

Prime Minister's statement to the House of Commons on coronavirus: 27 January 2021

Mr Speaker, with permission, I will make a statement on the Government's measures to safeguard our United Kingdom against the new variants of Covid until we have administered enough vaccinations to free ourselves from the virus.

And I am acutely conscious that at this moment, parents are balancing the demands of working from home with supporting the education of their children, businesspeople are enduring the sight of their shops or restaurants or other enterprises standing empty and idle and, sadly, too many are coping with the anxiety of illness or tragedy of bereavement.

I am deeply sorry to say that the number of people that have taken from us has surpassed 100,000, as the house was discussing only an hour or so ago, and I know the House will join me in offering condolences to all those who have lost loved ones.

The most important thing we can do to honour their memory is to persevere against this virus with ever greater resolve, and that is why we have launched the biggest vaccination programme in British history.

Three weeks ago, I reported that the UK had immunised 1.3 million people; now that figure has multiplied more than fivefold to exceed 6.8 million people, more than any other country in Europe and over 13 per cent of the entire adult population.

In England we have now delivered first doses to over four-fifths of those aged 80 or over, and over half of those aged between 75 and 79 and three quarters of elderly care home residents

And though it remains an exacting target, we are on track to achieve our goal of offering a first dose to everyone in the top four priority groups by the middle of February.

I can also reassure the House that all current evidence shows that both the vaccines we are administering remain effective against the new variant that was first identified in London and the South East by means of our world-leading capability in genomic sequencing.

The UK has now sequenced over half of all COVID-19 viral genomes that have been submitted to the global database, 10 times more than any other country.

And yesterday, my Rt Hon Friend the Health Secretary announced our New Variant Assessment Platform, through which we will work with the World Health Organisation to offer our expertise to help other countries, because a new variant anywhere poses a potential threat everywhere.

To guard against this danger, we must also take additional steps to strengthen our borders to stop those strains from entering the UK.

We have already temporarily closed all travel corridors and we are already requiring anyone coming to this country to have proof of a negative Covid test taken in the 72 hours before leaving.

They must also complete a Passenger Locator Form which must be checked before they board – and then quarantine on arrival for ten days.

I want to make clear that under the stay at home regulations it is illegal to leave home to travel abroad for leisure purposes and we will enforce this at ports and airports by asking people why they are leaving and instructing them to return home if they do not have a valid reason to travel.

We have also banned all travel from 22 countries where there is a risk of known variants including South Africa, Portugal and South American nations, and in order to reduce the risk posed by UK nationals and residents returning home from these countries, I can announce that we will require all such arrivals who cannot be refused entry to isolate in government-provided accommodation – such as hotels – for ten days without exception. They will be met at the airport and transported directly into quarantine.

The Department for Health and Social Care is working to establish these facilities as quickly as possible and my Rt Hon Friend the Home Secretary will set out the details of our plans in her statement shortly.

My Rt Hon Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has this morning spoken to the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales, and the First and deputy First Ministers of Northern Ireland and, as we have throughout the pandemic, we will be working closely with the DAs to implement these new measures so that, where possible, we continue to take a UK-wide approach.

Mr Speaker, it was the emergence of a new variant – up to 70 per cent more transmissible – that forced England back into lockdown, and I know everyone yearns to know how much longer we must endure these restrictions, with all their consequences for jobs, livelihoods and most tragically of all, the life chances of our children.

We will not persist for a day longer than is necessary, but nor can we relax too soon, because if we do we run the risk of our NHS coming under still greater pressure, compelling us to re-impose every restriction and sustain those restrictions for longer.

So far, our efforts do appear to have reduced the R rate, but we do not yet have enough data to know exactly how soon it will be safe to reopen our society and economy.

At this point, we do not have enough data to judge the full effect of vaccines in blocking transmission nor the extent and speed with which the vaccines will reduce hospitalisations and deaths, nor how quickly the combination of vaccinations and the lockdown can be expected to ease the pressure on the NHS.

What we do know is that we remain in a perilous situation, with more than 37,000 patients now in hospital with Covid, almost double the peak of the first wave.

But the overall picture should be clearer by mid-February: by then, we will know much more about the effect of vaccines in preventing hospitalisations and deaths, using data from the UK but also other nations like Israel. We will know how successful the current restrictions have been in driving down infections.

We will also know how many people are still in hospital with Covid, which we simply can't predict with certainty today.

So we will then be in a better position to chart a course out of lockdown, without risking a further surge that would overwhelm the NHS.

When I announced the lockdown I said we would review its measures in mid-February, once the most vulnerable had been offered the first dose of the vaccine.

So I can tell the House that when Parliament returns from Recess in the week commencing 22nd February subject to the full agreement of the House, Mr Speaker, we intend to set out the results of that review and publish our plan for taking the country out of lockdown.

That plan will, of course, depend on the continued success of our vaccination programme, the capacity of the NHS, and on deaths falling at the pace we would expect as more people are inoculated.

Our aim will be to set out a gradual and phased approach towards easing the restrictions in a sustainable way, guided by the principles we have observed throughout the pandemic, beginning with the most important principle of all: that re-opening schools must be our national priority and the first sign of normality beginning to return should be pupils going back to their classrooms.

I know how parents and teachers need as much certainty as possible, including two weeks' notice of the return of face-to-face teaching.

So I must inform the House that, for the reasons I have outlined, it will not be possible to re-open schools immediately after the February half term.

I know how frustrating that will be for pupils and teachers who want nothing more than to get back in the classroom and for parents and carers who have spent so many months juggling their day jobs not only with home schooling but with meeting the myriad other demands of their children from breakfast until bedtime. And I know too the worries we all share about the mental health of our young people during this prolonged period of being stuck at home.

So our plan for leaving the lockdown will set out our approach towards re-opening schools.

If we achieve our target of vaccinating everyone in the four most vulnerable

groups with their first dose by 15 February – and every passing day sees more progress towards that goal – then those groups will have developed immunity from the virus by about three weeks later, that is by 8 March.

We hope it will therefore be safe to commence the reopening of schools from Monday 8 March, with other economic and social restrictions being removed thereafter as and when the data permits – then or thereafter, I should say, Mr Speaker.

As we are extending the period of remote learning beyond the middle of February, I can confirm that the government will prolong arrangements for providing free school meals for those eligible children not in school – including food parcels and the national voucher scheme – until they have returned to the classroom. We can also commit now that, as we did this financial year, we will provide a programme of catch up over the next financial year.

This will involve a further £300m of new money to schools for tutoring and we will work in collaboration with the education sector to develop, as appropriate, specific initiatives for summer schools and a Covid Premium to support catch up.

But we recognise that these extended school closures have had a huge impact on children's learning which will take more than a year to make up.

So we will work with parents, teachers and schools to develop a long-term plan to make sure pupils have the chance to make up their learning over the course of this Parliament.

I know, Mr Speaker, that the measures I am setting out today will be deeply frustrating to many honourable friends and colleagues, and disappointing for all of us.

But the way forward has been clear ever since the vaccines arrived and, as we inoculate more people hour by hour, this is the time to hold our nerve in the endgame of the battle against the virus.

Our goal now must be to buy the extra weeks we need to immunise the most vulnerable and get this virus under control, so that together we can defeat this most wretched disease, reclaim our lives once and for all, and, Mr Speaker, I commend this statement to the House.

**Government confirms £10 million
emergency support for steps 3-6 of the**

National League system

- Grant funding to protect immediate future of approximately 850 football clubs across England
- Announcement marks first round of funding from Government's Sports Winter Survival Package
- Confirmation that clubs in National League Steps 1 and 2 can apply for grants if their imminent future is at risk and they can demonstrate loans are unaffordable

The funding will be provided in the form of grants. Clubs in Steps 3-6 will be contacted directly by the Football Foundation with full details and will be able to make an application from tomorrow. Funds will be distributed quickly to clubs through the Football Stadium Improvement Fund.

It is the first award to be announced from the Government's [£300 million Sports Winter Survival Package](#) that is focused on helping those major spectator sports severely impacted by coronavirus restrictions survive the winter.

It follows submissions made from individual sports to an [independent decision-making Board](#), supported by Sport England.

[In October the Government announced it had brokered a unique deal with the National Lottery to provide a £10 million cash injection to keep Step 1 and 2 clubs afloat](#), and recently announced a [provisional £11 million in very low interest long term loans to support clubs in those tiers](#). Clubs will be assessed on the basis of need, with grants available where loans are demonstrated to be unaffordable for individual clubs in line with the support offered for other sports.

The Sports Winter Survival Package is a sector-specific intervention that is on top of the multi-billion pounds worth of business support that has been made available by the Government, including the furlough scheme, business rates relief and business interruption loan scheme that has helped many sports clubs survive. Football alone has accessed many hundreds of millions of pounds of support through this.

Sports Minister Nigel Huddleston said:

"We promised to support sports and target help to where it's most needed. Today we continue to deliver on that with further support for National League football clubs.

"The National League has already benefited from the Government support schemes through a £10 million Government-brokered cash partnership with the National Lottery, and there will be more support for the bigger clubs on the way.

"Today's £10 million grant for lower league clubs in Steps 3-6 will act as a lifeline for around 850 clubs in towns and cities across England, and help

these clubs through this difficult period until we can get fans back in safely.”

Chair of the independent Board, Sir Ian Cheshire said:

“On behalf of the independent Board we are pleased to be able to confirm funding from the Sports Winter Survival Package in the form of up to £10 million of grants for steps 3-6 of the National League System.

“As the sport and physical activity sector continues to navigate trying times, this package of government support is vitally important in ensuring that clubs, sports and leagues who are reliant on revenue from spectators can continue to stay afloat.

“With thanks to Sport England for their significant work managing the scheme, the independent Board continues to work at speed while prioritising those with most pressing need for support, and we anticipate confirming further recipients in the coming weeks.”

On Step 1 and 2 National League funding, Sports Minister Nigel Huddleston added:

“With precious public money, we are providing financial support to the National League Steps 1 and 2 in the form of loans. However if clubs at those levels can demonstrate it needs grant funding urgently to survive, we will ensure that option is available. We will not let clubs go to the wall. Applications will be assessed by the independent Board, through the same rigorous process that we apply to other sports.”

Further confirmations of funding from the Sports Winter Survival Package will be made in due course.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- The Premier League, The FA and Government’s Football Foundation is the largest sports charity in the UK. It champions and supports fair access to quality football facilities for everyone, regardless of gender, race, disability or place. The Premier League’s Football Stadia Improvement Fund (FSIF) is the country’s largest provider of grants towards projects that help improve the comfort and safety of lower-league football grounds in both the professional and amateur game.
- The Government is providing up to £10 million funding for football clubs in Steps 3-6 as part of its Sports Winter Survival Package. It will be distributed by the Football Foundation, through the Football Stadia Improvement Fund. More information can be found at <https://footballfoundation.org.uk/grant/football-winter-survival-package>

- Any clubs in National League Steps 1 and 2 that can demonstrate they are in urgent need of grant funding to survive should apply to the main Sports Winter Survival Package through Sport England.

Companies House to pause voluntary and compulsory strike off processes for one month

News story

We've temporarily paused our voluntary and compulsory strike off processes for one month from 21 January until 21 February 2021.



We're closely following the government's COVID-secure guidance and have reduced the number of colleagues in our offices. This has led to delays in processing correspondence, documents and forms.

We've temporarily paused our strike off processes so that companies are not adversely affected by these delays.

We'll continue to publish first Gazette notices for voluntary strike off applications to minimise the impact on those who have applied to close their company – but we will not be publishing the second Gazette notice and striking companies off during this period. For companies on the compulsory strike off path, we will not be publishing first and second Gazette notices.

Pausing our strike off processes will provide companies with more time to update their records and help them avoid being struck off the register. It'll also protect creditors and other interested parties who might have had difficulties in receiving notices or registering an objection, or whose objections have not yet been processed.

We'll continue to remind customers about their filing responsibilities during

this period. Our digital services are available as normal, and we encourage all customers to [file online](#) if you're able to.

You can find your filing deadlines on your company overview page on [Companies House service](#).

We'll conduct a review before the end of the one month period, and we'll keep customers updated on GOV.UK and on our social channels.

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[Scottish Secretary responds to November GDP figures in Scotland](#)

News story

These show a fall in GDP of 1.4% in Scotland for November compared to a UK wide fall of 2.6%



Scottish Secretary, Alister Jack said:

Today's figures reflect the challenges we continue to face as a result of this global pandemic.

The UK Government has invested over £280 billion to safeguard lives and livelihoods across the country – including through our furlough scheme which has protected nearly 780,000 jobs in Scotland. This direct support is on top of £8.6 billion extra funding given to the Scottish Government.

Hope is on the horizon with the roll out of vaccines and we are taking steps to kick start the economic recovery through our Plan for Jobs, expanding City and Regional Growth Deals in Scotland and

investing in a new Shared Prosperity Fund.

As we continue to see during these challenging times, the strength of the Union and support offered by the UK Treasury has never been more important.

- The UK Government furlough scheme, paying 80 per cent of wages, will run until the end of April. The self-employed support scheme has also been extended to the end of March and will increase from 55% to 80% of average profits – up to £7,500. At their peak in the summer our furlough and self-employed support schemes were supporting more than 930,000 jobs in Scotland.
- More than 90,000 businesses in Scotland have been supported from UK Government business loans worth £3.4 billion.
- The UK Government is investing billions to help people of all ages back into work, including our £2 billion Kickstart scheme for young people, expansion of sector work experience programmes and recruitment of thousands of Work Coaches in Jobcentres.
- This support is on top of an additional £8.6 billion upfront funding given to the Scottish Government this financial year for their Covid response.
- At the Budget in March the Chancellor will outline the next phase of our plan to provide certainty and growth in the months ahead.
- The UK Government continues to provide the bulk of Covid testing in Scotland and has moved quickly to buy vaccines, securing 367 million doses from seven developers with Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines currently being rolled out across the UK.

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[Government reviews law on access to land for digital infrastructure](#)

A government [consultation has been launched](#) on whether to make changes to the

law around digital infrastructure, such as phone masts and broadband cabinets, with a view to providing more homes with improved internet and mobile coverage.

Announced by Digital Minister Matt Warman, the consultation will review the legal framework for building and maintaining these structures on private and public land.

While progress has been made since the UK's Electronic Communications Code was reformed in 2017, stakeholders have reported that negotiations do not always progress smoothly and agreements can take a long time to complete. This is holding back homes and businesses from accessing better mobile coverage and much faster gigabit broadband.

The consultation will explore whether changes to the Code are required to encourage faster and more collaborative negotiations between landowners and telecoms providers. It will also examine whether there are ways that the use of existing infrastructure can be improved.

Matt Warman, Minister for Digital Infrastructure, said:

As part of our vision to level up the UK with better connectivity and faster broadband speeds, we're looking at reforming the law so people can get the benefits of better connectivity as soon as possible.

We're also investing £5.5 billion to roll out nationwide gigabit broadband and improve poor mobile coverage.

The consultation seeks views on: issues that have arisen relating to obtaining and using Code agreements; rights to upgrade and share infrastructure; and difficulties relating to the renewal of expired agreements.

The consultation proposes reviewing automatic rights which can be used when a phone mast needs to be upgraded from 4G to 5G or shared among operators to remove coverage blackspots, to make clear when these rights should be available.

Views are also being sought on whether greater certainty is needed for operators and landowners about what will happen when their land agreements come to an end and how they can be renewed.

The 2017 reforms to the Electronic Communications Code were made to support faster and easier rollout in rural areas, balancing the need for digital infrastructure with the rights of landowners and other site providers.

Hamish MacLeod, Director at Mobile UK, said:

The Government has set ambitious targets on extending coverage and

capacity and getting the regulatory framework right to enable operators to deploy their networks is essential. We welcome the consultation on the Electronic Communications Code as a vital part of this strategy.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

- The consultation will provide all interested parties with the opportunity to comment on the scale and scope of potential reforms. The deadline for responses is 24 March 2021.
- The Electronic Communications Code is the legal framework underpinning agreements between landowners and communications operators in the UK. The Code was substantially reformed in 2017 to make it cheaper and easier for electronic communications apparatus to be deployed, maintained, shared and upgraded. Now, more than ever, it is important that operators are able to do this at pace.
- The purpose of this consultation is to understand whether changes to the Code are needed. Whether changes are introduced will depend on our findings from this consultation. A full response to the consultation will be published in due course, and will provide further information on any changes to be made and, if so, the timescales for that. Should the government decide that reforms to the Electronic Communications Code are needed, this would require primary legislation.