

Health and Social Care Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 28 April 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 Nikki Kanani, the Medical Director for Primary Care at NHS England.

Today we've got an update on our fight against coronavirus, both here at home and around the world.

Support for India

I'll start by talking about events around the world.

We've all seen the harrowing pictures of what's happening in India.

I think it pains each one of us who's seeing those scenes.

Not least because the bonds between our countries are so strong. And there are ties of family and friendship.

I've been in constant contact with my Indian counterpart.

And we worked over the weekend to put together our first package of support of ventilators and oxygen concentrators.

More supplies will be arriving later this week.

I've also been working with the Health Minister for Northern Ireland, Robin Swann, to donate large scale oxygen production equipment from Northern Ireland which is capable of producing over 1,000 litres of oxygen per minute – which is one of the main needs of the people of India.

I'd like to thank Robin for the incredible hard work he's done in getting this to the position it is so we can get it sent to India where it can produce that oxygen that is so badly needed.

Everyone across this whole United Kingdom stands side-by-side with the people of India in these troubled times because in this battle against coronavirus, we're all on the same side.

This fight is a global fight.

And when other nations face their hour of need, as we have faced our hour of need here at home: we'll be there.

The situation in India is a stark reminder that this isn't over yet.

It shows how important it is that we're vigilant here at home.

Professor Van Tam will take us through the data in a moment.

Transmission data

Just before we do, I want to give an update on the vaccination programme.

This morning we published new data, giving the first concrete evidence of how much vaccines reduce transmission within households.

We've seen already that a vaccine reduces your chance of catching COVID by around two thirds.

This new data looked at people who tested positive after having received one dose of the vaccine and found that they were up to 50 per cent less likely to pass on the disease to someone else in their household.

And we're looking at whether the second dose gives an even bigger effect.

We know that indoor settings have the highest risk of transmission.

So these results are very encouraging in terms of the impact of the vaccine on reducing transmission.

We're finding out more and more about the layers of protection you get from a vaccine, and how its impacting in the real world.

In summary, we think you get around two thirds protection against catching the disease at all, around four fifths reduction in your likelihood of ending up in hospital and around 85 per cent protection from dying of COVID.

That's the protection you get from one dose.

And in addition to all that, you're up to half as likely to pass it on to somebody else that you live with.

We expect the benefits to be even greater after two doses and we are monitoring that carefully.

What this means is the evidence is stacking up that the vaccine protects you, protects your loved ones, and is the way out of this pandemic.

Vaccination programme

The overall effectiveness of the vaccination programme comes from just two things.

One, how effective the vaccine is – that's the science if you like.

And two, how many people get the jabs. That of course is on all of us.

I just want to turn to the second of those for a moment as well.

First animation, please.

This shows the proportion of people who've had a jab, according to age group.

Green bars represent people who've had one dose, and the blue represent people who've had two.

And you can see they are growing over time as the vaccination programme reaches more and more people who are younger and younger.

As you can see, across the United Kingdom, uptake of the first dose among the over 50s is phenomenally high, at over 95 per cent.

And is rising sharply in people in their late forties who have been now able to receive the vaccine for a couple of weeks.

This is great progress, and it's something we can all celebrate, because we all have a part to play in this.

I'm delighted we've been able to offer the vaccine to even more people.

So anyone who's 42 or older can now come forward and get the jab.

I'm delighted about this, not just because it shows the progress we're making, I'm also delighted because it means I can get my jab too.

Just like every other 42 and 43 year old, I got a text from the NHS yesterday.

I went online and booked it for myself. It takes less than a minute.

And I'm looking forward to getting my jab first thing tomorrow morning.

In the words of our new campaign "every vaccination brings us hope".

Antibody data

So, we've looked at the effectiveness of the vaccine and we've looked at the take up of the vaccine.

And now I want to turn to a combination of the two.

What I'm about to show you is not how many people have had the jab, but how many people have got the antibodies that make the jab effective. These antibodies that protect you from coronavirus.

This isn't a measure of the vaccination programme directly. This is a measure of the protection that we have, collectively, built up in people right across the country.

Can we have the second chart, please.

This data, released today by the ONS, is from a national survey where they visit over 20,000 people, and actually measure the antibodies in people's bloodstream.

The blue area shows the proportion of people who have COVID-19 antibodies.

As you can see, in the older age groups who got vaccinated first they are much more likely to have COVID-19 antibodies.

So more and more people are getting protection.

And now 7 in 10 adults have protective COVID antibodies. This is the vaccination programme in action.

It makes me so proud of what we've done.

We have been working on the vaccination programme for more than a year now.

And there's a massive team to it, and I'm grateful to them all.

But the thing that makes me proudest is how, when the call came, the whole nation who has been asked has effectively stepped forward.

This vaccination programme depends, yes, on the effectiveness of the science and that is crucial. But it depends on everybody stepping forward.

Booster programme and Pfizer doses

The vaccine is helping us to bring back our freedom and we must protect this progress.

The biggest risk to that progress is the risk posed by a new variant.

So we're working on our plans for booster shots too.

To keep us safe and free here while we get this disease under control across the whole world.

We've been working on a programme of booster shots again for over a year now.

And we've backed some of the only clinical trials in the world looking specifically at booster shots.

I'm delighted to be able to tell you that we've secured a further 60 million doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

And that will be used, alongside others, as part of our booster shot programme from later this year.

And that is all about protecting the progress that we've made.

Conclusion

We have a clear route out of this crisis.

But, this is no time for complacency, it's a time for caution.

So that we can keep the virus under control, while we take the steps, safely, back to normal life.

So please remember the basics of hands, face, space, and fresh air.

And crucially, if like me you get the call, join me and get the jab.

Now I'd like to hand over to Professor Van Tam to talk through the latest data and then to Dr Kanani to talk through some of the detailed data about that extraordinarily high take up of the vaccine

Thank you.