

Health and Social Care Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 18 January 2021

Welcome to Downing Street for today's coronavirus briefing. And I'm joined by Professor Steven Powis, the Medical Director of NHS England and by Dr Susan Hopkins, the Chief Medical Adviser to Public Health England and NHS Test and Trace.

And I want to bring you up to date with the latest data on the disease and on our vaccine plan in order to combat it.

Today, 37,535 positive cases of coronavirus were recorded. The NHS is under significant pressure in all parts of the country.

There are 37,475 people in UK hospitals with coronavirus – that is the highest that it's been throughout the pandemic and someone is admitted to hospital every 30 seconds.

And sadly, today 599 more deaths were recorded. That's 599 more people who have died from this terrible disease and left loved ones and their families in mourning.

And I know the pain that this disease causes – and I'm determined to do everything we possibly can to defeat it, and I know that is what you want too.

And our vaccine delivery plan is absolutely at the core of this, it is our way out. It's also the biggest medical deployment in British history and it's one of the biggest civilian operations that this country's ever undertaken.

Our approach is, of course, to save as many lives as possible – as quickly as possible and to reduce the pressure on the NHS.

We're on track to deliver our plan to vaccinate the most vulnerable groups by the middle of February, the groups that account for 88% of COVID deaths.

And I'm very glad to report that, as of midnight last night, we have now vaccinated 4,062,501 people across the United Kingdom, and we're currently vaccinating more than double the rate – per person per day – than any other country in Europe.

Latest data show that we've now vaccinated more than half of those over 80 as well as half of our elderly care home residents.

And we all know these are the groups most vulnerable to COVID and we know that every jab counts and I am really pleased that we've been able to meet this milestone.

Some areas of the country have done even better. There are some parts where the vast majority of octogenarians have been vaccinated and there are some places – for instance Slough – who have vaccinated all of their care home residents.

And so, I want to thank all those who've been doing this enormous task and in particular Slough, and other places around the country, who have reached the critical goal of making sure that every body in a care home can be vaccinated.

And this means that, in those areas, where the vast majority of people in the top two priority groups have been vaccinated, from today, we can start moving on to the over 70s, and those under 70 who are clinically extremely vulnerable.

We're doing this because it's the best way both to maximise the pace of the rollout and deliver according to the clinical prioritisation. All with the goal of saving as many lives as possible, as quickly as possible and reducing the pressures on the NHS.

And I want to say to anybody aged over 80 but hasn't yet had their jab, I want to say we will reach you. The NHS will contact you and you will have your invitation to be vaccinated within the next 4 weeks.

And I'm absolutely determined to do all that I possibly can to support people in care homes, while we get this vaccination done as soon as possible.

Over the weekend I announced £120 million to support staffing levels in social care, and that's in addition to the £149 million we recently made available to support the regular staff testing in care homes.

And I want to thank everyone working in social care for the incredible way that you've stepped up for those who you care for – you make us all proud.

And I know – that as we continue to live under these difficult restrictions – people want to know the way forward for everyone.

Our vaccine programme continues to accelerate and expand – and another 10 large-scale vaccination centres came on stream in England just this morning.

But in the meantime we must all continue to play our part. We must stay at home wherever possible and take vital steps like the basics of hands, face and space, letting fresh air in – and keeping to the rules on social distancing.

Don't blow it now. We're on the route out. We're protecting the most vulnerable, we're getting the virus under control. Together, I know that we can do it.

And we've got to stick at it and especially with our plans for all adults in the UK to be offered a COVID vaccine by September.

And just before I end, I just want to say this: there are many more ways that

everybody can help in this great national effort.

Of course, following the rules is the single most important thing that people can do. But more formally, people are helping by being a community volunteer, or signing up for clinical trials for vaccines and for therapeutics.

Or, the 50,000 people who've now signed up for the Sun's 'Jabs Army' – smashing the target, in the battle against this disease.

And I want to thank each and everyone of you, and the Sun newspaper for leading in this part of the national effort.

But also informally too – and this is something that I know so many people are already doing in every part of the country – and I see it every day, and people talk to me about it all of the time.

And it really inspires me, how people are helping in adversity. Like a grandson, helping their grandma to book an appointment online, or neighbours dropping off essentials on the doorstep, or the community groups that are getting together to help drive people to a vaccination centre so that people can get that all important jab.

I find it really heartening, and the kind actions we're seeing from so many people – especially when people need help.

So, thank you for all that you are doing for your loved ones, for your communities, for your friends and colleagues and neighbours.

Being there for each other is so important in these difficult days – and that spirit that can help us all get to the brighter times that I know are ahead.

Thank you for watching so far and now we are going to turn straight to the questions.