

Business Secretary calls on businesses to continue supporting vaccine rollout

- Kwasi Kwarteng today called on businesses to continue supporting the national vaccine rollout effort as companies pledged their own initiatives
- Companies including IKEA, Timpson and the John Lewis Partnership are already stepping up, including offering paid time off for employees to receive their jab and volunteer, as well as offering workspace for vaccination centres
- Support from business comes as the number of people vaccinated in the UK reaches 15 million

He paid tribute to leading business in the UK such as Marks and Spencer, Heineken and Boots who have made offers to repurpose vital workspaces, including warehouses, pubs and shops, to be used as vaccination hubs to support NHS staff in delivering the biggest vaccination programme in British history.

Business leaders are also allowing thousands of UK workers to take paid time off work to receive their jab, while also encouraging their staff, supporting crucial tasks such as checking patients in and guiding people at vaccination sites across the UK.

The Business Secretary will make the call for even more businesses to get on board as part of a visit to Pall Biotech in Portsmouth. Pall specialises in the provision of critical equipment for biological manufacturing, supporting multiple vaccine developers including AstraZeneca, Novavax and Valneva with single-use consumables, which are essential for the vaccine development process.

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said:

It has been awe inspiring to see businesses lending their hand over the past few months to our heroic healthcare workers and clinicians – all playing their part to support the biggest vaccination programme in our nation's history.

Businesses and their workers have shown an indomitable spirit and leadership that will help us to defeat this virus, and I urge all businesses, no matter how big or small, to join us and do what they can as we reach the next stage of the rollout.

I want to thank British businesses for their ingenuity and collaboration which will help guide us towards the light at the end of the tunnel, which is getting brighter by the day.

Among the businesses supporting the vaccine rollout is UK retail group the

John Lewis Partnership which has donated space at their Waitrose Head Office to be used as a local vaccination hub and are encouraging their 78,000 Partners to sign up as volunteers for vaccination centre and are offering full pay to those who take time off work to receive the vaccine.

Andrew Murphy, Executive Director at the John Lewis Partnership said:

Having worked with the Department of Health & Social Care to pilot and carry out over 60,000 workplace rapid tests since November, we are really proud to be supporting the rollout of the vaccination programme.

Timpson, the UK's leading shoe repair, locksmith and key cutting company, recently confirmed that its 5,400 employees across 2,150 sites nationwide would be eligible for time off from work at full pay in order to receive the vaccine.

Deliveroo has teamed up with BP and restaurant chains such as Wagamama, Pizza Hut and Nando's to deliver free meals to volunteers at vaccination centres. Hundreds of thousands of meals have been donated and delivered to hubs in Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol, Cardiff, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Oxford and Sheffield.

Clive Glover, Director, Cell & Gene Therapy, Pall Corporation:

We are an industry well-known for innovation and scientific endeavour, but what we've achieved over the past twelve months has been extraordinary. Everyone involved—from the life sciences businesses like Pall Corporation that support production, to the biopharmaceutical companies, to the UK Government—we all have elevated our collective efforts to meet the COVID-19 vaccine challenge.

Pall is proud to be a part of this massive undertaking and will continue to support the effort any way we can to help ensure a successful vaccine rollout across the UK and around the globe.

Vaccine Minister, Nadhim Zahawi said:

The rollout of our vaccine programme is our route out of this pandemic and I am incredibly grateful to UK businesses for rallying to support this monumental effort. "Businesses have once again proven themselves to be up to the challenge of fighting COVID-19, both in supporting their own employees to receive the vaccine and in offering up practical resources to get vaccine centres operating up and down the country.

The ingenuity and collaboration we have seen from businesses is

nothing short of remarkable and I thank them sincerely for all that they are doing to help in the UK's roadmap out of this pandemic.

Major retailer Marks and Spencer, which employs 70,000 people in the UK, have said it wants to do 'all it can to help' with the vaccine rollout and has offered the use of its empty properties as vaccination centres, as well as guiding colleagues on how to volunteer.

Sacha Berendji, Retail Director at Marks and Spencer said:

Our colleagues have been helping to deliver essentials to the nation throughout the pandemic, as well as doing a huge amount in their own time to support the NHS and local communities.

On top of this, we know they want to help roll out the much-needed vaccine so we're pleased to do our bit in supporting involvement in the NHS Volunteer Responders campaign.

To further support the vaccine effort we have also offered the use of our vacant property and queuing tunnels which can be used to protect people queuing in winter weather.

It follows the Prime Minister's announcement on Monday that the UK has surpassed its mid-February target of vaccinating over 15 million of the country's most vulnerable people with their first coronavirus vaccine dose.

Notes to editors

- Still images of today's visit available on request by contacting the BEIS Press Office on 020 7215 1000
- For broadcast footage please contact BBC South Today at 023 8037 4540.

Full list of companies supporting and their pledges:

John Lewis

John Lewis has donated space at their Waitrose Head Office to be used as a local vaccination hub. The company is also actively encouraging their 78,000 Partners to sign up as volunteers to support the vaccination programme rollout, and offering full pay to those who take time off work to receive the vaccine. The Partnership was also one of the first UK businesses to rollout rapid lateral flow testing and now has 63 sites across England regularly testing its John Lewis and Waitrose Partners.

Timpson

Timpson, the UK's leading shoe repair, locksmith and key cutting company, recently confirmed that its 5,400 employees across 2,150 sites nationwide would be eligible for time off from work at full pay in order to receive the vaccine.

Marks and Spencer

Major retailer Marks and Spencer, which employs 70,000 people in the UK, has kept its food halls open since the start of the pandemic. As the next stage of tackling the virus gets underway, the company says it wants to do 'all it can to help' with the vaccine rollout and has offered the use of its empty properties as vaccination centres, as well as guiding colleagues on how to volunteer.

HEINEKEN UK

HEINEKEN UK, which owns around 2,500 pubs nationwide, is offering the use of empty pubs as potential vaccination centres, as well as its head office in Edinburgh.

James Crampton, Corporate Affairs Director, HEINEKEN said:

The NHS vaccination programme has provided us with a light at the end of the tunnel.

As well as encouraging and allowing our 2,300 colleagues to take time off to receive their vaccination in the coming months, HEINEKEN colleagues want to continue to support their communities and many have already been volunteering to help the NHS and other local charities.

Boots

Pharmaceutical company, Boots, which has been supporting coronavirus testing since the start of the pandemic, with over 700 staff at around 50 testing sites across the UK, has also opened 3 vaccination hubs to help with the vaccine roll out.

Seb James, Managing Director, Boots said:

We've opened three vaccination hubs so far and are extremely well placed to support the roll out of the vaccine quickly and safely. We stand ready to do more to support the NHS and the government.

IKEA

IKEA, which employs more than 11,000 people across its 21 UK stores, has continued to support staff throughout the pandemic, putting an extensive set of safe working procedures in place and ensuring that all workers are paid 100 per cent of their contracted hours, regardless of the restrictions in place. The company is now stepping up plans to support the vaccine rollout.

Peter Jelkeby, Country Retail Manager and Chief Sustainability Officer, IKEA UK & Ireland said:

The vaccine roll-out is an exciting milestone, enabling an eventual return to the togetherness we need and crave. In supporting our co-workers to get vaccinated, our return to normality, to our customers, and most importantly to our loved ones, is a step closer. And for that opportunity we're incredibly grateful.

Barratt Developments

Meanwhile, Britain's biggest housebuilder, Barratt Developments, has had 6,500 construction workers on the frontline since the pandemic began to deliver its 15,000 new homes target. The company has ensured that employees are equipped with the right information about the safety of vaccines and are actively encouraging volunteering at local vaccine centres.

David Thomas, Chief Executive, Barratt Developments said:

We want to play our part in the national effort to vaccinate against COVID-19.

As well as ensuring our people have the information and the time they need to receive the vaccine themselves, we are encouraging our employees to volunteer and to help the NHS roll out the vaccines where they live.

Deliveroo

Deliveroo has teamed up with BP and restaurant chains such as Wagamama, Pizza Hut and Nando's to deliver free meals to volunteers at vaccination centres. Hundreds of thousands of meals have been donated and delivered to hubs in Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol, Cardiff, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Oxford and Sheffield.

Uber

Taxi service Uber have been providing free rides for those who need it to receive their vaccination. They're offering trips to 42 of the mass vaccination centres around the country.

Asda

An Asda store in the West Midlands became the first supermarket to administer the Covid-19 jab in January. It has now transformed part of a shop in Watford to help deliver over 1,000 vaccines a week.

Brewdog

Scottish craft brewer Brewdog have offered the use of their bars as vaccination centres, with staff helping out as volunteers.

Portsmouth Football Club have pledged to offer staff time off work to receive the vaccine when they're offered it, as well as encouraging fans to take up

the offer.

Mark Catlin, Chief Executive, Portsmouth Football Club said:

Like the rest of the country, Portsmouth Football Club are in awe of the incredible work being undertaken by the NHS to vaccinate the most vulnerable members of our community.

We are always proud to partner with our National Health Service – whether that’s promoting their request for blood plasma donations via our social media channels or providing a location for blood donor sessions.

Thanks to their incredible work, the light at the end of this long tunnel grows ever closer.

We urge fans of all clubs to step forward when they are offered the vaccination. We also pledge to commit to our staff having the time they need when it’s their turn to receive the vaccine.