

Health and Social Care Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 10 December 2020

[Coronavirus press conference \(10 December 2020\)](#)

Good evening, and welcome back to Downing Street for today's coronavirus briefing.

Today I'm joined by Chief Medical Officer, Chris Whitty, and Professor Steve Powis, Medical Director of NHS England.

The start of our COVID-19 vaccination programme on Tuesday was the latest in a long line of firsts for the NHS. The NHS was the first health care system in the world to roll out the vaccines for other deadly diseases like TB, measles, mumps and rubella, and meningitis C.

So I'm so proud we can now add COVID-19 to that list.

Before updating you on vaccine deployment, I'd like to go through the latest coronavirus data.

The average number of new cases each day is now 16,236 – that has risen over the last week.

Today, there are 15,242 COVID patients in hospital across the UK – which is slightly less than last week. And sadly, 516 deaths were reported yesterday.

Vaccine deployment

The fall in the number of cases has flattened off – and is rising in some parts of the country like Kent, Essex and some parts of London.

It shows us this fight is far from over and how we must all play our part and stay on our guard, now and through Christmas.

We've got help on the horizon and we can all see that with the vaccine – so don't blow it now. And of course, this shows why the deployment of a vaccine is so important.

I just want to take a moment to thank everyone involved in the vaccine rollout so far, which has been done with such professionalism and skill.

And today I want to pay a special tribute and thank pharmacists, who are working with such a tricky vaccine. Must be kept cold at -70 degrees. They have done so much work to get ready for this moment at such pace.

As of today, we are vaccinating in 73 hospitals across the UK. Tens of thousands of people have had the jab.

I want to set out the next steps.

I can confirm that we will shortly expand our vaccination programme further to 10 more locations in England and from next week we will begin vaccinations in GP-led sites and vaccinate in care homes by Christmas.

We will keep on expanding this roll out to reach more and more people.

As more vaccines come on stream, we will open vaccination centres in larger venues, like sports stadia and conference halls next year and that's when most people can expect to get their jabs.

When the time comes, the NHS will get in touch with you – so you don't need to come forward and get in contact with the NHS.

Get the jab

On Tuesday in Milton Keynes, it was great to meet some of the patients and the staff involved.

And I loved what Barbara – who's 82 – said. When she got her jab there she said: "I'd much rather get the vaccine than COVID-19 itself".

I'm with Barbara. It's free according to need – and it's the very best way to protect you and to protect those around you. And when enough people get vaccinated – and we see those hospitalisations coming down – we can then start lifting those restrictions which have made this year so tough.

And I felt so proud when I sat with Muhammad Hassan, I sat with him while he got his jab. He's a doctor at Milton Keynes Hospital who volunteered to treat COVID patients – and himself caught COVID in the first peak.

He said the jab was painless.

But we also talked about the challenges that we still face right now while we roll out the jab across the country.

Protect the NHS

Even with this mass vaccination programme, for the next few months, we will not have sufficient protection through the vaccination programme.

This is always the most difficult time for the NHS anyway for the winter months.

And with the number of cases flattening again, we've all got to do our bit and not put more pressure on the NHS.

To do that, we must keep respecting the rules where we are and take those sensible steps that we can all take: washing our hands, covering our face and making space between people, respecting that social distancing and the rules that come with it.

We can't stop that now, just because the vaccine is here.

And even if you've had the jab, you are not immune. The vaccine will not fully protect you until 7 days after you've received the second dose and we don't yet know if it will stop you from passing on the disease to other people.

So we all have to keep acting as if we still can pass it on. That is the safest way to get the number of cases down and keep people safe.

London, Kent and Essex

I'm particularly concerned about the number of cases in London, Kent and Essex.

Cases are rising – and in many areas, already high.

Looking into the detail, the testing results and surveys show us that by far the fastest rise is among secondary school age children, 11 to 18 year-olds while the rate among adults in London is broadly flat.

But we know from experience that a sharp rise in cases in younger people can lead to a rise amongst more vulnerable age groups later. We've seen that happen before.

So we need to do everything we can to stop the spread among school-age children in London right now.

We must not wait until the review which will take place on the 16 December.

We need to take targeted action immediately.

Having spoken to the leaders of London's councils, and to the mayor, we have decided to put in place an immediate plan for testing all secondary school aged children in the 7 worst affected boroughs of London, in parts of Essex that border London, and parts of Kent.

We want to keep schools open, because that's both right for education and right for public health.

We are therefore surging mobile testing units and we will be working with schools and local authorities to encourage these children and their families to get tested over the coming days.

More details will be set out tomorrow.

And I want to urge all those involved to step forward for testing.

It is important that 11 to 18 year-olds get tested in these boroughs irrespective of whether they have symptoms – this is a really important point, because we know that you can have COVID – and you can still pass it on – even without symptoms.

Around 1 in 3 people with COVID have no symptoms at all but they can still pass it on to others.

I know that nobody wants to be responsible for endangering those around them so I urge everyone involved to get a test.

We surged testing in Leicester. We surged testing in Liverpool.

We know that community testing can work and it requires a collective spirit of determination and resilience, and of people coming together to do the right thing. Something I have confidence that everybody involved will find in the days to come.

This sort of community testing deployment is not just available in London, Kent and Essex, where cases are rising, but also across the country to help get cases coming down.

We are now working with over 100 local authorities across England – and with the 3 devolved administrations – to help get cases down using community testing.

This includes Manchester, Kirklees and Lancashire, who are planning to mobilise community-based testing in their areas before Christmas. As are Manchester and Kirklees.

This offer remains available across the UK to be done in partnership with local authorities and devolved administrations.

Test and Trace 2.0

We can deploy this sort of massive testing, because of the work NHS Test and Trace have done so effectively to build our vast testing capacity.

Our new [NHS Test and Trace Business Plan](#), which we published today, sets out how we will grow this yet further.

Today's figures on testing and tracing show that – thanks to improvements in the way we do contact tracing – by reducing the number of repeat calls that are made to individual households, which has been one of the pieces of feedback that we've received, our contact tracing now reaches 86% of contacts, and that's up from around 60% just a few weeks ago.

I want to pay tribute to the contact tracing team, working under Dido Harding, for delivering on this very significant improvement.

From today, I can confirm that people instructed to isolate by the COVID-19 app, and are eligible, can claim the £500 Test and Trace Support Payment directly through the app too.

Hospital upgrades

Even as we work to overcome these immediate challenges, I'm determined that

we also lose no time in modernising our hospitals.

Today, I can announce 1,800 projects, which are being funded from our £600 million package to upgrade and refurbish hospitals across 178 NHS trusts this year.

This will include projects for fixing roofs, for new MRI machines. These projects, which will be completed over the winter period, will make a real difference for staff and patients alike and help our NHS build back better.

Close

These announcements that I'm making today show just what a massive effort is needed every day to tackle coronavirus even with the vaccine on the horizon.

I'm very grateful to all those working in schools, local authorities, delivering the vaccine rollout, our pharmacists, NHS Test and Trace and the hospital improvement programme for the efforts that will be needed to deliver all of this.

It shows that every part of our NHS – from GP surgeries to hospitals – and every part of government – local and national – is all playing its part in the battle against this virus.

We've got to remember, in this battle, that we're all on the same side.

And, especially with Christmas coming, there's something we all can do which is to respect the rules, and all of us, at all times, do all that we can to stop the spread of the virus.

This is a marathon, not a sprint.

We've got to keep going.

The finish line is in sight.

And I know that, together, we can get there.