

Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 15 February 2021

Today the national vaccination programme continues to power past the target we set six weeks ago with more than 15 million people vaccinated across the UK.

And once again I pay tribute to the astonishing efforts of everyone involved – the GPs, the nurses, the volunteers, the army and the pharmacists like Hardik Desai – who rallied local volunteers to vaccinate 3,000 people in his village hall in Ticehurst in Sussex, while keeping his pharmacy open – and of course I thank all of you who have come forward to be vaccinated.

This is an unprecedented national achievement but it's no moment to relax and in fact it's the moment to accelerate because the threat from this virus remains very real.

Yes, it's true, we have vaccinated more than 90 per cent of those aged over 70 but don't forget that 60 per cent of hospital patients with Covid are under 70.

And although the vaccination programme is going well, we still don't have enough data about the exact effectiveness of the vaccines in reducing the spread of infection.

We have some interesting straws in the wind. We have grounds for confidence. But the vaccinations have only been running for a matter of weeks – and while we are learning the whole time – we don't today have all the hard facts that we need.

And the level of infection remains very high, with more people still in hospital today than at the peak last April and admissions running at 1,600 a day.

So we have to keep our foot to the floor. And I can tell you today that the next million letters are landing on people's mats right now, offering appointments to the over-65s and we are also contacting all those aged between 16 and 64 with underlying health conditions, as well as adult carers.

And if we can keep this pace up – and if we can keep supply steady – and I hope and believe we can – then we hope to offer a vaccination to everyone in the first nine priority groups – including everyone over 50 – by the end of April.

And at the same time we will be giving second doses to millions of the most vulnerable within twelve weeks of the first.

So this moment is a huge step forward but it's only a first step.

And while it shows what the country can do we must be both optimistic but also patient.

And next week I will be setting out a roadmap saying as much as we possibly can about the route to normality even though some things are very uncertain.

Because we want this lockdown to be the last. And we want progress to be cautious but also irreversible.

So please continue to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives.

Thank you.