

UK coronavirus (COVID-19) alert level increased from Level 3 to Level 4

Transmission of COVID-19 is already high in the community, mainly still driven by Delta, but the emergence of Omicron adds additional and rapidly increasing risk to the public and healthcare services.

Early evidence shows that Omicron is spreading much faster than Delta and that vaccine protection against symptomatic disease from Omicron is reduced. Data on severity will become clearer over the coming weeks but hospitalisations from Omicron are already occurring and these are likely to increase rapidly.

When vaccine protection is reduced in the way that is happening with Omicron it is essential to top up that protection with a booster. Both booster vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) increase the immune response substantially and show good effectiveness although with some reduction compared to Delta.

The NHS is currently under pressure mainly driven by non-COVID-19 pressures. With a variant spreading with increased transmissibility and reduced vaccine effectiveness, we are likely to see this pressure rise soon.

It is extremely important that if you are eligible, you get your COVID-19 vaccination now – whether this be your first, second or booster dose.

People should continue take sensible precautions including ventilating rooms, using face coverings, testing regularly and isolating when symptomatic.

Chief Medical Officer for England, Professor Chris Whitty

Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland, Professor Sir Michael McBride

Chief Medical Officer for Scotland, Professor Gregor Smith

Chief Medical Officer for Wales, Dr Frank Atherton

NHS England National Medical Director, Professor Stephen Powis