

Prime Minister sets out autumn and winter Covid plan

- Boosters, testing and refreshed public health advice will help keep the virus under control in the coming months
- Plan B prepared to protect NHS if necessary
- PM continues to warn the pandemic is not over and public need to remain vigilant

The Prime Minister has today set out the government's plan to manage Covid throughout autumn and winter.

Thanks to the phenomenal success of the vaccination programme, the data continues to show the link between cases, hospitalisations and deaths has weakened significantly.

In England, the number of hospital admissions with Covid has remained relatively stable over the last month.

And although deaths increased at the beginning of the summer, they have remained far below the levels in either of the previous waves.

Over autumn and winter, the government will aim to sustain this progress through:

- Building our defences through pharmaceutical interventions
- Identifying and isolating positive cases to limit transmission
- Supporting the NHS and social care
- Advising people on how to protect themselves and others
- Pursuing an international approach

Vaccines will continue to be our first line of defence. All those who were vaccinated during Phase 1 of the vaccine programme (priority groups 1 to 9) will be offered booster jabs from this month – to boost immunity amongst the most vulnerable groups during winter.

The Test, Trace and Isolate programme will continue its important work, with symptomatic PCR testing continuing throughout the autumn and winter.

Lateral flow tests will also remain free of charge but at a later stage, as our response to the virus changes, this will end and individuals and businesses will be expected to bear the cost. The government will engage widely on this before any changes are made.

The legal obligation to self-isolate for those who have tested positive and their unvaccinated contacts will continue, and the financial support payment for those self-isolating on certain benefits will continue in its current format until the end of March.

Our NHS will continue to get the support it needs, with an extra £5.4 billion recently announced for the next 6 months alone for the Covid response.

The public will be offered continued guidance on how to protect themselves and each other – including letting fresh air in, wearing a face covering in crowded and enclosed places where you come into contact with people you don't normally meet, getting testing and self-isolating if required.

Our tough border policy will remain in place and genomic sequencing capability will be increased to help scientists update our vaccines to defeat new variants.

As the PM also set out, autumn and winter could pose renewed challenges and it is difficult to predict the path of the virus with certainty.

So as the public would expect, there will be a range of 'Plan B' measures kept under review to help control transmission of the virus while minimising economic and social damage.

Plan B would include:

- Introducing mandatory vaccine only Covid status certification in certain, riskier settings.
- Legally mandating face coverings in certain settings, such as public transport and shops.
- Communicating clearly and urgently to the public if the risk level increases.

The government could also consider asking people to work from home again if necessary, but a final decision on this would be made at the time, dependent on the latest data – recognising the extra disruption this causes to individuals and businesses.

Ministers would only decide to implement these measures if necessary, and if a range of metrics and indicators mean the NHS is at risk of becoming overwhelmed.

Plan B recognises the success of our vaccination programme – meaning smaller interventions which are far less disruptive can have a much bigger impact on reducing the spread.

The Prime Minister committed to taking whatever action is necessary to protect the NHS, but stressed his belief that the combined efforts of the public and the vaccination programme mean we can avoid plan B and protect our freedoms in the coming months.