

New support to help vulnerable countries tackle Omicron

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has pledged up to £105 million of UK emergency aid to help vulnerable countries tackle the Omicron Covid-19 variant, with a particular focus on Africa.

The vital aid will be delivered through trusted partners and will:

- Scale-up testing – especially in parts of Africa where testing rates for Covid-19 remain lowest – allowing health systems to track and respond to the spread of the virus more effectively. This is in addition to the UK's world-leading genomic sequencing support.
- Improve access to oxygen supplies for ventilators – a surge in demand for oxygen is a significant risk for some countries.
- Provide communities with hygiene advice, products and access to handwashing facilities and support deep cleaning in schools, health centres and other public places. This will build on the successful global hygiene campaign between UK aid and Unilever which has reached over 1.2 billion people since its launch in 2020.
- Fund the UK's ground-breaking science and research into the spread of variants like Omicron to enable innovative evidence-based policy responses in low and middle-income countries.
- Ready the UK's own expert emergency teams for deployment overseas to crisis hotspots, including with new medical equipment.

The government has also confirmed today that over 30 million vaccines have been delivered so far as part of the UK's pledge to donate 100 million doses to the world, benefitting more than 30 countries.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

The UK is providing vital assistance to help tackle the spread of new variants around the world. This is key to securing our freedom and ending this pandemic once and for all.

I am proud that we have also delivered over 30 million vaccines to benefit our friends around the world this year. The UK is helping other countries most in need. No one is safe until everyone is safe.

Doses donated by the UK have reached four continents and provided vital protection from Covid-19 in countries including Angola, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Malawi, Nepal, and Rwanda.

Of the more than 30 million doses now donated, 24.6 million have been received by COVAX for delivery to countries and 5.5 million have been shared

directly with countries in need including Kenya, Jamaica, and Indonesia.

Millions more vaccines will be sent to other countries in 2022, including 20 million Oxford-AstraZeneca doses and 20 million Janssen doses.

The UK has been at the forefront of the global response to Covid-19. Today's announcement builds on the £1.3 billion in UK aid committed to the international health response early on in the pandemic, supporting vaccines, health systems and economic recovery in developing countries.

The Government also invested more than £88 million to support the development of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, and the UK became the first country in the world to approve the jab a year ago today.

Thanks to AstraZeneca's commitment distribute the vaccine on a non-profit basis, 2.5 billion doses have been used in more than 170 countries, two thirds of which are low- and middle-income countries.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

The global pandemic has challenged health systems around the world and the best way to overcome this awful disease is to unite and stand side by side with our international partners.

By supporting countries with the UK's ground breaking science and research into the spread of variants, improving access to oxygen and scaling up testing we will help those most in need chart their course out of the pandemic.

I am proud that we have already delivered over 30 million vaccines to our friends abroad. The UK, as a global leader, is helping other countries most in need. No one is safe until everyone is safe.

Dr Seth Berkley, CEO of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, said:

We welcome the UK's commitment in new funding to protect the most vulnerable, particularly in Africa; the UK's continued focus on COVAX and equitable global access to COVID19 vaccines, both through early financing commitments made at UNGA 2020, as well as meeting the Prime Minister's G7 commitment to dose sharing – the 30m target set by the end of 2021.

We look forward to operationalising the remainder of the UK's dose sharing commitment via COVAX in 2022, while we also work with the UK Government on continuing to support Gavi's ambitious 2021- 2025 routine vaccination programmes, of which the United Kingdom is the largest funder through the PM's commitment made at the UK-hosted Global Vaccine Summit in June 2020.

Notes to editors:

- The UK will fund testing and oxygen supplies through the COVID-19 response mechanism C19RM, established by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. This is a proven, rapid, and highly effective approach designed to respond to the needs of countries and communities in low- and middle-income countries.
- The UK continues to offer our world-leading expertise to help identify new Covid-19 variants. The UK is the second largest contributor of genomic data to the global initiative mapping the spread of Covid-19, providing around a third of the total number of sequences so far uploaded.
- The UK kick-started efforts to establish COVAX, pledging £548 million to the scheme. COVAX has so far provided 811 million doses to 144 of the world's poorest countries.
- The UK's Health Security Agency continues to help countries effectively identify, assess, and track new SARS-CoV-2 variants among their population through the New Variant Assessment Platform (NVAP).
- Planning for future pandemics is crucial and that is why the UK will host a replenishment conference in March 2022 to support the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) to raise funds for vaccine research and development. CEPI aim to cut the time it takes to develop a vaccine to 100 days which could avert future pandemics, save millions of lives, and avoid trillions of pounds of economic damage.
- The UK donates vaccines through COVAX as well as directly to countries. So far, doses donated by the UK have arrived in Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Belize, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Dominica, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Grenada, Guyana, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Laos, Malawi, Malaysia, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Rwanda, Saint Vincent & Grenadines, Senegal, Thailand, Uganda, Vietnam, and Zambia.
- The UK continues to proactively manage our vaccine supply and does not hold a stockpile of coronavirus vaccines. All procured, regulated doses are either used rapidly by our domestic programme or shared internationally with countries in need, meaning the domestic booster rollout is not impacted by donations