

# Speech on coronavirus restriction tiers, vaccines and testing

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

I'm joined by Dr Jenny Harries, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, and Dr Susan Hopkins, the Chief Medical Advisor to Public Health England and NHS Test and Trace.

We all know that 2020 has been a hard year.

And it is ending in this festive period, which is going to be very different.

After all the efforts that we've gone through to control this virus, and in many parts of the country, this virus is under control.

Just as we've got a tiering system in place that was able to control this virus, we've discovered a new, more contagious virus, a variant which is spreading at a dangerous rate.

And I know that the vast majority of people watching today and across the country understand what we need to do together to get through this.

So today we're announcing further action within the tiering system and also some further progress on vaccines and on testing.

And I just wanted to say this before I set out the details of what we're going to have to put in place: I know this action has consequences.

And I know how difficult it is.

But I also know that it is right to take the action that is necessary to control this virus.

Across the country, cases have risen 57% in the last week

The average daily COVID hospital admissions are 1,909 a day – that's the highest figure since mid-April.

There are 18,943 people in hospital right now, that's almost as many as at the peak.

And yesterday, 691 deaths from coronavirus were reported. That's 691 people who have died just before Christmas. And our hearts go out to their families and loved ones as with all those that have died from this horrible disease.

I know the pain this causes.

So against this backdrop of rising infections, rising hospitalisations and rising number of people dying from coronavirus, it is absolutely vital that

we act.

We simply cannot have the kind of Christmas that we all yearn for.

Of course, it's the social contact that makes Christmas so special. But it is that social contact that the virus thrives on, and that's how the virus has spread from one person to another.

So it's important that we all minimise our social contact as much as is possible this Christmas, and that will help protect ourselves, our loved ones and the whole country.

We've got to keep our resolve. We've got to keep going through this.

And there are 4 areas of our response that I want to update you on today very specifically.

## **Local action**

The first are those tiering decisions that I've just mentioned.

We know that the 3-tiered system worked to control the old variant, and is working now in large parts of the country, especially in Northern England.

But, we also know that Tier 3 is not enough to control the new variant.

That is not a hypothesis, it is a fact, and we've seen it on the ground.

We have seen case rates rise in some of places close to where the current Tier 4 restrictions are, in places like East Anglia, where we've also detected a significant number of the new variant as we've seen case rates rise sharply.

It is therefore necessary to put more of the East and South East of England into Tier 4.

We are also taking action in parts of the South West, where there are some early signs of the new variant, and where cases are rising.

Even though case rates in some of these areas are not as high as in some areas badly affected, in London for instance and in Kent, the direction is clear, and in many cases is quite stark.

The doubling times are short.

And we have learnt that when it's a matter of when, not if we take action.

It is better to act sooner.

So, from one minute past midnight on Boxing Day, Sussex, Oxfordshire, Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire, those parts of Essex not yet in Tier 4, Waverley in Surrey, and Hampshire, including Portsmouth and Southampton, but with the exception of the New Forest, will be escalated to Tier 4.

Bristol, Gloucestershire, Somerset, including the North Somerset Council area, Swindon, the Isle of Wight, New Forest and Northamptonshire, as well as Cheshire and Warrington, will be escalated to Tier 3.

And I'm afraid Cornwall and Herefordshire have seen sharply rising rates and need to be escalated to Tier 2.

This is not news that anybody wants to deliver.

And I am truly sorry for the disruption that it causes.

But I think people know how important it is that we take decisions like this to keep people safe and to protect the NHS.

## **South Africa**

The second piece of news I want to tell you about is developments on another new strain of this virus.

Of course, the fight against this virus is a global effort.

And we are constantly vigilant and looking around the world.

As part of our surveillance, and thanks to the impressive genomic capability of the South Africans, we have detected 2 cases of another new variant of coronavirus here in the UK.

Both are contacts of cases who have travelled from South Africa over the past few weeks.

The Chief Scientific Advisor and Chief Medical Officer and others met their South African counterparts over the last day.

We are incredibly grateful to the South African Government for the rigour of their science, and the openness and the transparency with which they have rightly acted, as we did when we discovered the new variant here.

This new variant is highly concerning, because it is yet more transmissible and it appeared to have mutated further than the new variant that has been discovered here.

We have taken the following action.

First, we are quarantining cases, and close contacts of cases, found here in the UK.

Second, we are placing immediate restrictions on travel from South Africa.

Finally, and most importantly, anyone in the UK who has been in South Africa in the past fortnight, and anyone who has been in close contact with anyone who has been in South Africa in the last fortnight, must quarantine immediately.

By quarantine, I mean they must restrict all contact with any other person whatsoever.

We will be changing the law to give this legal effect imminently.

These measures are temporary, while we investigate this further new strain, which is currently being analysed at Porton Down.

And I want to thank everyone involved for the seriousness with which I know they will take these instructions.

## **Testing**

I'd like to now move onto some more positive developments.

The third thing I wanted to talk about was an update on testing.

As you know, we continue rapidly to expand testing capacity here in the UK.

We are expanding community testing yet further in areas where the rate of infection is highest

So we can identify people, and especially to identify the around 1 in 3 people, who carry the virus without displaying any symptoms at all.

116 local areas have now signed up for this community testing, and we are in discussion with more.

These rapid turnaround tests are proving to be extremely effective at finding cases where we otherwise wouldn't.

And I am today publishing an assessment of the Liverpool community testing project, which shows how effective this can be.

I would urge anyone who has the opportunity to take part to protect their local area.

And at the same time we are boosting rapid testing in care homes, with a further £149 million to support that effort.

So all those who work in care homes in England will receive 2 rapid tests a week, in addition to their weekly PCR test.

## **Vaccines**

Finally, amid all this difficulty, the great hope for 2021 is of course the vaccine.

The vaccine is our route out of all this.

And, however tough this Christmas and this winter is going to be, we know that the transforming force of science is helping find a way through.

I am delighted to be able to announce that the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, developed here in the UK, has submitted its full data package to the MHRA for approval.

This is the next step towards a decision on the deployment of the vaccine, which is already being manufactured including here in the UK.

We are, of course, continuing to deploy the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, which is being delivered now from over 500 sites all across the UK, and we are adding more all of the time and we are accelerating the rollout.

I am also delighted to be able to announce that we have begun vaccination in care homes.

We know that people who live in care homes are amongst those most vulnerable to this disease, and I'm delighted that we're able to do this. It is another enormous logistical challenge, and I am very grateful to colleagues in the NHS and social care sector, who have worked so hard together to make this happen.

This afternoon, it gives me great joy to tell you that the Chelsea Pensioners will be vaccinated, along with care home residents right across the country.

I think we all need a bit of good news.

And the reality is this vaccine programme is the we are going to get this.

Because every time someone is vaccinated, our country becomes a little bit safer, they become a little bit safer and we get a little bit closer to the life that we all want to get back to.

## **Achievements this year**

As I sincerely hope this is my last press conference before Christmas.

I want to take a moment firstly to thank you, and everyone watching, for the sacrifices you've made.

And I want to thank my whole team, who have done so much, including those here, including Susan and Jenny, but including the huge team in the NHS, in the Department and right across the board.

As a country, we have been faced with the most enormous challenges, and it has been very tough.

But I especially want to thank those who help this country to become the first in the world to roll out a clinically approved vaccine.

I want to thank all those that have helped us build a bigger capacity genomic testing than anywhere else in the world – and of course the biggest testing capacity in Europe.

I want to thank our scientist who discovered the first proven treatment for

coronavirus.

And I want to thank everybody working in the NHS and in social care for the work that they've done this year, and also for the work that's going to carry on this winter.

And especially to colleagues are going to work over Christmas, which of course is so important in the NHS and in social care.

Look, I know how hard 2020 has been for everybody.

And after delivering some really difficult news, if I may I want to end on a reflection about where we are as a country.

This Christmas, and the start of 2021, is going to be tough.

The new variant makes everything much harder, because it spreads so much faster.

But we mustn't give up now. We know that we can control this virus, we know that we can get through this together.

We're going to get through it by suppressing the virus, until a vaccine can make us safe, and that has been our strategy and that's what we must do.

And I know that we can do this. We've seen so much sacrifice.

We're not going to give up now, especially after so much sacrifice.

I know that some of these decisions are tough.

But I believe that everybody making the right decisions, and I believe that everybody will do what is needed to keep themselves and others safe, especially this Christmas.

And I know from the bottom of my heart that there are brighter skies ahead.

---

## **Convicted waste crime offender ordered to pay £2.1 million**

- Defendant given 3 months to pay under Proceeds of Crime Act
- Judge says Bruce is a career criminal
- One of the biggest orders gained by Environment Agency

A convicted waste crime offender has been ordered to pay £2,101,708 following a confiscation case brought by the Environment Agency at Worcester Crown Court which concluded on Tuesday 22 December 2020.

Judge Nicholas Cole ordered that John Bruce, aged 48 of Tilesford Park, Pershore, should pay the amount following a case brought by the Environment Agency under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

Judge Cole imposed the order on Bruce, who had received a 26-month custodial sentence in May 2018 for operating an illegal waste site at Ridgeway Park Farm, Throckmorton Airfield near Pershore in Worcestershire between 2011 and 2014.

Bruce has been given 3 months to pay or he faces 7 years in jail if he fails to do so.

He was initially prosecuted for 6 offences where waste totalling about 25,000 cubic metres was either dumped, buried or burned at the farm.

The court heard that the defendant had grown his business and had invested in various properties, land and cars. He also owned a large selection of expensive items of heavy plant hire which he hired, bought and resold.

Judge Cole ruled that a Trust set up by the defendant was a sham and that money held in a bank account operated by the Trust, along with a property, formed part of his criminal benefit.

Judge Cole also determined that Bruce had used a bank account operated by a proxy company to hide his ongoing unlawful activity and used it as he would his own business accounts.

James Puzey, the prosecuting counsel for the Environment Agency, said:

The defendant is a dedicated career criminal who has ignored planning and environmental law to run a waste haulage and processing business.

A spokesperson for the Environment Agency said:

This is one of the biggest orders the Environment Agency has gained.

The case shows that we're not just content to prosecute those who run illegal waste sites, we'll also come after them to get back the profits they made from their illegal activities and to recoup taxpayers' money spent on pursuing them.

Waste crime can have a serious environmental impact which puts communities at risk and undermines legitimate business and the investment and economic growth that go with it.

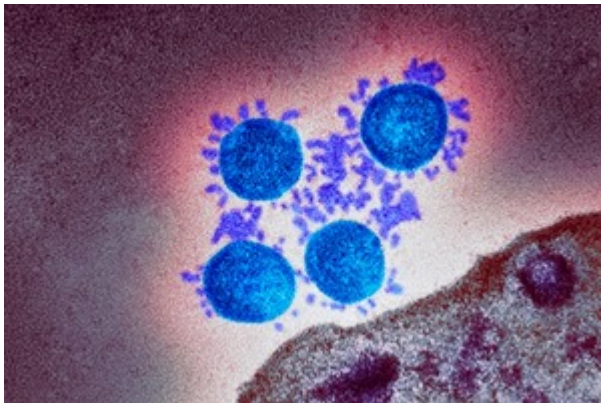
We support legitimate businesses and we are proactively supporting them by disrupting and stopping the criminal element backed up by the threat of tough enforcement as in this case.

We continue to use intelligence-led approaches to target the most serious crimes and evaluate which interventions are most effective.

If you see or suspect waste crime is being committed we urge you to report it immediately to CrimeStoppers on 0800 555 111.

---

## [Rapid evaluation confirms lateral flow devices effective in detecting new COVID-19 variant](#)



Scientists at PHE's Porton Down laboratory have carried out a [rapid evaluation](#) using clinical and laboratory grown samples containing the VUI 202012/01 variant to test whether it can be detected by lateral flow devices (LFDs) currently in use across the country.

Five LFDs were tested. Each device is either in use as part of mass testing or going through the final stages of validation at PHE. Each device successfully detected samples containing the new variant.

LFDs are one of the new tools being used to help detect COVID-19 and results can be delivered rapidly in under 30 minutes.

The devices can identify people who have high levels of virus but who do not have symptoms and would not otherwise be coming forward for a test. This is important as up to 1 in 3 people who have coronavirus never show any symptoms but may still be infectious.

Whereas the new variant affects the spike protein on the surface of the virus, the lateral flow devices tested work by detecting the nucleocapsid protein that is located inside the virus, which is less likely to be affected.

Dr Susan Hopkins, Senior Medical Advisor to PHE and NHS Test and Trace, said:

This rapid evaluation confirms that lateral flow devices can detect the new variant. This is good news as it means they can continue to be used to find people who have COVID-19 without symptoms who might be unknowingly passing it on.

Lateral flow devices alone aren't a silver bullet for stopping the spread of the virus but we know they can help detect large numbers of positive cases quickly.

When used in combination with other infection prevention control measures, they are another vital tool to help us combat the spread of the virus.

Labs have been issued with guidance to ensure that PCR tests can detect this variant.

DHSC has not identified any issues with detection of the variant in its network of laboratories.

Published 23 December 2020

Last updated 23 December 2020 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 23 December 2020

First published.

---

## [Highways England's A30 Cornwall upgrade to step up a gear in new year](#)

The multi-million pound improvement scheme, given the green light by the Secretary of State for Transport earlier this year, will dual an 8.7-mile section of single carriageway and help to promote economic growth, improve journey times and increase safety by unlocking one of the last major bottlenecks in the county.

Since March, contractor Costain has been busy with the diversion of utilities, vegetation clearance and ground investigation work to inform the detailed design of the new route ahead of main earthworks and construction of new structures starting in early 2021.

A virtual public information event was held in August, to update local communities on the latest plans and timescales, and work is now set to move into its main works phase next month.

A number of unclassified roads will be closed in areas alongside the existing

A30 carriageway, to allow for clearance and construction work, and all residents and businesses directly affected have been informed.

These include roads at Silverwell, closed between 11 January and 6 August, Marazan Farm, closed from 18 January to 28 January 2022, and Trevalso, closed between 19 January and 19 January, with signed local diversion routes in place.

Josh Hodder, Highways England's Senior Project Manager for the A30 upgrade, said:

Improving the A30 between Chiverton and Carland Cross is incredibly important for Cornwall's future, and we're really excited to be stepping up our construction activities in the new year – 2021 is going to be a big year for the A30 project.

It's the only remaining stretch of single carriageway on the A30 between Camborne and the M5 at Exeter, journeys are regularly delayed, congestion often brings traffic to a standstill, local communities are impacted, and as a result the Cornish economy is being held back.

Despite the Covid limitations Costain have progressed the early works well and we're now looking to move the scheme forward in the new year. Our work will become more visible from next month, and although this will have an impact on communities and road users, we are committed to minimising any disruption, and we'll continue to engage with and inform local residents and businesses.

The 8.7-mile road scheme includes:

- a 70mph high-quality dual carriageway
- a two-level junction at Chiverton Cross and a new roundabout to ensure the free flow of traffic on the A30
- a new partial junction at Chybucca built on two levels with west-facing slip roads to provide access onto the dual carriageway from local routes
- new bridges at Tolgroggan Farm, Pennycomequick Lane and over the Allet to Tresawsen road to provide local access
- a two-level junction at Carland Cross with a new roundabout north of the dual carriageway and re-using the existing roundabout to the south
- keeping the existing A30 as a local route with new sections where necessary to provide continuity and connectivity for local communities

With main construction work anticipated to start in the new year, Cheryl Mackrory, MP for Truro and Falmouth, recently undertook a site visit to learn of the latest plans, timescales and the environmental mitigation in place. She said:

This is such an exciting and much-needed improvement, something that has been needed for a long time and it's brilliant to see

shovels in the ground.

Included in the project are nearly nine miles of high quality dual carriageway, provision for pedestrian, cyclists and horse riders, over 12 miles of wildlife proof fencing, eight miles of new Cornish hedgerow, 29 new culverts and wildlife crossings and 10 new underpasses/underbridges.

All in all, a major upgrade for our major road that will not only will improve safety, reduce congestion and improve efficiency, but will also unlock economic growth in this part of Cornwall.

The existing A30 will remain open while the scheme is being built alongside, although traffic management and speed restrictions will be introduced through next year to ensure the safety of both the travelling public and the workforce.

Local communities and road users will be kept informed as the scheme progresses and in the meantime, further information and updates will be available at the [scheme web page](#)

Local residents and businesses can also [sign up for email notifications](#) and there is also a dedicated community relations team available to answer any questions. The team can be contacted by email at [a30chivertontocarlandcross@highwaysengland.co.uk](mailto:a30chivertontocarlandcross@highwaysengland.co.uk).

If you'd prefer to speak to someone, then you can phone the project helpline on 0845 600 2664 or Highways England on 0300 123 5000 and one of the team based on the A30 Chiverton to Carland Cross scheme will call you back as soon as possible.

The cost of developing the scheme is being partly funded by an £8 million contribution from the European Regional Development Fund, with an additional £12 million for the construction phase. The remainder of the cost of developing and delivering the scheme is being funded by central Government.

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

---

## [Gradings under review for Brent](#)

# Community Housing

Press release

The GUR lists registered providers whose compliance with the regulator's economic standards is being investigated.



The Regulator of Social Housing reports that Brent Community Housing has been placed on its gradings under review list today (23 December 2020).

The regulator is currently investigating matters which may impact on Brent Community Housing Limited's compliance with the Governance and Financial Viability Standard.

As a provider with fewer than 1,000 units, Brent Community Housing does not have a regulatory grading.

The regulator's [gradings under review list](#) is available on the website.

## **Further information**

For press office contact details, see our [Media enquiries page](#). For general queries, please email [enquiries@rsh.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@rsh.gov.uk) or call 0300 124 5225.

## **Note to editors**

1. The GUR lists providers where we are investigating a matter that might result in them being assessed as non-compliant in relation to the regulator's Governance and Financial Viability Standard.
2. The [regulatory standards](#) can be found on the website.
3. RSH promotes a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver homes that meet a range of needs. It does this by undertaking robust economic regulation focusing on governance, financial viability and value for money that maintains lender confidence and

protects the taxpayer. It also sets consumer standards and may take action if these standards are breached and there is a significant risk of serious detriment to tenants or potential tenants.

Published 23 December 2020