

Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 7 January 2021

Good afternoon, today I'm joined by Sir Simon Stevens, Chief Executive of NHS England

and Brigadier Phil Prosser, who is Commander of Military Support to the Vaccine Delivery Programme across our United Kingdom.

Because I know there is now one question at the very top of your minds

and that is how fast and how effectively we can get these millions of new vaccines into the arms of the most vulnerable and those who need them most.

And you want to know that we in government,

the NHS, the Armed Forces, local and regional government, government at every level

are truly throwing everything at it

round the clock if necessary.

And I believe that with the country once again in lockdown

and all the difficulties that means for you, for your family, for students, for education, for your businesses,

and of course with the tragic number of deaths that we're seeing and that we've seen today,

you have a right to understand exactly how we are cracking this problem and how the national vaccine effort is progressing.

And you rightly want to know how we are going to reach the target that I set out earlier this week

of offering a slot for vaccination by 15th of February for everyone in those key groups identified by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation

That's over 12 million people in England, and 15 million in the UK

including older care home residents and staff

everyone 70 or over

all frontline NHS and care staff

and all those who are clinically extremely vulnerable.

And just to remind you of the importance of these groups for fighting the

disease

they account for 88 per cent of all those who have sadly lost their lives.

And so our tactics are

first to use the immense natural capacity of the NHS

and by the end of next week there will be

over 1,000 GP-led sites providing vaccines

223 hospital sites

seven giant vaccination centres

and a first wave of 200 community pharmacies

If all goes well these together should have the capacity to deliver hundreds of thousands of vaccines per day by Jan 15th

and it is our plan that everyone should have a vaccination available within a radius of ten miles.

And it follows from that that the limits will not be on our distributional power but on the supply of vaccines.

And I have no doubt that we have enough supply to vaccinate these four groups by the Feb 15th deadline and we also have the distributional network to do it

and to continue an expanding programme down that priority list.

Yes, let's be clear this is a national challenge on a scale like nothing we have seen before

and it will require an unprecedented national effort.

And, of course there will be difficulties

appointments will be changed

but as Brigadier Prosser will shortly explain

the army is working hand in glove with the NHS and local councils to set up our vaccine network

and using battle preparation techniques to help us keep up the pace.

We will publish our full vaccine deployment plan on Monday

along with daily updates on the progress we are making.

We have now vaccinated 1.26 million people in England,

113,000 in Scotland,

49,000 in Wales,

and 46,000 in Northern Ireland.

So altogether, nearly 1.5 million people across the UK have now received their first dose

and within 2-3 weeks all of them will have a very considerable degree of immunity.

And it is thanks to the arrival of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine which can be stored at room temperature,

that we can accelerate the pace of vaccination in care homes.

We are using that vaccine in care homes for the first time today

and by the end of the month we hope to have offered every elderly care home resident a vaccine.

Our new National Booking Service will also make it easier to book and access appointments

So I urge everyone to come forwards

because it's absolutely vital that we should have confidence in these vaccines.

And I want to thank everyone involved in this extraordinary national effort

all the GPs, nurses, pharmacists and all the staff behind the scenes

our armed forces

local councils

our scientists who have not only developed the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, the first ever life-saving treatment of Covid in the form of dexamethasone –

but I am pleased to tell you today, British scientific research has now contributed to the creation of more new lifesaving treatments that have just passed rigorous clinical trials.

In particular, Tocilizumab, sorry I'll say it again, Tocilizumab

and Sarilumab, they'll shortly be on everybody's lips

which have been found to reduce the risk of death for critically ill patients by almost a quarter

and they've cut time spent in intensive care by as much as ten days

and these lifesaving drugs will be available through the NHS with immediate effect,

potentially saving thousands of lives.

And finally again I want to thank you – the British public – for coming forward to be vaccinated

in the numbers that you have – still greater than all the countries of Europe put together.

And yes of course, we are in a race against time

but I can assure you we're doing everything we can to vaccinate as many people as possible across our whole United Kingdom.

And in the meantime

please stay at home, protect our NHS and save lives.

And now I'll hand over to Sir Simon Stevens

[Travel restrictions update: South Africa ban extended, Israel \(and Jerusalem\) removed from Travel Corridors list](#)

- travel restrictions extended to southern African countries from 4am Saturday 9 January (2021) to protect against the spread of a new COVID-19 variant initially detected in South Africa
- British and Irish Nationals, longer-term visa holders and permanent residents who have travelled to all countries in southern Africa, Seychelles and Mauritius in the last 10 days will have to self-isolate along with their household
- the measures will be in place for an initial period of 2 weeks while we review the scientific data and alternative ways to protect the UK and our partners in Africa
- Israel (and Jerusalem) to be removed from list of travel corridors for England following data showing a significant increase in confirmed cases
- Mauritius, Seychelles and Botswana also removed from travel corridor list as part of tighter restrictions to slow the spread of the variant prevalent in South Africa

The government has responded swiftly to new evidence showing an urgent need to halt travel from all southern African countries to help prevent the spread of a new coronavirus (COVID-19) variant identified in South Africa.

Entry into England will be banned to those who have travelled from or through any southern African country in the last 10 days, including Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Eswatini, Zambia, Malawi, Lesotho, Mozambique and Angola – as well as Seychelles and Mauritius. This does not include British and Irish Nationals, longer-term visa holders and permanent residents, who will be able to enter but are required to [self-isolate for 10 days on arrival along with their household](#).

The government has therefore also removed Botswana, Seychelles and Mauritius from the [travel corridor list](#), with the changes coming into place from 4am on Saturday 9 January 2021.

The move, in addition to the [travel ban imposed on South Africa](#) on 23 December 2020, follows new data on the steep rise in incidence of the new variant, that has vastly increased the risk of community transmission between 9 other southern African countries as well as the Seychelles and Mauritius, which both have strong travel links with South Africa. Urgent restrictions are therefore now needed to prevent the spread of this strain in the UK.

The measures will be in place for an initial period of 2 weeks while the scientific data and alternative ways to protect the UK and our partners in Africa are reviewed.

Any exemptions usually in place – including for those related to employment – will not apply and those British nationals arriving into England from the other southern African countries, Seychelles and Mauritius after 4am on Saturday 9 January cannot be released from self-isolation through [Test to Release](#). People sharing a household with anyone self-isolating from these countries will also have to self-isolate for 10 days.

Ministers have also removed Israel (and Jerusalem) from the government's travel corridor list, as data from the Joint Biosecurity Centre and Public Health England has indicated a significant change in both the level and pace of confirmed cases of coronavirus. The decision to remove Israel (and Jerusalem) has been made following a sustained and accelerating increase in COVID-19 cases per 100,000 of the population, similar in trajectory to the UK.

[National restrictions for England](#) introduced on 6 January 2021 remain in place meaning everyone must stay at home unless travelling for a very limited set of reasons, including for work. This means people can no longer travel to take holidays or travel internationally unless for work or other legally permitted reasons. Those in breach of the rules face penalties starting at £200, rising to a maximum of £6,400.

People in all countries affected by the travel ban are encouraged to follow the local rules and check [FCD0 travel advice](#) for further information. All travellers, including those from exempt destinations, will still be required to show a complete [passenger locator form](#) on arrival into the UK unless they fall into a small group of exemptions.

Flu vaccine uptake among over 65s highest on record

NHS England and NHS Improvement, Public Health England (PHE) and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care are thanking NHS staff for their incredible work in achieving some of the highest ever vaccination rates for flu.

Despite the complexities of rolling out the largest national NHS flu immunisation programme during a COVID-19 winter, NHS staff have vaccinated a record 80.3% of those aged 65 years and over in England against flu so far this year.

This is the highest uptake ever achieved for this group and is just under 10% higher than this time last year, exceeding the World Health Organization uptake ambition of 75%.

Uptake in 2 and 3 year old children is also the highest ever recorded, at 54.0% and 56.5% respectively.

Flu vaccine uptake rates are higher than the same time last season for all other eligible groups. This includes an uptake rate of 51.5% in clinical at-risk groups (aged under 65 years), which is the highest achieved in the last seven seasons.

These figures are a reflection of the hard work of the wide range of NHS and public health professionals involved in planning and delivering our national immunisation programme.

Dr Vanessa Saliba, Head of Flu at PHE, said:

The flu vaccine saves lives. It is therefore very encouraging to see record-high uptake rates this season, especially among the groups most vulnerable to flu, who are also most at-risk from COVID-19.

There is still time to get vaccinated against flu and we urge anyone who is eligible to take up the offer to help protect yourself, your family and the NHS.

Public Health Minister, Jo Churchill said:

It is fantastic to see that despite the unique challenges of this winter, more over 65s than ever before have had their flu vaccination and that there is such high uptake across the eligible

groups.

Every year health and care staff do an incredible job rolling out the flu vaccine, and this year the COVID-19 vaccine too, to protect us all.

Dr Nikki Kanani, NHS national medical director for primary care, said:

The NHS has done an outstanding job in vaccinating a record number of people with flu and I congratulate staff for all of their fantastic efforts in achieving this as they continue to go above and beyond in these challenging times.

As we embark on the biggest vaccination programme in our history, now more than ever we are aware of the vital importance of vaccines, and so I strongly encourage everyone in the eligible groups to take up the offer of both the flu and the COVID-19 vaccine to protect themselves and their families and to save lives.

On 1 December 2020, all 50 to 64 year olds became eligible for the flu vaccine and 26.1% of those in this age group (but not in a clinical risk group) have taken up the offer so far.

The NHS in England achieves some of the highest flu vaccine uptake rates in Europe for healthcare workers, with an uptake of 74.3% by the end of the season in 2019 to 2020. By the end of November 2020, 70.5% of frontline healthcare workers had already been vaccinated, compared to 61.5% at the same period last year.

This means more than 120,000 additional healthcare workers had been vaccinated than the same time last year.

It is estimated that over 2,521,000 children were vaccinated through the school-aged programme between 1 September and 30 November 2020 (47.5%), which is 480,000 more children than at the same time last season. Monthly data showed that uptake was between 2.9 and 5.9% higher for all year groups compared to the same time last season.

The flu vaccine is safe and the best defence against flu, and one of the most effective ways to reduce pressure on the health and social care system each winter.

With COVID-19 also circulating this flu season, it remains important that those in eligible groups take up the offer of a free flu vaccine. This will also relieve pressure on the NHS and social care system when they are dealing with high numbers of COVID-19.

COVID-19 critical worker status

News story

Clarification on when a security operative is considered to be a “critical worker”.



Security Industry Authority

On Monday 4 January 2021, the Prime Minister announced that the Government will be introducing new national COVID-19 measures in England to protect the NHS and save lives.

The SIA has spoken with the Home Office to obtain information and guidance for individuals and security businesses/employers in the sector to enable them to consider working requirements during the on-going period.

A security operative is considered a critical worker if they are deployed in the following:

- critical security provision in hospitals, social care, the courts, government estate buildings, as well as key supermarkets/food supply chain, the transport network and critical national infrastructure and utilities
- roles essential to supporting law and order, or which have the potential to limit any further likely pressures on the Police or national emergency services – this could include the guarding of empty or closed commercial property judged at risk, closed retail sites or sensitive office premises, or the monitoring of similar through CCTV or other remote means, and the provision of alarm response centres including mobile units

If you are providing essential security to a service which itself remains critical and functioning, which attracts critical worker status, then you are likely to be covered. If in doubt, check with whoever contracts for your services.

To further assist in determining locally which private security roles are critical, decisions will need to be taken on a case-by-case basis by those contracting security provision and security businesses/employers. Any access

to school places is role dependent and will be decided on by the relevant local authority.

These are challenging and unprecedented times. The questions arising are not easy and no-one else can answer them for you. You will need to apply judgement, with the aim of following the Government's guidance and always minimising social contact where possible.

For further information please refer to the [Government's guidance published on GOV.UK](#).

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Civil news: amendments to legal aid eligibility criteria

News story

Compensation provided to claimants of specific compensation schemes will now be disregarded when assessing civil legal aid eligibility.



Legal aid eligibility criteria has changed and will now allow more people to access justice in civil cases of law.

The Legal Aid Agency (LAA) has implemented the changes made to the regulations to ensure that claimants of specific compensation schemes are not disadvantaged in applying for legal aid.

LAA Chief Executive, Jane Harbottle said:

I welcome this change as it will ensure that many more people are able to access the justice they need.

The Legal Aid Agency has worked to implement these important changes as quickly as possible and I would like to acknowledge this work to support families experiencing difficult circumstances.

There will now be a mandatory disregard for these 6 schemes, when applying for civil legal aid:

- Relevant Infected Blood Support Schemes covering [England](#), [Wales](#), [Northern Ireland](#) and [Scotland](#) (and earlier support schemes)
- Payments under the Vaccine Damage payment Act
- Compensation for person diagnosed with variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD)

In addition, there will be a discretionary approach applied to these 4 schemes:

As a result of receiving a compensation payment from these compensation schemes or any connected payment (e.g. to a relative) some individuals applying for legal aid would have failed the financial eligibility criteria if the change to the means test had not been made, due to such payments being considered as income or capital.

Mortgage cap removal

The legislation also removes the existing cap on the amount of mortgage debt that can be deducted from a property's value, so that all mortgage debt will be deducted. This means that more individuals will pass the financial eligibility criteria for civil legal aid. This change will come into effect from 28 January 2021.

Further information

[Disregard of payments from Infected Blood Support Schemes \(and other specified compensation payments\) guidance](#) – full information for legal aid providers

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