

Measures against Omicron variant come into effect: 30 November 2021

- New measures to respond to emergence of Omicron variant come into force at 4am
- Face coverings compulsory in shops and on public transport
- All international arrivals to take a Day 2 PCR test and self-isolate until they receive a negative test
- All contacts of suspected Omicron cases must self-isolate, regardless of their age or vaccination status

Targeted measures to prevent the spread of the new COVID-19 Omicron variant take effect from 4am today [Tuesday 30 November].

They will be introduced as a precaution while more information is gathered and assessed on the variant's transmissibility and any possible effect on our vaccines.

Vaccines continue to remain our best line of defence, and all adults who have not yet received their first or second dose of the vaccine, or those who are eligible for their booster are encouraged to come forward to help protect themselves and others.

Yesterday the JCVI advised the booster programme was extended to all 18-39 year-olds and the gap between the second dose and booster was reduced to three months. All those aged 12 to 15 years have now been advised to receive a second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, no sooner than 12 weeks after the first dose. Severely immunosuppressed individuals who have received three primary doses, should now also be offered a booster dose.

From 4am this morning:

- Face coverings are compulsory in shops and settings such as banks, post offices and hairdressers, as well as on public transport unless individuals are exempt from doing so. All hospitality settings are exempt.
- All international arrivals must take a PCR test by the end of the second day after arrival and self-isolate until they receive a negative result. The PCR tests are available online from private providers.
- All contacts of suspected Omicron cases must self-isolate, regardless of their age or vaccination status. They will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

The measures taking effect today are proportionate and responsible, and will buy us time in the face of this new variant. Based on everything we know, our vaccines and boosters remain our best line

of defence, so it is more important than ever that people come forward when eligible to get boosted. Not only will today's steps help us slow down the variant's spread, but they will help us protect each other and the gains we have all worked so hard for.

The measures are temporary and precautionary, and will be reviewed in three weeks. The regulations will be kept under review to ensure they only remain necessary and proportionate.

The step for all international arrivals to take a PCR test by the end of the second day and self-isolate until they receive a negative result comes on top of restrictions focused on the areas of most risk. South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, and Angola have all been added to the UK's travel red list.

Surge PCR testing and enhanced contact tracing are underway where cases have been identified. The UK Health Security Agency is carrying out targeted testing at locations where the positive cases were likely to have been infectious. Confirmed cases and contacts are being followed up and requested to isolate and get tested as necessary.

The Omicron variant contains a large number of spike protein mutations as well as mutations in other parts of the viral genome, with early indications suggesting this variant may be more transmissible.

The measures will give us time to slow down the spread of the variant as work continues internationally to fully understand how these mutations may change the behaviour of the virus with regards to vaccines, treatments and transmissibility.

The vaccination programme and test, trace and isolate system continue to be the most effective way of reducing transmission, along with practicing good hygiene, keeping spaces well ventilated, and wearing masks.