

Prime Minister to set out next steps in Covid response

- Government focus to remain on vaccines as the first line of defence over the autumn and winter months
- JCVI final 'booster' decision expected next week
- Measures from the Coronavirus Act expected to be repealed

The Prime Minister will next week set out the government's autumn and winter plan for managing Covid.

Vaccines will continue to be our first line of defence over the autumn and winter months supported by new treatments, testing, and a world leading variant surveillance system.

Due to the efforts and sacrifices of the public, our NHS, and the phenomenal success of the vaccine rollout, the vast majority of restrictions were lifted in England at Step 4 of the Roadmap on 19 July.

As of 9 September, nearly 90% of the UK population aged over 16 have received a first dose of the Covid vaccine, and over 80% have received both doses.

The latest data from Public Health England shows Covid vaccines are highly effective against hospitalisation from the Delta (B.1.617.2) variant, the dominant strain in the UK. Analysis shows the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is 96% effective and the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine is 92% effective against hospitalisation after two doses.

The winter months will bring renewed challenges. Covid will circulate alongside flu and other respiratory viruses and the threat of a new variant remains. It is difficult to predict with certainty how these will interact and what pressure they may place on the NHS.

The independent expert committee – the Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisation (JCVI) – were asked to consider a Covid vaccine booster programme. Their interim advice suggested planning for booster vaccines to be rolled out to the most vulnerable from September 2021, to offer an increased level of protection over winter.

The government expects to receive confirmation next week from the JCVI on the details of a vaccination booster programme, with plans in place to begin this month. This will boost immunity over the winter months, protecting against serious disease and death and unsustainable pressure on the NHS.

The government confirmed last week that those who are immunocompromised will be offered a third primary dose. This is separate to the booster programme, as those who require a third primary dose had insufficient protection from two doses.

The Prime Minister is also expected to repeal powers in England that are no longer necessary from the Coronavirus Act, as part of the government's plan for managing Covid over the autumn and winter.

These include:

- Powers to close-down sectors of the economy, such as business premises, or apply restrictions to events and gatherings.
- Powers that disrupt education, enabling temporary closure or restricting access to schools, colleges, and childcare.
- Powers that extend time limits for urgent warrants. Powers to detain infectious people.

Vital powers from the Act will be retained that are critical to protect and support the public. This includes giving sick pay to those isolating from day one rather than day seven, directing schools to remain open if they close against government guidance, and helping the NHS to get the emergency resource it needs.

Legal requirements will remain for someone to isolate if they test positive, to protect the most vulnerable from infection and to control the spread of variants. The Coronavirus Act is separate from the Public Health Act.

The Prime Minister is expected to hold a press conference next week to set out the next steps in the pandemic response.

Prime Minister, Boris Johnson said:

Thanks to the efforts of the public, the NHS and our phenomenal vaccination programme, we reached Step 4 in our Roadmap and life has returned to a sense of normality.

These extraordinary times required necessary but intrusive measures. But I'm determined to get rid of any powers we no longer need because of our vaccine defences.

I will set out the next phase in our Covid response shortly.