

# Health and Social Care Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 17 March 2021

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

I'm joined by Professor Jonathan Van Tam, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, and Dr Mary Ramsay, Head of Immunisation at Public Health England.

I've got some fantastic news to bring you today on the success of the vaccination rollout and the protection that it's bringing right across the United Kingdom right now.

Yesterday, we delivered 529,119 vaccinations. More than half a million.

And that means that today, exactly 100 days since Margaret Keenan got the first authorised jab in the whole world, we have now vaccinated over 25 million people across the United Kingdom.

It's been such a national mission. One of the biggest logistical exercises since the war. And I've had the honour of playing my part, we've had the honour of playing our parts – it's been a huge team effort.

And I've got absolutely no doubt it's the best project I've ever been involved in. And I want to say a huge thank you to everybody who leant in and has done so much to put this country in the position we are in where we've been able to vaccinate almost half of the adult population, 25 million people.

It's nothing any of us who've been involved in it from the start will ever forget. But what really matters is why this is making a difference.

And we have some very exciting information for you today about the real-world impact the vaccination programme is having.

I've just got one slide today.

This slide shows over time the increase in the proportion of people who actually have COVID-19 antibodies – those are the antibodies that are so crucial to the bodies' ability to fight the disease.

This chart isn't measuring how many vaccines have been done. It's actually measuring the proportion of people who actually have COVID-fighting antibodies swimming around in their bloodstream.

This chart represents the fact the vaccine is giving the country protection. As you can see it runs up to the start of March and it shows around 90 per cent of people aged around 70 and above had these antibodies and it has

continued to expand further in the 2 weeks or so since then.

The chart explains why deaths from COVID in this country are now thankfully falling so fast, down by more than a third last week again.

The vaccine is saving thousands of lives right now here in the UK, and can give us all hope. And professor Van Tam is going to say a little more about this and the safety details in a second. And it underlines why it's so important that when you get the call, get the jab.

I find this data really compelling. And to anybody who still has concerns, or any doubt about getting the jab, we know that the vaccine is safe and helps make you safe. It gives you this protection. And Dr Mary Ramsay is with us because she's going to set out details on a publication that Public Health England have just released with more evidence of the impact of this vaccine – to show what this protection looks like.

It shows that after a single dose of the vaccine – either vaccine – protection against getting COVID-19 is around 60 per cent. That's protection against getting it.

It shows protection against hospitalisation is around 80 per cent and protection against death is around 85 per cent.

One of the other interesting facts that is really important is that the vaccine offers protection to you, but also offers protection to those around you.

The data shows that if you live with someone who's been vaccinated, you have a 30 per cent lower risk of catching COVID-19 yourself.

This is the first data that directly measures the impact of the vaccine on reducing transmission. And it shows that the vaccines are saving lives.

Both vaccines being rolled out in the UK are not just safe but they make you safe. They're saving lives and protecting people.

And because we're rolling out this vaccine so fast, and because we've protected so many people so quickly, we're now able to extend the offer of a vaccination to yet more people.

All people aged 50 and above are, from today, invited to come forward and get a jab.

The NHS will contact you, and today, we're sending over 2 million texts and letters and invitations to get vaccinated.

Anyone aged 50 and over can now sign up on the [NHS UK website](#) or call 119.

We're on track to offer a first dose to everyone in priority groups 1 to 9 by 15 April. While we deliver on that commitment we also want to ensure this offer reaches everyone in groups 1 to 9.

So at the same time as opening up vaccinations to all those that are 50 and above we are going to do whatever it takes to reach all those in the most vulnerable groups who haven't come forward yet before we move onto the next cohort of people in their 40s.

My message to our huge team of vaccinators is: let's keep getting the numbers through the doors.

But it's absolutely critical that we reach out and loop back and we invite in yet again all those who are in vulnerable groups who haven't yet been vaccinated. I want to get those percentages of people in vulnerable groups right up, reaching every last vulnerable person – and it is worth the extra effort. We'll do that before we move on to people in their 40s.

I'm 42, and I'm as eager as anyone to get the jab. But before we forge ahead I want us to be confident that we've done everything we can to protect those most in need of protection.

And we will do all we can, and do everything necessary, to secure the supplies that are contractually committed to protecting people in this country.

We're moving in the right direction thanks to everybody following the rules that are keeping us safe now and coming forward to get a jab that will keep us safe for the future.

But now is not the time to waver. We're on the road to recovery. The vaccine is our way out. We are on track.

So let's stick with it, follow the rules, and when you get the call, get the jab.