

# Oxford University/AstraZeneca vaccine authorised by UK medicines regulator

The Government has today accepted the recommendation from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to authorise Oxford University/AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine for use. This follows rigorous clinical trials and a thorough analysis of the data by experts at the MHRA, which has concluded that the vaccine has met its strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) will also publish its latest advice for the priority groups to receive this vaccine.

The NHS has a clear vaccine delivery plan and decades of experience in delivering large scale vaccination programmes. It has already vaccinated hundreds of thousands of patients with the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine and its roll out will continue. Now the NHS will begin putting their extensive preparations into action to roll out the Oxford University/AstraZeneca vaccine.

Throughout this global pandemic we have always been guided by the latest scientific advice. Having studied evidence on both the Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford University/AstraZeneca vaccines, the JCVI has advised the priority should be to give as many people in at-risk groups their first dose, rather than providing the required two doses in as short a time as possible.

Everyone will still receive their second dose and this will be within 12 weeks of their first. The second dose completes the course and is important for longer term protection.

From today the NHS across the UK will prioritise giving the first dose of the vaccine to those in the most high-risk groups. With two vaccines now approved, we will be able to vaccinate a greater number of people who are at highest risk, protecting them from the disease and reducing mortality and hospitalisation.

The JCVI's independent advice is that this approach will maximise the benefits of both vaccines. It will ensure that more at-risk people are able to get meaningful protection from a vaccine in the coming weeks and months, reducing deaths and starting to ease pressure on our NHS.

To aid the success of the vaccination programme, it is vital everyone continues to play their part, abides by the restrictions in their area and remembers hands, face, space so we can suppress this virus and allow the NHS to do its work without being overwhelmed.

Further details will be set out shortly.

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## UK pledges urgent life-saving aid for families hit by coronavirus and hunger around the world

- New UN data reveals humanitarian crises are worsening around the world, with 235 million people expected to be in need of urgent assistance compared to 175 million people at the start of 2020.
- The UK is releasing an extra £47 million of aid to immediately provide food, nutrition, water and shelter for vulnerable families in nine countries and regions.
- The UK is also lobbying international donors to provide more funding and working to ensure conflict parties allow humanitarian access for aid workers and ensure the protection of civilians.

The UK is releasing new emergency aid to help over 1.3 million vulnerable people in some of the world's most dangerous places, who face daily threats of starvation, conflict and coronavirus.

Life-saving food, nutrition, water, childhood vaccinations and shelter will urgently help families caught in some of the largest humanitarian crises, including across the Sahel, Syria, South Sudan, Nigeria, Somalia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Venezuela and Mozambique.

Humanitarian crises are getting worse according to UN data published earlier this month, compounded by the pandemic, with 235 million people expected to be in need of urgent assistance next year compared to 175 million people at the start of 2020.

The UN's Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)'s survey also shows that there are people in South Sudan and Yemen living in famine-like conditions today.

In September the Foreign Secretary announced a Call to Action to prevent famine, and appointed Nick Dyer as the UK Special Envoy on Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs to drive this effort. Today's extra aid forms part of the UK's continued leadership on addressing this global crisis.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

Hundreds of millions of people living in the world's largest humanitarian crises are struggling to survive, threatened by conflict, starvation and coronavirus.

This extra emergency UK aid will mean people can feed their families and prevent these crises from escalating into widespread

famine. We hope to see other donors step up to the plate with some extra funding to prevent these global crises getting worse.

The extra UK aid announced today will help continue momentum and pressure other donors to step up with additional financing.

The UK has been sounding the alarm on this growing threat to millions of lives – with the dire situation in conflict and fragile states being exacerbated by economic recession, coronavirus and climate change. This is rapidly increasing the number of people in desperate need and more people than ever are going hungry.

The UK is combining its humanitarian expertise with its diplomatic power to build back stronger from coronavirus. We are using our seat on the UN Security Council to call for life-saving humanitarian access for everyone who needs it and hold countries to account on their international legal obligations to allow aid workers to operate impartially in conflict zones and support the protection of civilians.

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## [Government reforms intimidation scheme to relocate more Afghan staff under threat](#)

The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy will be introduced next year to reflect the changing situation in Afghanistan. It will offer relocation to current and former employees such as embassy support staff, those in political or counter-terrorism roles, or cultural advisors who could face threats related to their occupation.

The move follows the recent expansion of a separate scheme to relocate Afghan interpreters in recognition of the government's gratitude for their service.

Under the new scheme, anyone facing imminent risk such as intimidation or threat to life will be offered priority relocation regardless of their employment status, rank or role, or length of time served.

This could see hundreds of brave locally employed staff and their families come to the UK.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

Nobody's life should be put at risk because they supported the UK Government to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan.

As the situation in the region evolves, it is only right we do more to protect local citizens who stood shoulder to shoulder with our armed forces.

As a former soldier I know the bond between the brothers who fight by our side. These Afghans stood by us and risked their lives to make a better country. We owe them a debt and I am proud that the Home Secretary and I can finally close this chapter and thank them for their service.

The new intimidation scheme will be administered by a specialist team based in Kabul, the Intimidation Investigations Unit, which was set up to assist and support local staff who are threatened as a result of their work with the UK. The UK is the only nation with such a permanent expert team.

The scheme will operate under a tiered approach, with high risk local staff who face imminent threat to be relocated urgently. Local staff who are in the public eye and who could be at risk as the security situation evolves will be relocated to the UK on a routine basis, and those not eligible to move will be offered other support such as security advice and relocation within Afghanistan.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

We owe an immense debt of gratitude to the brave individuals who have worked side by side with our Armed Forces in Afghanistan.

I am proud that through this new scheme we can provide further support and sanctuary to these courageous men and women.

The Afghan Relocations and Assistance scheme will run alongside the existing Ex-Gratia Scheme, which offers relocation to the UK for Afghan interpreters who served a minimum of 12 months on the frontline before resigning or being made redundant.

The Ex-Gratia Scheme was established in recognition of the UK Government's gratitude for the service of Afghan interpreters, rather than any risk they may face.

It will run until November 2022, at which point the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy will be the single track route for relocation.

To date, over 1,400 Afghans and their families have relocated to the UK under the Ex-Gratia scheme, while hundreds more received funding for education and training.

Legislation for the new scheme will be introduced in April through changes to the Home Office Immigration Rules.

The Ministry of Defence and the Home Office will continue to seek ways to go

further to support this cohort and others who have supported the British Armed Forces.

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## [UK and Turkey sign trade deal](#)

- The UK and Turkey secure trade agreement in major win for UK automotive, manufacturing and steel industries.
- Today's deal supports a trading partnership worth £18.6 billion last year.
- The agreement lays the groundwork for a more ambitious UK Turkey trade relationship in the future.

The UK-Turkey Free Trade Agreement was signed today as International Trade Secretary Liz Truss and Turkey's Minister for Trade, Ruhsar Pekcan, met on a video call.

The deal will secure existing preferential tariffs for the 7,600 UK businesses that exported goods to Turkey in 2019, ensuring the continued tariff-free flow of goods and protecting vital UK-Turkey supply chains in the automotive and manufacturing sectors.

Both countries have also committed to working towards a more ambitious free trade agreement in the future, which will go further than the existing deal and will be tailored to the UK economy.

Today's agreement will ensure preferential trading terms for UK businesses that exported more than £1bn worth of machinery, and iron and steel exports worth £575m, to Turkey in 2019.

It also ensures UK businesses can continue to import under preferential tariffs, compared with no agreement. This supports UK importers of textiles, where the annual increase in estimated duties would have been around £102m under WTO terms. Tariffs applied to UK imports of washing machines and televisions will remain at 0%, compared to up to 2% and 14% respectively under WTO terms.

Vital UK-Turkey supply chains will also be protected for automotive manufacturers, such as Ford, which employs 7,500 people in the UK. Car parts are imported from the UK to Turkey to assemble the Ford Transit range of vehicles, a third of which are then exported to the UK. In 2019, UK car exports to Turkey were worth £174m.

In under two years we have now reached agreement with 62 countries – and the European Union – to cover £885 billion of UK trade.

This is unprecedented, with no other country ever negotiating so many trade deals simultaneously. The Government's ambition is to secure free trade

agreements with countries that cover 80% of UK trade within three years.

“Today’s deal covers trade worth more than £18 billion, delivers vital certainty for business and supports thousands of jobs across the UK in the manufacturing, automotive and steel industries.

“It paves the way for a new, more ambitious deal with Turkey in the near future, and is part of our plan to put the UK at the centre of a network of modern agreements with dynamic economies. More trade and investment will drive economic growth across our United Kingdom and help us build back stronger from Covid.”

“Ford welcomes the announcement today of a trade agreement between the UK and Turkey, and the speed with which it has been concluded underscores its importance to the economic prosperity of both countries.

“As Europe’s leading commercial vehicle brand, Ford’s Dagenham engine manufacturing facility in east London exports much of its diesel engine production to our Ford Otosan joint venture in Turkey where the engines are fitted into Ford Transit vehicles, many of which are then exported from Turkey to the UK.

“Given that Ford and Ford Otosan business constitutes more than 10 per cent of the total trade volume between the UK and Turkey, this trade agreement is extremely significant for us and will help to secure jobs in both countries.”

“This agreement will maintain bilateral trade worth over £18bn and will shore up key supply chains across many industries after a year of disruption.

“Turkey’s customs union with the EU made a trade deal with the UK complicated, but the pace at which the deal has been finalised following the negotiated EU deal shows the strength and depth of the relationship.

“Businesses and government must now look to growth, creating the trading relationships which will build a competitive, dynamic and progressive future economy.”

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## [2,700 tax returns sent in on Christmas Day](#)

The Self Assessment deadline is on 31 January 2021. Customers can complete their tax returns online ahead of the deadline at a time that suits them. Every year, HMRC sees thousands of customers using the festive period to get their documents in order and complete the task.

On Christmas Day, the peak time for completing tax returns was 14:00 to

14:59, with more than 200 customers pressing send on their online form.

Once Self Assessment customers have completed their 2019 to 2020 tax return, and know how much tax is owed, they can set up their own payment plan to help spread the cost of their tax liabilities, up to the value of £30,000. They can use the self-serve Time to Pay facility to set up monthly direct debits online. Interest will be applied to any outstanding balance from 1 February 2021.

To find out if they are eligible, customers can [visit GOV.UK to find out more about the service](#).

Karl Khan, HMRC's Interim Director General for Customer Services, said:

Online Self Assessment means customers can do their tax returns at any time, day or night – even on Christmas Day if they want to.

We're here to help customers get their tax right, and there's support available 24/7 like help sheets, webinars and YouTube videos. Search 'Self Assessment' on GOV.UK to find out more.

In total, 31,400 customers completed their 2019 to 2020 tax returns between 24 and 26 December:

- Christmas Eve: 20,200 tax returns were filed – the peak time for filing was 11:00 to 11:59 when 2,892 returns were received
- Christmas Day: 2,700 tax returns were filed – the peak time for filing was 14:00 to 14:59 when 214 returns were received
- Boxing Day: 8,500 tax returns were filed – the peak time for filing was 15:00 to 15:59 when 858 returns were received

Be aware of copycat HMRC websites and phishing scams. Customers should always type in the full online address [www.gov.uk/hmrc](http://www.gov.uk/hmrc) to get the correct link for their Self Assessment tax return online securely and free of charge. They also need to be alert if someone calls, emails or texts claiming to be from HMRC, saying that they can claim financial help, are due a tax refund or owe tax. It might be a scam.

Check GOV.UK for information on how to:

## **Further information**

The comparative data for the 2018 to 2019 tax year is:

- Christmas Eve: 22,000 tax returns filed, with 3,612 filing between 11:00 to 11:59
- Christmas Day: 3,000 tax returns filed, with 245 filing between 12:00 to 12:59

- Boxing Day: 9,200 tax returns filed, with 946 filing between 12:00 to 12:59

Full guidance on Self Assessment is available at: [www.gov.uk/selfassessment](http://www.gov.uk/selfassessment)

Help and support is available to customers completing their Self Assessment tax return. A list of available resources can be found:

If a customer's Self Assessment debts are over £30,000, or they need longer than 12 months to pay their debt in full, they may still be able to set up a Time to Pay arrangement by calling the Self Assessment Payment Helpline on 0300 200 3822.

To protect against identity fraud customers must verify their identity when accessing HMRC's online services. They must have 2 sources of information including:

- credit reference agency data
- tax credits
- P60/payslip
- UK Passport

Follow the National Cyber Security Centre's 6 essential steps to keep yourself and your business secure online by visiting [CyberAware.gov.uk](http://CyberAware.gov.uk).

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