

Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 2 December 2020

It is almost a year since humanity has been tormented by COVID

Across the world, economic output has plummeted and a million and a half people have died

And all the time we have waiting and hoping for the day when the searchlights of science would pick out our invisible enemy

And give us the power to stop that enemy from making us ill – and now the scientists have done it

And they have used the virus itself to perform a kind of biological jiu-jitsu, to turn the virus on itself in the form of a vaccine from an idea that was pioneered in this country by Edward Jenner in 1796

And today we can announce that the government has accepted the recommendation from the independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency to approve the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for distribution across the United Kingdom.

after months of clinical trials,

involving thousands of people

to ensure that the vaccine meets the strictest, internationally recognised, standards of safety, quality and effectiveness.

Thanks to the fantastic work of Kate Bingham and the Vaccines Task Force, we purchased more than 350 million doses of seven different vaccine candidates,

and the UK was the first country in the world to pre-order supplies of this Pfizer vaccine

securing 40 million doses.

Through our Winter Plan, the NHS has been preparing for the biggest programme of mass vaccination in the history of the UK.

And that is going to begin next week,

and in line with the advice of the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation

the first phase will include care home residents, health and care staff, the elderly and those who are clinically extremely vulnerable,

But there are immense logistical challenges:

the vaccine must be stored at minus 70 degrees

and each person needs two injections, three weeks apart.

So it will inevitably take some months before all the most vulnerable are protected,

Long and cold months

So it is all the more vital that as we celebrate this scientific achievement we are not carried away with over optimism

Or fall into the naïve belief that the struggle is over

Its not, we've got to stick to our Winter Plan,

a comprehensive programme to suppress the virus, protect the NHS and the vulnerable,

keep education and the economy going

and use treatments, testing and vaccines to enable us to return to much closer to normal by spring.

Today in England we have ended national restrictions, opening up significant parts of the economy in doing so;

but also replacing them with tough tiers to keep this virus down.

And I know that those tiers will mean continued hardship for many, and it is going to continue to be tough for some sectors

but until the vaccine is deployed, our plan does rely on all of us continuing to make sacrifices to protect those we love.

So please, please continue to follow the rules where you live,

remember hands, face, space –

and if you live in a tier 3 area where community testing will be made available, please take part in that community testing.

Together, these steps are for now the surest way to protect yourselves and those you love

and by reducing the transmission of the virus, help de-escalate your area to a lower level of restrictions,

as vaccines and testing, as I say, take an ever larger share of the burden.

And as we do all this,

we are no longer resting on the mere hope that we can return to normal next year in the spring,

but rather on the sure and certain knowledge that we will succeed:

and together reclaim our lives and all the things about our lives that we love

So I want to thank the scientists and all those around the world who have taken part in the trials and got us to this stage

All students offered testing on return to university

Students will be asked to stagger their return to universities after Christmas to help protect those around them and reduce transmission of Covid-19, the Government has announced today (Wednesday 2 December).

New [guidance](#) published by the Department for Education will set out how higher education providers should manage student returns over a five-week period according to the following:

- From 4 – 18 January, medical students, those on placements or practical courses with a need for in-person teaching should return in line with their planned start dates;
- The remaining courses should be offered online from the beginning of term so students can continue their studies from home; and
- From 25 January, all other students should start to return gradually over a two-week period, and by 7 February all students are expected to have returned.

All students should be offered Covid tests when they return to university to help identify and isolate those who are asymptomatic but could spread the virus. All universities will be offered testing facilities to give students two lateral flow tests, three days apart, with results turned around within an hour to help control the spread of the virus.

These measures will be crucial to manage returns carefully and protect students, staff and local communities while reducing disruption to education.

The Government has also announced a one-off fund of up to £20 million to help students most in need of support in these exceptional circumstances.

Universities Minister Michelle Donelan said:

The health and wellbeing of students, staff and local communities is always our primary concern and this plan will enable a safer return for all students. But we must do this in a way which minimises the risk of transmission.

I know students have had to make sacrifices this year and have faced a number of challenges, but this staggered return will help to protect students, staff and communities.

It is so important students have the support they need to continue their education, which is why we are providing up to £20 million funding for those facing hardship in these exceptional times.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

We must use every tool at our disposal to stop the spread of the virus and help reduce the risks around students travelling back home this Christmas. Using new technology and the additional capacity we have built, we are now able to extend our testing offer to help manage this risk, by identifying those showing no symptoms who can infect people unknowingly and stop them from passing the virus on to others as they move around the country.

I encourage all students to play their part in bringing this virus under control by getting tested twice, and by following the restrictions in place when travelling to and from university this term.

Universities should tailor plans to best suit the needs of their own student population. They should also consider prioritising those who may need to return to campus earlier for other reasons such as students who do not have access to appropriate accommodation or study space.

The Government expects universities to maintain the quality, quantity and accessibility of their tuition. The Office for Students will be monitoring universities to ensure this happens.

The plans for the spring term follow those enabling students to return home for the Christmas break, with 126 universities offering mass testing for students before they leave in the 'travel window' between 3 – 9 December.

Mass testing will help break transmission among students especially when they may be asymptomatic. Students should restrict contact in the three days between their tests and if they receive a positive test they will have to self-isolate in their accommodation.

Universities should continue to provide additional support to students who are isolating to ensure they can access food and medical supplies if needed, along with mental health support.

Where available, students who have spent the winter break in Tier 3 areas where mass community testing is on offer should take a test before travelling back to university if possible.

Along with developments in mass testing using new rapid 'lateral flow' tests and other advances in medical technologies and protective measures, this should allow for a more normal spring term and a better experience for students and staff.

COVID-19 vaccine authorised by medicines regulator

- UK medicines regulator authorises first COVID-19 vaccine
- Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine meets regulator's strict standards of safety, efficacy and quality
- Vaccine to be made available across the UK to priority groups from next week

Tens of thousands of people will receive an effective and high-quality COVID-19 vaccine from next week, as the UK becomes the first country in the western world to authorise a vaccine.

Following rigorous clinical trials involving thousands of people and extensive analysis of the vaccine's safety, quality and effectiveness by experts from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), Pfizer/BioNTech's vaccine has been authorised for use in the UK.

Now authorisation has been granted, Pfizer will deliver the vaccine to the UK. In making the recommendation to authorise supply, the MHRA will decide what additional quality assurance checks may be required before a vaccine can be made available. Pfizer will then deliver the vaccines to the UK as soon as possible.

The NHS has decades of experience in rolling out successful widespread vaccination programmes and has put in place extensive deployment plans.

In line with the recommendations of the independent Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), the vaccine will be rolled out to the priority groups including care home residents and staff, people over 80 and health and care workers, then to the rest of the population in order of age and risk, including those who are clinically extremely vulnerable.

The vaccine is given in 2 doses – 3 weeks apart – and data from clinical trials showed the vaccine is 94% effective in protecting people over the age of 65 from coronavirus, with trials suggesting it works equally well in people of all ages, races and ethnicities. There were also no serious safety

concerns reported in the trials.

The UK was the first country to pre-order supplies of the vaccine from Pfizer/BioNTech, with 800,000 doses being made available next week and 40 million doses ordered overall – enough to vaccinate up to a third of the population, and the majority of doses anticipated in the first half of next year.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

This is a momentous occasion and provides fresh hope that we can beat this pandemic, with the UK at the forefront of this revolutionary breakthrough.

I can't thank enough every single person who has contributed to this triumph – from the thousands of volunteers who took part in clinical trials, to the teams of expert scientists and clinicians at the MHRA who carefully analysed reams of data.

This vaccine, when combined with effective treatments, will form a vital part in making COVID-19 a manageable disease, hopefully allowing us to return to normality in the future.

This work will take time so for now we must all play our part and abide by the local restrictions to suppress the virus and protect the NHS as they start this vital work.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma said:

Since the start of the pandemic, every single person has made an immense sacrifice to protect themselves, their loved ones and the health of our nation. Through it all, we have remained united to defeat a virus that has taken too many before their time.

As a nation we owe every scientist, clinician and trial volunteer an enormous debt of gratitude for their victory won against odds that at times seemed impossible. It is thanks to their efforts, and of our Vaccine Taskforce, that the UK was the first country to sign a deal with Pfizer/BioNTech and will now be the first to deploy their vaccine.

While today's breakthrough is a positive one, we will not end the pandemic overnight. But in years to come, we will look back and remember this moment as the day the United Kingdom led humanity's charge against this terrible disease.

The MHRA started the rolling review of Pfizer/BioNTech's data in October and the government asked the regulator to assess the vaccine for its suitability for authorisation under Regulation 174 of the Human Medicines Regulations,

enabling the temporary supply of medicines to be authorised in response to a public health need, which the regulator has recommended.

NHS England will outline further details on deployment shortly, but the plans will include:

- hospital hubs for NHS and care staff and older patients to get vaccinated
- local community services with local teams and GPs already signing up to take part in the programme
- vaccination centres across the country, ensuring people can access a vaccine regardless of where they live

The global deployment of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine will require a huge logistical exercise over land, air and sea.

Pfizer has years of proven experience in cold supply chain management and delivering temperature-controlled vaccines to locations across the world. It has developed packaging and storage innovations for the vaccine, including specifically designed, temperature-controlled thermal shippers to maintain conditions of ultra-low temperatures.

Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England Professor Jonathan Van-Tam said:

This is a remarkable day – congratulations to Pfizer/BioNTech and their researchers, and to all my colleagues in the Vaccine Taskforce for their tremendous work to get us to this point, and I want to thank the MHRA experts, including the experts at the Commission on Human Medicines, who have tirelessly and rigorously assessed the safety, effectiveness and quality of the vaccine.

This vaccine has now passed all of the extensive checks needed for authorisation to supply and will soon be ready to be delivered to the NHS.

To all those who are eligible – this is the start of vaccine supply for the UK. In time, you will be invited to book your appointments to get your vaccinations. I urge you to be ready, and to help make the process as smooth as possible. For now, stay patient, and keep yourselves safe by continuing to follow the rules and maintaining social distancing.

As the JCVI has made clear, there will need to be flexibility in terms of operational challenges around delivery of the vaccine to those in care homes. In line with the advice, every effort will be made to supply vaccine and offer vaccinations to care home residents and we will deliver the vaccine according to clinical prioritisation and operational necessity.

The vaccine will be available for free across the UK and the government is working with the devolved administrations to ensure it is deployed fairly across the UK under the Barnett formula.

Through the Vaccine Taskforce, the UK has secured early access to 357 million doses of 7 of the most promising vaccine candidates so far. To date, the government has invested over £230 million into manufacturing a successful vaccine. In the Chancellor's [Spending Review](#), published on 25 November, it was announced that the government has made more than £6 billion available to develop and procure successful vaccines.

Vaccine Deployment Minister Nadhim Zahawi said:

The NHS has decades of experience in delivering highly successful vaccination programmes and has put in an enormous amount of work to get ready to roll out a COVID-19 vaccine to those most in need as quickly as possible.

Once extensive quality checks have taken place, it can be transported to vaccination sites across the UK and carefully unpacked ready for vaccinations to begin this month, with large-scale vaccination happening in the new year.

Chair of the government's Vaccine Taskforce Kate Bingham said:

Today is a momentous occasion and the UK will go down in history as the country that led the world in one of the biggest scientific breakthroughs of our time.

I am incredibly proud of my team in the government's Vaccine Taskforce who have worked tirelessly over the last six months to negotiate agreements with vaccine developers around the world and step up the UK's vaccine manufacturing and logistics capabilities, so any potential candidate can be rolled out as soon as possible.

The work does not stop here. The taskforce will continue to monitor vaccines being developed around the world so that we have a diverse mix available, as well as ensure the UK is able to respond quickly to any future health crises.

Background information

The [full prioritisation list](#) is on GOV.UK and is as follows (in order of priority):

1. Residents in a care home for older adults and their carers
2. All those 80 years of age and over and frontline health and social care workers
3. All those 75 years of age and over
4. All those 70 years of age and over and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals
5. All those 65 years of age and over.
6. All individuals aged 16 years to 64 years with underlying health

conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality

7. All those 60 years of age and over
8. All those 55 years of age and over
9. All those 50 years of age and over

Deployment plans

Despite the huge complexities, staff have been working to ensure that when it is approved and ready for use, the NHS is able to vaccinate from day one. The time between approval and deployment of a vaccine like this might typically be expected to take around a week, due to travel and extensive safety and quality control checks.

The steps include:

- Pfizer dispatches the vaccine from Belgium and it will arrive in the UK. This is followed by a post-delivery quality assurance process to ensure the vaccine's quality and integrity has been maintained.
- Once all checks are complete the vaccine will be made available to order by authorised sites in the NHS.
- Orders will be packed and shipped as appropriate for the required storage temperature of each vaccine. Generally vaccines will be delivered on a next day delivery schedule except for more remote parts of the UK where delivery may take 48 hours.
- Delivering the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is complex as it needs to be stored at very cold temperatures and moved carefully, so at first we will only be able to deliver it from 'hospital hubs'. Defrosting the vaccine takes a few hours and then additional time is required to prepare the vaccine for administering.
- Stage one of the phased roll-out of the vaccine will begin when it has been distributed.

Further information

Vaccination will be managed by the health services in each nation: NHS England and NHS Improvement, NHS Wales, NHS Scotland, and Health and Social Care Northern Ireland.

Until the end of December, and as part of the transition period, vaccines must be authorised via the European Medicines Agency and that authorisation will automatically be valid in the UK.

However, if a suitable COVID-19 vaccine candidate, with strong supporting evidence of safety, quality and effectiveness from clinical trials becomes available before the end of the transition period, EU legislation which we have implemented – Regulation 174 – allows the MHRA to temporarily authorise the supply of a medicine or vaccine, based on public health need.

Through the government's Vaccine Taskforce, the UK has secured early access to 357 million doses of 7 of the most promising vaccine candidates,

including:

- BioNTech/Pfizer for 40 million doses
- Oxford/AstraZeneca for 100 million doses
- Moderna for 7 million doses
- GlaxoSmithKline and Sanofi Pasteur for 60 million doses
- Novavax for 60 million doses
- Janssen for 30 million doses
- Valneva for 60 million doses

UNHCR Pledging Conference: UK statement

We are experiencing a year of unprecedented challenges. As the impacts of COVID-19 are felt far and wide, humanitarian need has more than doubled. Nearly 80 million people have been forced to flee their homes as a result of persecution, conflict, violence and human rights violations, and more than one per cent of the population is forcibly displaced.

These shocking figures are a stark reminder of the human cost in lives interrupted, hopes and aspirations derailed – and the impact is greatly magnified by COVID-19.

Throughout all this UNHCR have stayed the course, continuing to deliver life-saving support in some of the most challenging environments. This is a testament to your commitment and bravery, and for this we thank you. The UK has a proud tradition of supporting refugees and we have ensured their needs are addressed in the COVID-19 response and more widely.

In 2019 the UK contributed \$122 million. This year we again provided unearmarked, flexible funding, including over \$25 million for the COVID-19 response, and making an early payment, giving UNHCR increased flexibility early in the year.

We have already committed \$18.7 million for 2021 and this figure will grow as more programmes are designed and agreed.

The seismic impact of the pandemic on the UK economy means there is uncertainty about 2021. We will have to make difficult choices with our aid budget. However, our commitment to UNHCR and to supporting the world's forcibly displaced remains steadfast.

Looking forward, the UK is deeply concerned that we are facing the very real risk of a 'crisis within a crisis', with some 30 million people in emergency levels of food insecurity.

The causes are complex, but we know that it will again be the most vulnerable who will bear the brunt of this crisis, including refugees.

The UK is leading a global call to action to protect the world's poorest people from coronavirus and the increasing threat of famine.

The UK has been a long-standing champion of a more sustainable approach to refugee crises – one that benefits refugees and hosts alike.

We are wholly committed not only to saving lives in responding to the immediate crisis, but to ensuring forcibly displaced people can begin to build a better future for themselves and their families.

Letter to the chemicals sector about actions to take from 1 January 2021

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Last updated 2 December 2020 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 2 December 2020

Minor update to reflect that chemicals regulatory obligations affect both new chemicals and existing chemicals already on the market.

2. 18 November 2020

First published.