

UK marks one year since deploying world's first COVID-19 vaccine

- A year ago today the UK became the first country in the world to deploy an approved COVID-19 vaccine
- Vaccination programme has been a phenomenal success with almost 120 million doses administered across the UK, saving countless lives and reducing pressure on the NHS
- Booster programme accelerating, with new vaccine sites opening, support from military and new vaccinator recruitment drive to offer top-up jobs to all adults by end of January
- UK approaching 21 million boosters and third doses administered

The UK administered the first COVID-19 vaccine in the world, outside of clinical trials, one year ago today as the Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid urges people to get their booster jab as soon as they are eligible.

On 8 December 2020, 90-year-old Margaret Keenan received a Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine at University Hospital in Coventry, administered by Matron May Parsons.

Thanks to the UK Government's quick action to secure the most promising vaccine doses in advance, almost 120 million doses have been administered across the UK in a year, saving countless lives and helping stop the NHS from being overwhelmed.

In light of the new Omicron variant and following advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), the government is expanding the booster programme to all adults over 18 and announced that all eligible people will be offered a top-up jab by the end of January, as well as halving the minimum gap between second doses and boosters.

To speed up the vaccination programme, around 450 military personnel have been drafted in to support deployment, with extra community pharmacy sites, hospital hubs, and pop-up sites opening in convenient locations across the country. Payments to GPs, community pharmacies and primary care staff will help boost capacity and encourage more visits to those who are housebound.

NHS England has also launched a recruitment drive for 10,000 new vaccinators, administration staff, healthcare support workers and volunteers to join the national vaccination mission.

Almost 21 million boosters and third doses have been administered in the UK and, on Saturday, more than 450,000 top-up jabs were administered in a single day. In the last week, the booster programme reached more people than the adult population of Greater Manchester.

Everyone over the age of 40 who had their second dose at least three months ago will soon be able to book an appointment for their booster jab. Younger age groups will be invited by the NHS in order of age in due course. The BT Tower in London will celebrate the anniversary with a message encouraging people to get vaccinated, get boosted and get protected.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

Since the first jab was delivered one year ago today, our phenomenal vaccine rollout has saved hundreds of thousands of lives and given us the best possible protection against Covid-19.

So many people have been involved in this national vaccination effort, including our brilliant NHS staff, pharmacists, the military, the thousands of volunteers who dedicated themselves to the rollout, the incredible scientists, researchers and their teams who developed these life-saving vaccinations, and crucially every single one of you who has taken up the offer of a jab with such enthusiasm.

Our fight against the virus is not over yet, but vaccines remain our first and best line of defence against the virus – so the best way to continue to protect yourself and your loved ones is to get behind the vaccine programme and get boosted as soon as you're eligible.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

I'm incredibly proud of our phenomenal COVID-19 vaccination programme. In one year we have administered almost 120 million doses across the UK, saving countless lives and giving us a powerful weapon to fight this devastating virus.

The battle is not yet over and we are working around the clock to boost the booster programme to maximise immunity following the emergence of the Omicron variant.

It is absolutely crucial everybody comes forward for their vaccines and booster jabs as soon as you are eligible so we can strengthen our wall of defence against COVID-19 and enjoy Christmas safely with our families and loved ones this year.

The first real-world study on the effectiveness of booster vaccines against the dominant Delta variant by the UK Health Security Agency shows top-up jabs

boost protection back up to over 90% against symptomatic COVID-19 in adults aged over 50 two weeks after being vaccinated.

As shown in the COV-Boost study, the booster vaccines, Moderna and Pfizer, increase the immune response substantially, which makes it more likely that protection will be maintained against Omicron. The best thing anyone can do given the new variant, is to get a booster.

People who have had their booster vaccine by 11 December will likely have very high protection against COVID-19 by Christmas Day.

Vaccines Minister Maggie Throup said:

Our COVID-19 vaccination programme has been an incredible success.

Booster jabs will top-up the immunity people have already developed to ensure we are protected during the winter and ahead of Christmas.

I encourage everybody to come forward for the first, second, booster and flu vaccines to protect yourself and those around you.

The COVID-19 vaccination programme is the largest in British history and was established at unprecedented speed, with thousands of vaccine centres set up rapidly in England which means around 98% of people live within 10 miles of a vaccination clinic.

The government's Vaccines Taskforce secured early access to almost 340 million doses of the most promising vaccine candidates in advance for the entire UK, Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories, enabling a rapid deployment once approved by the medicines regulator. New deals have been signed to buy an additional 60 million doses of the Moderna vaccine and 54 million more Pfizer/BioNTech doses for 2022 and 2023. These future supply deals include access to modified vaccines if they are required to combat Omicron and future Variants of Concern.

The UK has one of the highest COVID-19 vaccine uptake rates in the world, with 4 in 5 people aged over-65 in England already receiving their booster jab.

Flu is another winter virus that can be serious. To give people the best protection over winter, those eligible for a free flu vaccine should come forward and book an appointment at either their GP practice or their local pharmacy, or take it up when offered by their employer or other healthcare provider.

Notes to editors

Stats from the COVID-19 vaccination programme:

- The highest number of new vaccinations reported in one day in the UK was 844,285 on 20 March 2021 – that’s equivalent to vaccinating the entire population of Liverpool in one day.
- The highest number of new vaccinations reported in a 7-day period in the UK was 4,215,859 between 15th-21st March 2021 – that’s equivalent to vaccinating the entire population of Birmingham more than four times in a week.
- More than 3,000 vaccine sites are now available in England – double the number than February.