

PM opening statement at COVID-19 press conference: 4 January 2022

Previous waves of the pandemic did not have a single day with more than 100,000 new cases reported.

On one day last week we had 200,000 people test positive.

And the latest figure today is another 218,000, though that includes some delayed reports.

So anyone who thinks our battle with Covid is over is, I'm afraid, profoundly wrong.

This is a moment for the utmost caution.

But our position today differs from previous waves in two crucial respects.

First, we now know that Omicron is milder than previous variants,

so while hospital admissions are rising quickly

with over 15,000 Covid patients now in hospital in England alone –

this is not yet, thankfully, translating into the same numbers needing intensive care that we saw in previous waves.

And second, thanks to the fantastic national effort to get Britain boosted,

we now have a substantial level of protection, higher than any of our European neighbours,

with over 34 million boosters administered,

including in England reaching more than 90 per cent of the over-70s,

and 86 per cent of the over-50s.

And so together with the Plan B measures that we introduced before Christmas,

we have a chance to ride out this Omicron wave without shutting down our country once again.

We can keep our schools and our businesses open, and we can find a way to live with this virus.

But the weeks ahead are going to be challenging, both here in the UK and across the world.

There is no escaping the fact that some services will be disrupted by staff absences,

but we have been working through Christmas to prepare for this wherever possible.

And if we all play our part in containing the spread of this virus

the disruptions we face can be far less severe than a national lockdown, with all the devastation that would bring for livelihoods and the life chances of our children.

So the government is acting to protect critical national services, keep supply chains open, and fortify our NHS to withstand the pressures ahead.

We've identified 100,000 critical workers,

in areas from food processing to transport to our border force –

and from 10 January we'll be rolling out lateral flow testing for all these workers, available on every working day.

We'll be sending testing kits directly to these organisations and liaising with them on the logistics.

We've asked qualified teachers who have left the profession to come back and help fill temporary absences,

and I want to thank them and all teachers, parents and pupils for taking the precaution to test yourselves and to wear a mask in the classroom, enabling vital face-to-face education to continue.

We're increasing NHS capacity by building onsite Nightingale hospitals,

as well as creating 2,500 virtual beds where people can be safely treated at home.

We've bought more antivirals per person than anywhere else in Europe those are the tablets which reduce your chances of going to hospital once you've caught Covid.

We're mobilising our volunteers

– the emerging territorial army of the NHS –

and we're working to identify those NHS Trusts which are most likely to need actual military support, so this can be prepared now.

As our NHS moves to a war footing, I will be recommending to Cabinet tomorrow that we continue with Plan B,

because the public have responded and changed their behaviour, your behaviour, buying valuable time to get boosters in arms and help the NHS to cope with the Omicron wave.

So please carry on observing those measures for now.

Work from home if you can.

Wear face coverings on public transport and in indoor public places,
and take a test before you go to a high-risk venue or meet those who are
elderly or vulnerable.

And follow the relevant rules if you live in Scotland, Wales or Northern
Ireland.

Above all, if you haven't already done so please, please get that booster.

Since I launched the Get Boosted Now campaign on 12 December:

we have delivered 10 million extra boosters across the UK;

we have doubled the rate of vaccination from 450,000 doses a day to a peak of
more than 900,000;

we matched the NHS's previous record day, and then beat it again and again;

and we met our target of offering a booster to every eligible adult a whole
month early.

The freedoms we are able to maintain in the teeth of this Omicron wave

have been made possible by the number of people getting boosted,

and I want to thank again, everyone who assisted this extraordinary national
effort over Christmas.

Our GPs and their teams, pharmacists and everyone in our fantastic NHS,

the thousands of volunteers,

the ingenious initiatives of local communities,

like the one in Redbridge Town Hall which vaccinated 1,700 people on
Christmas Day –

and every one of you who has come forward and done your bit by getting
jabbed.

But there are still almost 9 million people eligible, who haven't had their
booster,

And it's absolutely heart-breaking that as many as 90 per cent of those in
intensive care with Covid have not had their booster,

and over 60 per cent of those in Intensive Care, who have Covid, have not had
any vaccination at all.

People are dying needlessly because they haven't had their jabs,
they haven't had that booster.

And there are 2 million booster slots available this week alone.

It's already the case that to travel to some countries you need a booster to
be considered fully vaccinated,

and it's likely that within weeks this will increasingly become the norm.

So if you haven't done it already, get yourself boosted this month.

Exactly a year after the UK administered the first AstraZeneca vaccine,

a British invention that has enabled 2.5 billion jobs around the world –

the best way to contain this virus, help our NHS, and keep our country open,

is to get boosted, and so please, Get Boosted Now.