

Health and Social Care Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 14 December 2020

Welcome back to Downing Street for today's coronavirus briefing.

Today I'm joined by Chief Medical Officer, Professor Chris Whitty and Professor Kevin Fenton, Public Health England's Regional Director for London.

Sadly, the news on the spread of the virus is not good.

The latest number of cases of coronavirus is rising once more.

We've seen an increase of 14% in the last week and the number of patients admitted to hospital across the UK has risen again too.

The average number of new cases reported each day is 18,023 which is up on last week.

Today, there are 16,531 COVID patients in hospitals across the UK – which is also up.

And sadly, on average each day over the past week 420 deaths have been reported

Once again, the spread of this disease is not even across the country. There have been sharp rises in South Wales, London, Kent, Essex and parts of the East and South East of England.

In some areas, the doubling time is now 7 days, this rise is amongst people of all age groups – not just school-age children.

I'm particularly concerned by the rising rates amongst the over 60s, the number of people in hospital which is also rising. That's even before that we factor in the increases in last week's rates.

And we know, through painful experience: more cases lead to more hospitalisations and sadly, more deaths.

To think that this link and this chain is broken is wrong and dangerous.

We've seen it time and time again elsewhere this year when cases rise, the pressure on hospitals mount. And so to then sadly, do the number of people who die from coronavirus

To stop this, we need to act fast.

I can tell you that because of the testing and surveillance systems that we built, we've also identified a new variant of this virus which may be

associated with the faster spread in some areas.

We deal with this variant just like we do with all the others and this underlines how important it is for us to be vigilant.

The vaccine is being rolled out – and it's wonderful to see that tens of thousands of people have had their jabs, their first jabs and it's also very good to see that the vaccine, as of today, is being rolled out by GPs in England and to care homes in Scotland.

Help is on its way. But we're not there yet.

To control this deadly disease while the vaccine is being rolled out, we all have a role to play.

Everyone should minimise their social contact, because that's how we can control the spread of this disease.

Turning to London and south and west Essex, and south Hertfordshire – in these areas we have seen sharp exponential rises in the past week we have taken swift and decisive action to protect the NHS and save lives even ahead of the formal review point on Wednesday.

We must act now.

So, from one minute from midnight on Wednesday morning these areas will move into [Tier 3 – the very high alert level](#).

I know this is not the news people wanted – it's a blow to so many people who have made plans and to businesses that will be adversely affected too.

But we know from experience: the best thing to do in the face of this virus is to act fast and not wait to see the growth continue.

And we do not rule out further action.

This rise in transmission – as well as the new variant of COVID – should be a warning to us all that – even after such a difficult year – we must stay vigilant.

People of all ages can spread this disease and around 1 in 3 people don't display any symptoms at all. But can still spread it.

We should never lose sight of our own role in this – our personal responsibility.

Each and every one of us to respect the rules where you are don't ease up on those simple steps that keep us safe: like hands, face, and space. The social distancing that we need. And to come forward and get a test.

This moment is a salutary warning for the whole country – this isn't over yet.

Please play your part and do all you can to stop the spread of this disease.

I'll now turn to Professor Whitty to turn to the data and the details.