

# Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 2 December 2020

It is almost a year since humanity has been tormented by COVID

Across the world, economic output has plummeted and a million and a half people have died

And all the time we have waiting and hoping for the day when the searchlights of science would pick out our invisible enemy

And give us the power to stop that enemy from making us ill – and now the scientists have done it

And they have used the virus itself to perform a kind of biological jiu-jitsu, to turn the virus on itself in the form of a vaccine from an idea that was pioneered in this country by Edward Jenner in 1796

And today we can announce that the government has accepted the recommendation from the independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency to approve the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for distribution across the United Kingdom.

after months of clinical trials,

involving thousands of people

to ensure that the vaccine meets the strictest, internationally recognised, standards of safety, quality and effectiveness.

Thanks to the fantastic work of Kate Bingham and the Vaccines Task Force, we purchased more than 350 million doses of seven different vaccine candidates,

and the UK was the first country in the world to pre-order supplies of this Pfizer vaccine

securing 40 million doses.

Through our Winter Plan, the NHS has been preparing for the biggest programme of mass vaccination in the history of the UK.

And that is going to begin next week,

and in line with the advice of the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation

the first phase will include care home residents, health and care staff, the elderly and those who are clinically extremely vulnerable,

But there are immense logistical challenges:

the vaccine must be stored at minus 70 degrees

and each person needs two injections, three weeks apart.

So it will inevitably take some months before all the most vulnerable are protected,

Long and cold months

So it is all the more vital that as we celebrate this scientific achievement we are not carried away with over optimism

Or fall into the naïve belief that the struggle is over

Its not, we've got to stick to our Winter Plan,

a comprehensive programme to suppress the virus, protect the NHS and the vulnerable,

keep education and the economy going

and use treatments, testing and vaccines to enable us to return to much closer to normal by spring.

Today in England we have ended national restrictions, opening up significant parts of the economy in doing so;

but also replacing them with tough tiers to keep this virus down.

And I know that those tiers will mean continued hardship for many, and it is going to continue to be tough for some sectors

but until the vaccine is deployed, our plan does rely on all of us continuing to make sacrifices to protect those we love.

So please, please continue to follow the rules where you live,

remember hands, face, space –

and if you live in a tier 3 area where community testing will be made available, please take part in that community testing.

Together, these steps are for now the surest way to protect yourselves and those you love

and by reducing the transmission of the virus, help de-escalate your area to a lower level of restrictions,

as vaccines and testing, as I say, take an ever larger share of the burden.

And as we do all this,

we are no longer resting on the mere hope that we can return to normal next year in the spring,

but rather on the sure and certain knowledge that we will succeed:

and together reclaim our lives and all the things about our lives that we love

So I want to thank the scientists and all those around the world who have taken part in the trials and got us to this stage