleased to be able to tell you that, as of midnight last night, among the over 80s, we've now given a first dose to 91%; among those aged between 75 and 79, it's 95%. And almost three-quarters of those aged between 70 and 74, who were the most recent group to be invited.

We've also visited every eligible care home with older residents, and offered vaccinations to all their residents and staff.

So among eligible care home residents, the take-up is 93%.

But we'll not rest until we vaccinate all those in the most at-risk groups.

Because vaccines save lives. They protect you, and there's increasing evidence they protect those around you too.

The fewer people who are left unprotected, the safer we'll all be and the more securely we'll be able to release restrictions when the time is right.

I've been thrilled to see so much enthusiasm about coming forward for a jab, and I'm just so pleased that take-up has been so high.

But we're not going to rest until all those who are vulnerable have been protected.

So the NHS, and local authorities, and the teams working with them are doing everything they can to reach the remaining people in these groups and we'll keep on searching for those final few per cent, even as we expand the offer of a vaccine to younger age groups.

I'm going to ask Dr Kanani to say a few words more about this project in a moment.

We're on track to meet our goal of offering a vaccine to everyone in priority groups 1 to 4 by the 15th of February – one week today – before moving onto the other JCVI priority groups.

The NHS has worked hard to contact everyone in groups 1 to 4.

But we want to be certain.

So, from today, I have a message for everyone aged 70 and above.

Until now, we've said please wait for the NHS to contact you.

But now that message is changing.

If you live in England, and are 70 and over, and have not yet got an appointment to get vaccinated please contact the NHS.

The easiest way is to do this is through the National Booking Service, online at nhs.uk.

Or if you can't get online then you can call 119 or you can speak to your local GP practice.

If you're in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, we are also on track, working together to meet the goal by the 15th February, and your local health team will be in touch.

I'm so grateful to the whole team who are delivering this vaccination programme so brilliantly across the whole United Kingdom.

And to everyone who's doing their bit, by baring their arms, and getting the jab.

Testing

While we use our vaccination programme to go on the offensive against this virus, it's very important we keep our defences up as well.

Our testing programme has also grown at a blistering rate.

We're now carrying out, on average, 4.5 million tests every single week.

NHS Test and Trace is returning 97% of in-person test by the next day contact tracing is performing incredibly well, reaching over 97% of contacts where details are given – and 98% of those they're reaching within 24 hours.

I want to say a massive thank you to the NHS Test and Trace, who have built this extraordinary capability almost from scratch.

Even in lockdown, testing to find out where the virus is, is critical to break the chains of transmission and to find those positive cases so people isolate and stop the spread.

Today I'm delighted to be able to announce another step forward, to bolster our on-shore test manufacturing capacity.

We're joining forces with the Derby-based manufacturer Surescreen, to deliver 20 million rapid tests, which can produce results in 30 minutes.

They'll be used in our asymptomatic testing programme to identify the around one in 3 people who get the virus without any symptoms at all yet can still pass it on.

This expanded capacity means we can offer more regular testing to even more people.

Many employers are already taking up our offer of rapid, regular workplace

testing which has protected critical workers like in the NHS and schools, so they can keep going.

Employers who've introduced workplace testing tell me that they find it useful for early identification of people who have COVID and so the number of outbreaks reduces as time goes on and so lowers the number of people who are off work with COVID. This is a really important part of what we want to do.

Now, from today, we're expanding the offer of regular workplace testing to all businesses with over 50 employees, in sectors that are currently open.

Testing will become even more important as we exit lockdown, when the time is right.

For now of course, you must work from home if you can.

But if you can't, we want to make sure we're providing as much certainty and confidence as possible. I'd urge all eligible employers to take up this offer. You can go online to the portal at gov.uk/coronavirus.

And this will all help to keep vital services going, and to keep the virus on the back foot.

New variants

The third thing I want to touch on is our work to tackle new variants.

All viruses mutate over time. And part of controlling any virus is responding to new variants as they arise.

We do this every year with flu, for instance.

Knowing this, we invested in genomic sequencing capability right at the start of this pandemic genomic sequencing is how you identify new variants giving the UK one of the biggest genomic sequencing capabilities in the world.

In fact we've provided almost half of global COVID sequencing.

This genomic capacity has allowed us to spot variants here at home and is allowing us to support others to detect variants in other parts of the world.

We musn't let a new variant undo all of the good work that the vaccine rollout is doing to protect people.

Now, the first line of defence is to spot and suppress new variants aggressively wherever they're found.

Hence the tougher measures at the border and the firm action we're taking in those small number of areas where variants of concern have been found in the community Including door-to-door communications, and enhanced testing and sequencing.

At the same time, since the emergence of variants of concern late last year,

we've been working on how vaccines can be used to tackle them.

It is imperative that our vaccination programme keeps pace with any changes to this virus.

And Professor Van-Tam will be saying a little bit more about what we're doing.

The work has 3 parts.

First, the evidence is that the existing vaccines have some effect against new variants particularly preventing serious illness and mortality so the existing vaccine rollout is mission critical for tackling new variants too.

Second, we're working with the existing vaccine suppliers on potential booster jabs, targeted specifically at the new variants, to strengthen this protection further.

Third, we're building on-shore UK capacity, including cutting edge mRNA technologies to give us the ability rapidly to develop and deploy vaccines against any new variants, or similar new diseases, in the future.

We've entered into a new partnership with the vaccine manufacturer CureVac to develop vaccines that can be quickly adapted as new strains are identified just as we do for the flu vaccine every year.

I'm determined that we build this capacity right here securely here in the UK.

To protect everyone across these islands, not just from new variants but for the long term too.

We've agreed an initial supply of 50 million doses, to add to the 400 million doses that are already in our vaccine portfolio so we'll be prepared for whatever the future might bring.

Of course, the fewer new cases of coronavirus that we have, the lower the chance of a new variant appearing domestically.

So the essential message to stay at home and follow the social distancing rules is our best defence right now.

Taking all this together, what I want to say is this.

The number of people in hospital is still far too high, but it is falling. The number of deaths is far too high, but that is falling too. We're turning a corner in our battle against coronavirus.

The vaccine rollout is going well – and if you're aged 70 and over and haven't been contacted yet, please get in touch now.

And all the time, we must be vigilant and do what it takes to tackle any new variants that arise.

For now, the most important thing you can do is: get the jab when your time comes.

Stay at home, protect the NHS, and save lives.

COP26 President addresses UN Member States

Excellencies, Secretary General, friends.

It is a real pleasure to speak to you all again to provide this regular update. And as you all know I am now devoting all of my time and energies to the role of COP26 President Designate, whilst continuing as a full member of the UK Government Cabinet.

I hope this tells you how seriously Prime Minister Boris Johnson and the whole of the UK Government are taking our role as incoming COP Presidency.

It recognises the stark facts in front of us. The facts as the Secretary General has just outlined. And the urgent need to increase our collective ambition across all elements of the Paris Agreement.

2020 saw record temperatures.

We saw fires raging across the world.

We saw storms intensifying.

In short, my friends, the climate crisis is closing in.

But, as the Secretary General noted, we are seeing some acceleration in climate action despite the pandemic, and of course at the Climate Ambition Summit the UK held with the UN and France in December, we heard from 75 leaders.

Who announced between them 45 Nationally Determined Contributions, 24 net zero pledges, and 20 adaptation commitments.

With many of the countries most vulnerable to climate change leading the way.

So I want to thank you, every one of you, who took part.

By the end of 2020, net zero was firmly established as the norm.

If you take into account President Biden's recent announcements, over half of G20 countries and around 70 per cent of global emissions are now covered by net zero targets.

And I hope I speak for all of us when I say: welcome back to the USA in our shared fight against climate change.

As I said at the Climate Ambition Summit. All this commitment is welcome. But it is not enough to meet the ambitions of the Paris Agreement.

Ambitions which we have collectively agreed.

So let's be frank with ourselves, we still have some way to go. We are, as the Secretary General said, way off target.

We need to do more, and we need to do it urgently.

So, in my speech to the Summit, I outlined four goals, I want us to work towards together, to get the world on track to make Paris a reality.

Today, I want to say a bit more about how we can do so.

First, we need to secure that step change in emissions reductions.

We all know what we need to do here:

This isn't new. This is about net zero targets; with aligned NDCs that keep that 1.5 degrees within reach; and policies like phasing-out coal power, to show that we are serious.

Secondly, we must strengthen adaptation.

I really welcome the Secretary General's leadership here.

And the Climate Adaptation Summit, held by the Netherlands last month.

Where the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson launched the new Adaptation Action Coalition.

This has been developed by the UK, and our friends in Egypt, Bangladesh, Malawi, the Netherlands, Saint Lucia and the UN.

With our Group of Friends on Adaptation and Resilience in New York.

The aim is to convert the political commitment generated through the Call to Action – which I was part of launching in 2019, at UNCAS – into practical reality.

I urge all countries to join this Coalition.

Please sign the Call to Action if you have not already done so.

As well as to focus on effective adaptation planning and setting out progress in Adaptation Communications.

Our third goal – a vital one – is to get finance flowing – both public and private. Particularly to developing countries. And especially to adaptation.

My message could not be clearer. Progress on public finance has sadly been too slow.

Woefully slow, say our friends in countries on the frontline of having to deal with climate change.

My fellow donor countries need to step-up and deliver the \$100 billion a year in international climate finance that we have promised. As I've said before, this is a matter of trust and we must deliver.

Last month, the UK COP Presidency published our public finance priorities.

We want to work with all of you to make progress on these vital issues.

And I am also working to get both public and private finance moving.

And to make further progress in this area, the UK's COP26 Presidency will hold a Climate and Development Ministerial at the end of March.

We will bring together Ministers representing donor countries and countries vulnerable to climate change.

To establish how we can remove barriers to climate action and development.

Together, we will look at four vital issues: access to finance; quantity & predictability of finance; the response to impacts; and fiscal space and debt.

And we will plan how to make progress on each of these areas, through events like the G7, IFI Spring Meetings, and the UN General Assembly.

Discussions will be informed by experts and civil society groups.

We will be working with regional chairs to make sure all regions are represented.

The event will also be open to observers from countries who are not directly participating.

The fourth and final goal is to enhance international collaboration around critical challenges and sectors. To make progress faster.

Our COP26 campaigns have established new forums.

Like the Energy Transition Council, and the Zero Emission Vehicle Transition Council. Which met for the first time last year.

We also have the Forest, Agriculture and Commodity Trade Dialogues, which were launched publicly last week.

And I have to say we have seen a real appetite for cooperation. So I thank all countries involved.

On all of these four goals, major economies must show leadership.

Let me confirm to you that the UK will use its G7 Presidency to urge them to do so, as our Italian partners will with their G20 presidency.

Of course, the multilateral negotiations are at the heart of our plans.

They underpin each of the four goals I have outlined, and are absolutely key to fulfilling the Paris Agreement.

We must test solutions, and prepare the ground, ahead of COP26, so that we arrive in Glasgow ready to close a deal.

Last year, we did make progress virtually despite the pandemic. We had events like the UN Climate Change Dialogues and others.

But this year cannot simply be a repeat of the last.

As the Secretary General has outlined, we may not all be able to meet in person for some months.

But we know that we need to make progress faster. And so we need to seek creative ways of conducting our discussions that have inclusivity at their heart.

I am therefore consulting with the chairs of all the UNFCCC negotiating groups. And meeting international partners. To understand their positions.

As Ambassador Woodward pointed out, I have recently visited Ethiopia and Gabon and I will continue to travel where possible.

With our friends in Chile, we have initiated new monthly meetings, bringing together Heads of Delegation from every country, to chart the course to Glasgow together and to find possible solutions to negotiating issues.

Friends, I have to say this: this is a joint endeavour. An endeavour between all of us together.

So we are working with the UNFCCC to support parties' connectivity. We are holding meetings at times that respect different time zones. And we are discussing how technology can help us move forward together.

We must continue to work creatively and flexibly, guided by the principles of transparency, inclusivity and common purpose, to make progress which is so vital.

So that when we do meet in person in November, we secure an outcome that delivers for each and every country. And that delivers for our planet as a whole.

And I look forward to working with all of you throughout 2021 to achieve this.

We all know what is at stake if we do not work now to secure the right outcomes at Glasgow.

Let me remind you: we have 266 days to go to COP26. Please, let's work together.

Let's make sure that every one of those days counts.

UK shellfish exports: Environment Secretary's Commons statement, 8 February 2020

We have a long-standing trade in live bivalve molluscs to the EU from UK waters. This has benefited both our own shellfish industry and EU restaurants and retailers who rely on these premium products from the UK.

Recently, concerns have emerged for our trade in live bivalve molluscs to the EU coming from UK Class B production waters which have not been through purification or have not cleared testing.

The European Commission has changed its position in recent weeks. They advised us in writing in September 2019 that the trade could continue. We shared the Commission's view and worked with the industry on that basis. This included explaining that for one small part of the industry – wild harvested molluscs from Class B waters – there would need to be a pause while we awaited a new Export Health Certificate to become available in April but that in line with the guidance from the EU trade in the molluscs from farms could continue uninterrupted.

We continue to believe that our interpretation of the law and the EU's original interpretation is correct and that the trade should be able to continue for all relevant molluscs from April. And there is no reason for a gap at all for molluscs from aquaculture.

However, last week, the Commission gave us sight of instructions they had sent to all Member States on 3 February stating that any imports into the EU from the UK of Live Bivalve Molluscs for purification from Class B waters, such as the sea around Wales and the South West of England, are not permitted. Exports from Class A waters, such as we find around parts of Scotland, may continue.

Bringing an end to this traditional and valuable trade is unacceptable. I recognise this is a devastating blow to those business that are reliant on the trade. While we do not agree with the Commission's interpretation of the law, we have had to advise traders that their consignments may very well not be accepted at EU ports for now.

I am seeking urgent resolution to this problem and I have written to

Commissioner Kyriakides today. I have emphasised our high shellfish health status and our systems of control. I have said, if it would assist the trade, we could provide reasonable additional reassurances to demonstrate shellfish health, but this must recognise the existing high standards and history of trade between us. It is in the EU's interests to restore this trade; many businesses in the EU have invested in depuration equipment and are configured around managing the export of molluscs from Class B waters.

We have met the industry several times and they are of course extremely concerned. We are working well with the Shellfish Association of Great Britain who are taking up the issue in meetings with European counterparts.

The molluscs affected include mussels, oysters, clams and cockles. In general, the scallop trade is less affected. Scallop exports may instead undergo pre-export testing, as was the case before exit. However, we know that there are some businesses who have not traditionally been working in that way. We are discussing with them how we may help.

The issue does not affect molluscs landed in Northern Ireland. It does however affect movements from GB to Northern Ireland.

I know that this issue will be of great concern to many exporters around the country. Defra will continue the technical discussions with the European Commission and I will update the House with any developments in due course.