

Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 22 January 2021

Since the beginning of this pandemic, we have tried to update you as soon as possible about changes in the scientific data or the analysis.

So, I must tell you this afternoon that we have been informed today that, in addition to spreading more quickly, it also now appears that there is some evidence that the new variant – the variant that was first identified in London and the South East – may be associated with a higher degree of mortality, and I'm going to ask Patrick in a minute to say a bit more about that.

Because it is largely the impact of this new variant that means the NHS is under such intense pressure, with another 40,261 positive cases since yesterday.

We have 38,562 COVID patients now in hospital, that's 78 per cent higher than the first peak in April and, tragically, there have been a further 1,401 deaths.

So, it is more important than ever that we all remain vigilant in following the rules and that we stay at home, protect the NHS and thereby save lives.

But I also want to answer a key question that I know will be uppermost in your minds.

All current evidence continues to show that both the vaccines we are currently using remain effective both against the old variant and this new variant.

And so, you will also want to know that our immunisation programme continues at an unprecedented rate.

5.4 million people across the UK have now received their first dose of the vaccine and over the last 24 hours we can report a record 400,000 vaccinations.

In England one in ten of all adults have received their first dose, including 71 per cent of over-80s and two thirds of elderly care home residents.

Having secured orders for hundreds of millions of doses, the U.K. government has supplied vaccines to the Devolved Administrations, according to population size.

First doses have been administered now to 151,000 people in Northern Ireland, 358,000 in Scotland and 212,000 in Wales.

And I am glad that the whole of the U.K. is able to assist the Devolved Administrations in deploying the vaccine and I know everyone across the country is grateful for the logistical skill of the British Army.

There is much more to do, and the target remains very stretching indeed, but we remain on track to reach our goal of offering a first dose to everyone in the top four priority groups by the middle of February.

And I want to thank all the doctors and nurses, especially at the GP-led sites who are vaccinating at a phenomenal rate, as well as, as I say, all those in our armed forces, our local authorities, our pharmacies and volunteers, who are making this extraordinary national effort possible.

And I want to thank all of you who have come forward to get your jabs, because, by doing that, you are protecting yourselves, your communities and, of course, our NHS.

And I say to everyone, when that letter arrives, please don't hesitate to book that appointment and get this life-saving protection, because this is the best and fastest way for us all to defeat this virus and get our lives back to normal.