

Prime Minister sets out plan for living with COVID

- Prime Minister confirms next steps for living with Covid-19
- Vaccines will remain first line of defence against the virus with further boosters this spring for the most vulnerable
- All remaining domestic covid regulations restricting public freedoms to end this week as part of the Living with Covid Plan

Vaccines will remain the first line of defence against Covid-19 as the Prime Minister sets out the [Government's plans](#) to live with and manage the virus.

The UK was the first country in the world to authorise the use of the Pfizer and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines, the first European country to vaccinate 50% of its population and has delivered the fastest booster programme in Europe.

Over 31 million boosters have been administered across England and almost 38 million UK wide helping break the link between infections and hospitalisations. In England, the number of cases, hospitalisations and deaths continue to decline and are far below the levels of previous waves, with boosters offering strong protection against severe illness and hospitalisation.

Thanks to our hugely successful vaccination programme, the immunity built up in the population and our new antiviral and therapeutics tools, the UK is in the strongest possible position to learn how to live with Covid and end government regulation.

To save lives and protect the NHS, unprecedented measures were taken on a global scale that interfered with people's lives and livelihoods. Billions of pounds were spent on supporting a locked down economy as the public stayed at home.

The Prime Minister has been clear that restrictions would not stay in place a day longer than necessary. The British public have made extraordinary sacrifices during the 2020 lockdowns, the Roadmap, and recent Plan B measures in response to the Omicron variant.

The Plan, published today, sets out how vaccines and other pharmaceutical interventions will continue to form our first line of defence. Today the Government has accepted the JCVI recommendation to offer an additional booster to all adults aged over 75, all residents in care homes for older adults, and all over 12s who are immunosuppressed.

An autumn annual booster programme is under consideration, subject to further advice. Further detail on deployment on the spring booster programme will be set out in due course. The Government will continue to be guided by the JCVI on future vaccine programmes.

The plan covers four main pillars:

- Removing domestic restrictions while encouraging safer behaviours through public health advice, in common with longstanding ways of managing other infectious illnesses
- Protecting the vulnerable through pharmaceutical interventions and testing, in line with other viruses
- Maintaining resilience against future variants, including through ongoing surveillance, contingency planning and the ability to reintroduce key capabilities such as mass vaccination and testing in an emergency
- Securing innovations and opportunities from the COVID-19 response, including investment in life sciences

The public are encouraged to continue to follow public health advice, as with all infectious diseases such as the flu, to minimise the chance of catching Covid and help protect family and friends. This includes by letting fresh air in when meeting indoors, wearing a face covering in crowded and enclosed spaces where you come into contact with people you don't normally meet, and washing your hands.

The Prime Minister has today confirmed domestic legal restrictions will end on 24 February as we begin to treat Covid as other infectious diseases such as flu. This means:

- The remaining domestic restrictions in England will be removed. The legal requirement to self-isolate ends. Until 1 April, we still advise people who test positive to stay at home. Adults and children who test positive are advised to stay at home and avoid contact with other people for at least five full days and then continue to follow the guidance until they have received two negative test results on consecutive days.
- From April, the Government will update guidance setting out the ongoing steps that people with COVID-19 should take to be careful and considerate of others, similar to advice on other infectious diseases. This will align with testing changes.
- Self-isolation support payments, national funding for practical support and the medicine delivery service will no longer be available.
- Routine contact tracing ends, including venue check-ins on the NHS COVID-19 app.
- Fully vaccinated adults and those aged under 18 who are close contacts are no longer advised to test daily for seven days and the legal requirement for close contacts who are not fully vaccinated to self-isolate will be removed.

Our testing programme has been a crucial part of our response to the virus. Over 2 billion lateral flow tests have been provided across the UK since 2020 ensuring people could stay safe and meet family and friends knowing they were free of the virus.

As set out in the Autumn and Winter Plan, universal free provision of tests will end as our response to the virus changes. From the start of April, the government will end free symptomatic and asymptomatic testing for the general

public. Limited symptomatic testing will be available for a small number of at-risk groups and we will set out further details on which groups will be eligible shortly. Free symptomatic testing will also remain available to social care staff. We are working with retailers to ensure that everyone who wants to can buy a test.

The Test & Trace programme cost £15.7 billion in 2021/22. With Omicron now the dominant variant and less severe, levels of high immunity across the country and a range of strategies in place including vaccines, treatments, and public health knowledge, the value for taxpayers' money is now less clear. Free testing should rightly be focused on at-risk groups.

The Government remains ready to respond if a new variant emerges and places unsustainable pressure on the NHS, through surveillance systems and contingency measures such as increased testing capacity or vaccine programmes. Our world-leading ONS survey will allow us to continue to track the virus in granular detail to help us spot any surges in the virus.

Further changes being made include: * Today the guidance has been removed for staff and students in most education and childcare settings to undertake twice weekly asymptomatic testing. * On 24 February, removing additional local authority powers to tackle local COVID-19 outbreaks (No.3 regulations). Local Authorities will manage local outbreaks in high-risk settings as they do with other infectious diseases. * On 24 March, the Government will also remove the COVID-19 provisions within the Statutory Sick Pay and Employment and Support Allowance regulations.

From 1 April, the Government will:

- Remove the current guidance on voluntary COVID-status certification in domestic settings and no longer recommend that certain venues use the NHS COVID Pass.
- No longer provide free universal symptomatic and asymptomatic testing for the general public in England.
- Remove the health and safety requirement for every employer to explicitly consider COVID-19 in their risk assessments.