

Prime Minister's address to the nation on booster jabs: 12 December 2021

Good evening,

over the past year we have shown that vaccination is the key to beating Covid, and that it works.

The UK was the first country in the world to administer a vaccine,

we delivered the fastest roll-out in Europe,

and we've begun the fastest booster campaign too, with over half a million jabs delivered yesterday alone.

And these achievements

made possible by the extraordinary efforts of our NHS, including thousands of GPs and volunteer vaccinators –

have literally saved countless lives and livelihoods in this country.

But I need to speak to you this evening,

because I am afraid we are now facing an emergency in our battle with the new variant, Omicron,

and we must urgently reinforce our wall of vaccine protection to keep our friends and loved ones safe.

Earlier today, the UK's four Chief Medical Officers raised the Covid Alert level to 4, its second highest level,

because of the evidence that Omicron is doubling here in the UK every two to three days.

We know from bitter experience how these exponential curves develop.

No-one should be in any doubt: there is a tidal wave of Omicron coming,

and I'm afraid it is now clear that two doses of vaccine are simply not enough to give the level of protection we all need.

But the good news is that our scientists are confident that with a third dose – a booster dose –

we can all bring our level of protection back up.

And I know there will be some people watching who will be asking whether Omicron is less severe than previous variants,

and whether we really need to go out and get that booster.

And the answer is yes we do.

Do not make the mistake of thinking Omicron can't hurt you; can't make you and your loved ones seriously ill.

We've already seen hospitalisations doubling in a week in South Africa.

And we have patients with Omicron in hospital here in the UK right now.

At this point our scientists cannot say that Omicron is less severe, and even if that proved to be true, we already know it is so much more transmissible,

that a wave of Omicron through a population that was not boosted would risk a level of hospitalisation that could overwhelm our NHS and lead sadly to very many deaths.

So we must act now.

Today we are launching the Omicron Emergency Boost,

a national mission unlike anything we have done before in the vaccination programme –

to Get Boosted Now.

A fortnight ago I said we would offer every eligible adult a booster by the end of January.

Today, in light of this Omicron Emergency, I am bringing that target forward by a whole month.

Everyone eligible aged 18 and over in England will have the chance to get their booster before the New Year.

And we have spoken today to the Devolved Administrations, to confirm the UK Government will provide additional support to accelerate vaccinations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

To hit the pace we need, we'll need to match the NHS's best vaccination day yet – and then beat it day after day.

This will require an extraordinary effort.

And as we focus on boosters and make this new target achievable,

it will mean some other appointments will need to be postponed until the New Year.

But if we don't do this now, the wave of Omicron could be so big that cancellations and disruptions, like the loss of cancer appointments, would be even greater next year.

And I know the pressures on everyone in our NHS

– from our GPs, doctors and nurses to our porters –

all of whom have worked incredibly hard and we thank them for the amazing job they have done.

But I say directly to those of you on the front line,

I must ask you to make another extraordinary effort now,

so we can protect you and your colleagues – and above all your patients – from even greater pressures next year.

So from tomorrow in England, we are opening up the booster to every adult over 18 who has had a second dose of the vaccine at least three months ago.

The NHS Booking System will be open for these younger age groups from Wednesday,

and that's the best way to guarantee your slot,

but in some places you can walk in from tomorrow.

We will also assist this emergency operation by

deploying 42 military planning teams across every region,

standing up additional vaccine sites and mobile units,

extending opening hours so clinics are open 7 days a week, with more appointments early in the morning, in the evening, and at weekends,

and training thousands more volunteer vaccinators.

And we'll set out further steps in the days ahead.

It's because of the threat from Omicron that I announced on Wednesday we will move to plan B in England.

You must wear a face covering in indoor public spaces.

From tomorrow, work from home if you can.

And from Wednesday, subject to a vote in parliament, you'll need to show a negative lateral flow test to get into nightclubs and some large events if you're not double vaccinated.

These measures will help slow the spread of Omicron.

But we must go further and get boosted now.

If you haven't yet had a vaccine at all, then please get yourself at least some protection with a jab as quickly as possible.

If you've already had your booster, encourage your friends and family to do the same.

We are a great country. We have the vaccines to protect our people.

So let's do it. Let's Get Boosted Now.

Get Boosted Now for yourself, for your friends and your family.

Get Boosted Now to protect jobs and livelihoods across this country.

Get Boosted Now to protect our NHS, our freedoms and our way of life.

Get Boosted Now.

Thank you very much.