

Prevalence of COVID-19 remains at high levels across the country

The findings from Imperial College London and Ipsos MORI, covering 8 March to 31 March 2022 (round 19 of the study), show that prevalence in England during this period was 6.37%.

This is the highest recorded figure since the beginning of the study in May 2020 and significantly up on the 2.88% recorded in round 18 (8 February to 1 March 2022).

This means that during the period in which swabs were collected, approximately 1 in 16 people were infected with the virus.

Dame Jenny Harries, Chief Executive of the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), said:

These latest study results are another reminder that the pandemic is not over, and there is still a real risk to many of us catching COVID-19 with infection rates so high.

That is why it is sensible to wear a mask in crowded, enclosed spaces, keep indoor spaces ventilated and stay away from others if you have any symptoms of a respiratory illness, including COVID-19.

Vaccination continues to prevent a high number of cases resulting in severe disease, hospitalisation and death and remains the best way to protect us all.

If you have not yet come forward for your primary or booster vaccine I would urge you to do so straight away – the NHS vaccine programme is there to help you and the sooner you are vaccinated the sooner you and your family and friends will be protected.

I'd like to thank each and every REACT participant for contributing to what has been a vital study throughout the course of the pandemic in giving us insight into how COVID-19 has impacted the country.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Thanks to our plan to tackle COVID-19, we are leading the way in learning to live with the virus. We have made huge progress due to the success of our world-leading vaccination programme, access to antivirals for vulnerable people and increased scientific and public understanding about how to manage risk.

Despite high infection rates, the population now has much stronger protection against COVID-19 than at any other point in the pandemic.

Vaccines remain our best defence and we are now offering spring boosters to the elderly, care home residents and the most vulnerable – so please come forward to protect yourself, your family, and your community, and continue to follow public health guidance if you test positive.

Professor Paul Elliott, director of the REACT programme from Imperial's School of Public Health, said:

These trends are concerning since when a very high number of people are infected, this may lead to more people becoming seriously ill and needing to go to hospital.

Although restrictions have ended, I would urge people to still behave cautiously to help protect others who might be vulnerable and avoid contact with other people if you have symptoms. This will help to slow the spread of the virus and lessen its impact on the NHS and our lives more broadly as we enter this next phase of the epidemic.

Kelly Beaver, CEO at Ipsos MORI, said:

The high prevalence of COVID-19 the REACT study has found in the population highlights the need for continued vigilance as, as a society, we learn to live with COVID-19.

Over the course of REACT over 3.5 million people in England have taken part and have contributed to the enormous success of the study. We'd like to thank all of those people who took part over the last 2 years for helping provide this invaluable resource to government.

The main findings from the report are as follows:

There were 6,902 positives from 109,181 swabs in round 19, giving an overall weighted prevalence of 6.37%. This is an increase in weighted prevalence of over 2-fold from round 18, where the figure stood at 2.88%.

Weighted prevalence was very high and increased between rounds 18 and 19 in all age brackets. Prevalence was highest in 5 to 11-year olds at 8.81%, nearly double the rate reported in the same age bracket in round 18.

There was a possible decrease in prevalence within round 19 in those aged 5 to 17 and a possible plateauing prevalence in those aged 18 to 35 and those

aged 35 to 54, but a within-round increasing trend in those aged 55 and over.

Overall, the analyses showed a within-round reproductive number (R) of 1.10 in those aged 18 to 34 years, 1.04 in those aged 35 to 54 years and 1.12 in those aged 55 and over.

A total of 3,383 viral lineages were determined from the 4,038 positive samples up to 22 March; 89.7% (3,035) of these lineages corresponded to BA.2 or its sub-lineages, and 10.2% (346) to BA.1 and its sub-lineages.

There was just one case of the AY.4 Delta sub-lineage detected and one case of BA.3, while there was additional detection of both the XE and XL recombinants.

Exponential models estimated a daily growth advantage for BA.2 of 0.11 compared to all other Omicron sub-lineages. These models estimate that as of 22 March 2022 the proportion of BA.2 in all recorded infections across the country was 94.7%.

Weighted prevalence in round 19 was higher in all regions of the country compared to round 18, ranging from 5.28% in the West Midlands to 8.13% in the South West. The recorded prevalence in the next highest region, the East of England, was 7.17%.

At a lower-tier local authority level, of the 10 highest smoothed estimates of prevalence based on a nearest neighbour method, 7 were in the South West – Plymouth, Cornwall, South Hams, Torridge, Torbay, West Devon and Exeter. The other 3 highest – Braintree, Colchester and Maldon – were in the East of England.

The rate of prevalence among those who had been in contact with a positive case stood at 17.8% compared to 4.00% in those without such contact.

Among those who tested positive and reported on symptoms, 26.7% reported no symptoms in round 19 compared to 28.6% in round 18.

Over 109,000 volunteers in England took part in the study to examine the levels of COVID-19 in the general population between 8 March and 31 March.

[New calorie labelling rules come into force to improve nation's health](#)

- Government also encouraging smaller businesses to adopt calorie labelling as part of its drive to improve the nation's health and tackle obesity levels
- Part of government's ongoing commitment to level up the nation's health

New rules requiring calorie information to be displayed on menus and food labels come into force today (Wednesday April 6 2022).

The changes – which were approved by parliament in 2021 – mean it is now a legal requirement for large businesses with more than 250 employees, including cafes, restaurants, and takeaways to display calorie information of non-prepacked food and soft drinks.

Calorie information will need to be displayed on menus, online menus, third party apps, food delivery platforms and food labels at the point a customer is making their food and drink choices. As well as listing the calories for each food item, menus and labels will also need to include daily recommended calorie needs.

The legislation, which forms part of the government's strategy to tackle obesity, aims to ensure people can make more informed, healthier choices when it comes to eating food out or ordering takeaways. Displaying calorie information may also encourage businesses to provide lower calorie options for their customers.

It is estimated that overweight and obesity related conditions across the UK cost the NHS £6.1 billion each year. Almost two-thirds (63%) of adults in England are overweight or living with obesity – and 40% of children leave primary school overweight or obese. Obesity is also the second biggest cause of cancer across the UK.

The Covid pandemic has highlighted the impact that obesity can have on people's health, and as part of its drive to level up the health of the nation, the government is also asking smaller businesses to adopt calorie labelling.

Public Health Minister Maggie Throup said:

It is crucial that we all have access to the information we need to maintain a healthier weight, and this starts with knowing how calorific our food is. We are used to knowing this when we are shopping in the supermarket, but this isn't the case when we eat out or get a take-away.

As part of our efforts to tackle disparities and level up the nation's health, these measures are an important building block to making it as easy as possible for people to make healthier food choices.

The most recent official data shows that in 2019/20, there were over one million hospital admissions where obesity was the primary or secondary cause, an increase of 17% on 2018/19 when there were 876,000 obesity-related admissions.

Bridget Turner, Director of Policy, Campaigns and Improvement at Diabetes UK, said:

Obesity is the single greatest risk factor for type 2 diabetes and there are an estimated 13.6 million people at increased risk of developing the condition in the UK.

Tackling this health crisis is vital, so the government's commitment to make large takeaway, cafe and restaurant chains calorie label the food they sell is a welcome move towards reducing the rising levels of obesity in the UK.

Diabetes UK campaigned strongly for these measures through our Food Upfront campaign. We hope it will bring these large, out of home businesses more in line with the food retail sector when it comes to giving people clear calorie information for the food they buy, hopefully leading to improved menus and healthier options.

There are some exemptions to the legislation including food that is only on a menu for 30 days of the year or less and all alcohol drinks above 1.2% ABV.

The legislation will be enforced by local authorities with the Department of Health and Social Care supporting them with the additional costs of enforcing the policy. Local Authorities are encouraged first to have conversations with those businesses who are not complying with the law. Local authorities can issue improvement notices. Any person who fails to comply with a notice could be guilty of an offence and could be fined £2,500.

Buying food on the go or getting takeaways are increasingly important to people. On average the portions of food or drink that people eat out or eat as takeaway meals contain twice as many calories as their equivalent bought in a shop, where labelling is much more common. Research suggests that food people eat outside the home makes up 20-25% of adult calorie intake

In a survey by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities on calorie reduction, 79% of respondents said they think that menus should include the number of calories in food and drinks.

The types of businesses covered by the requirement include:

- restaurants, fast food outlets, cafes, pubs and supermarkets
- home delivery services and third-party apps selling food that is in scope of the legislation
- cafes and takeaways within larger shops and venues, such as supermarkets, department stores, and entertainment venues such as cinemas
- specialist food stores, delicatessens, sweet shops and bakeries
- contract catering – for example, for events and canteens, and
- domestic transport businesses including planes, trains, ferries and other forms of water transport within the UK.

As part of the government's obesity strategy we have also introduced regulations to restrict the promotion of less healthy foods by location and volume price in store and online, which come into force in October 2022, and through the Health and Care Bill, restrictions on the advertising of less

healthy foods on TV before 9pm and via online paid for advertising.

[Interim lead non-executive director appointed](#)

Press release

Dame Alison Nimmo DBE has been appointed to DLUHC's departmental board as our interim lead non-executive director.



Dame Alison Nimmo DBE has been appointed to DLUHC's departmental board as our interim lead non-executive director (NED), effective 31 March 2022.

This follows the departure of Michael Jary who has been appointed lead government NED at the Cabinet Office.

Alison, who has been a DLUHC NED since April 2021, will step into this role for 6 months to 30 September.

Permanent Secretary, Jeremy Pocklington, said:

I am delighted that Dame Alison Nimmo has accepted the role of interim lead non-executive director. She has over 30 years' experience in regeneration and has already made a huge contribution to the department as a NED over the past year. I am very much looking forward to continuing to work with her in this new role, and to building on the fantastic work that Michael Jary led over his term in office.

DLUHC's board provides strategic leadership for the department's business as well as advice, support and challenge on performance and delivery. Alison will help support the Secretary of State in his role as chair of the board and will work closely with other non-executives and the executive team to

support delivery of the department's priorities.

Alison is an experienced property professional and business leader with over 30 years of delivering sustainable urban regeneration and transformation across many parts of the UK. She is an independent Non-Executive at Cadogan and Thomas White Oxford, a commissioner of The Royal Commission 1851 and a member of Imperial College London's Property Committee.

She was made a Dame in 2019 for services to the public sector and services to the Exchequer. [Read more about Alison on GOV.UK.](#)

We will provide further details on our plans for a permanent appointment to the role of lead non-executive in due course.

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[Tax cut worth up to £1,000 for half a million small businesses starts today](#)

- Tax cut worth up to £1,000 for eligible businesses announced by the Chancellor at the Spring Statement takes effect today.
- Increase in Employment Allowance from £4,000 to £5,000 benefits around 495,000 businesses – 30% of all UK firms.
- Takes the total number of firms not paying the Health and Social Care Levy to 670,000.

Nearly half a million UK businesses will benefit from a tax cut worth up to £1,000 from today (6 April 2022).

The Employment Allowance has risen from £4,000 to £5,000 – meaning smaller firms will be able to claim up to £5,000 off their employer National Insurance Contributions (NICs) bills.

Announced by the Chancellor at last month's Spring Statement to reduce employment costs, the change takes an extra 50,000 firms out of paying NICs and the Health and Social Care Levy. This increases the total number of businesses not paying NICs and the Levy to 670,000.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak said:

This tax cut for half a million businesses will help them thrive and grow to help drive our economic recovery.

It comes on top of a suite of wider tax cuts available to firms, including 50% business rates relief, a record fuel duty cut and the

super-deduction, the largest two-year business tax cut in our history.

This is the third time the government has increased the Employment Allowance since its introduction in 2014, demonstrating an enduring commitment to supporting smaller businesses. Firms will be able to employ four full-time workers on the National Living Wage without paying employer NICs at all.

94% of businesses benefitting from the £1,000 increase are small and micro businesses, and the sectors that will see the highest numbers of employers benefitting are the wholesale and retail sector (87,000); the professional, scientific and technical activities industry (63,000); and the construction sector (52,000).

Today's Employment Allowance change is one of a number of measures on offer to spur business growth, including that:

- Last week eligible high street businesses saw the start of a new 50% business rates relief worth almost £1.7 billion, subject to a £110,000 cash cap per business.
- Businesses across the board are also benefitting from a freeze to the business rates multiplier, putting the brakes on bill increases and worth £4.6 billion over the next five years.
- Businesses are already benefitting from our temporary twelve-month-long 5p cut to fuel duty.
- Companies have one year left to make investments that benefit from the super-deduction, the largest two-year business tax cut in modern British history.
- Our landmark Help to Grow programmes are supporting SMEs to adopt productivity enhancing software and to get mini-MBAs.
- We will ensure that our tax regime for innovation is globally competitive and properly incentivises higher business investment in R&D, with further plans to be set out in the Autumn.

Michelle Ovens CBE, founder, Small Business Britain, said:

The Chancellor's move to increase the employment allowance is welcome, and will certainly play a role in helping those businesses with employees deal with the huge cost-of-living challenges they are currently facing. In particular, it is good to see the immediacy of this rise in employment allowance, which will go towards helping businesses asap.

Martin McTague, National Chair of the Federation of Small Businesses, said:

The increase in the Employment Allowance helps small firms do what they do best, creating and sustaining jobs.

This was FSB's 'hero ask' at the Spring Statement, and we have

hugely valued the time taken by Treasury officials to work with us on the positive impact this will have not just on work opportunities, but also training and investment. The Chancellor has now raised the Allowance twice since his appointment, stepping up for small businesses.

Lee Harris-Hamer, from White Horse cleaning services based in Thirsk, North Yorkshire, said:

As a growing company, we appreciate the opportunity to reduce our annual NI liability because this helps us to invest the savings in other areas like staff training and further growth. Staff are our key asset and we want to be able to continue recruiting and offering more employment opportunities locally. Government has supported us with the change and we are proud to be members of FSB who championed the increase.

Jo Bevilacqua, owner of Serenity Loves hair and beauty salon, Peterborough, said:

This rise in the employment allowance offers welcome breathing space for my small business and others like us across the country. In an age where we are all facing increasing costs from all angles and every penny counts, this will help ease some pressure, allowing us to invest more in staff – whether it is increasing salaries or offering training.

Further information

- From today (6 April) businesses and charities who had employer NICs bills of £100,000 or less in the previous tax year will be able to claim up to £5,000 off their employer NICs bills. Up until today the Employment Allowance was £4,000.
- NICs policy is reserved, so this increase to the Employment Allowance will take effect across the UK.
- See full details of [Employment Allowance eligibility criteria](#)
- Smaller businesses will be able to benefit from the increased Employment Allowance from 6 April 2022. This will either be through payroll software where this has been updated or through a payroll adjustment.

[Analysis Function Diversity and](#)

Inclusion Survey results

News story

Key findings from the Analysis Function Diversity and Inclusion Survey.



In June 2021, the Analysis Function (AF) launched our latest [AF Diversity and Inclusion \(D&I\) survey](#).

We'd like to thank the 1,800 plus analysts who responded from a variety of grades (levels of seniority), professions, departments and locations across the UK.

We encourage colleagues to reflect on these survey headlines and consider what you could do to make the Analysis Function a more inclusive place to work for us all and how you can support the [AF D&I Strategy](#) in your respective areas.

Our sincere thanks go out to all those who helped us run the survey from across the government analysis community. Your time and effort has been invaluable.

If you are a civil servant and would like to receive our more detailed analysis, please email Analysis.Function@ons.gov.uk.

What are the survey headlines?

- The survey response rate was 12% (based on the number of analysts identified in the [Civil Service People Survey \(PS\) 2020](#), a government-wide survey looking at civil servants' attitudes to and experience of working in government). Given the low response rate, our analysis also considered comparable responses in the PS 2020 and Snapshot Workforce Data Product 2020.
- In general, there was a decrease in ethnic minority and female respondents as grades progressed in seniority. This pattern was also present across the Civil Service.
- 33% of black respondents indicated that they had personally experienced discrimination at work in the past 12 months, in contrast with 7% of

white British respondents in 2021, similar to the 2020 results (34%). In the PS 2020 survey 13% of the black analysts who responded had experienced discrimination at work.

- Respondents with physical or mental health conditions or illnesses were less likely to agree that there was impartial promotion (60% in agreement for those with versus 70% for those without) or fairness in their workplace (78% compared to 88%). They were also less likely to agree that their department was committed to equal opportunities, with 79% agreeing versus 86% of those without. Both of these patterns were also seen in the 2020 AF D&I survey.
- The chances of respondents experiencing discrimination in the last 12 months showed an incremental increase with age, with respondents aged 55 and over experiencing the most at 16% (15% 2020), more than five times that of the youngest group. The PS 2020 data on analysts also showed that there was an incremental increase in discrimination with age, with 4% for 16–24-year-olds reporting discrimination compared to 9% for the 55+ age group.
- Respondents with caring responsibilities for adults were much less positive about being treated impartially in the workplace (64% agreed that staff were treated impartially compared to 87% without caring responsibilities) and for promotion (48% versus 68%), less positive about feeling their department was committed to equality (63% agreed their department was committed compared to 86%) and faced greater [levels of harassment](#) (19% had experienced this versus 5%) and discrimination (18% compared to 7%).

What next?

The results we saw this year echo those from 2020. In 2021, the Analysis Function set out [the AF D&I Strategy 2021-2024](#). This evidence-based plan contains 21 deliverables which our members and stakeholders have told us will make a real difference at a function level. Progress is led by the AF D&I Working Group, which consists of dedicated individuals from across government. They receive support from the AF team and [the strategy's senior sponsor, Rannia Leontaridi](#).

Eight out of ten priorities are already underway. These include establishing the Leaders in Analysis suite of career-building events, setting up the Analysis Function People Board Shadow Board (Runner Up in the [Analysis in Government Awards Inclusion category](#) and creating an Inclusion Toolkit showcasing best practice for analysts released at National Inclusion Week 2021.

In addition, this year's results have prompted us to undertake further analysis to better understand the experiences of people who belong to more than one disadvantaged demographic. This has been shared with the AF D&I Working Group for consideration.

If reading the survey results has inspired you to act, why not join our D&I Working Group? Email Curtis.Bateman@ons.gov.uk for more information.

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