

Public urged to sign-up to world-first COVID-19 antiviral study

- Recruitment drive backed by charities including Kidney Care UK, Cystic Fibrosis Trust, Diabetes UK and the British Liver Trust as antivirals help protect most vulnerable from hospital
- At least 6,000 more participants needed as soon as possible so the life-saving treatments can be rolled out more widely
- People can sign up here: www.panoramictrial.org

Adults over the age of 50 or with an underlying health condition who test positive for COVID-19 are being urged to sign up for a world-first COVID-19 study which is providing life-saving antivirals to thousands of people.

The government and leading charities, including Kidney Care UK, Cystic Fibrosis Trust, Diabetes UK and the British Liver Trust, are calling on at least 6,000 more participants to come forward for these cutting-edge treatments through the PANORAMIC study. This is so that expert scientists can understand more about how to deploy these treatments in the NHS more widely later in the year – including who would benefit most from receiving antiviral treatments for COVID-19.

Antivirals are medicines which can be swallowed as a tablet to help treat people with COVID-19 infections to reduce the risk of hospitalisations and death. Molnupiravir, which is currently being deployed through the study, has shown to reduce this for at risk, non-hospitalised adults with mild to moderate COVID-19 by 30% – potentially saving thousands of lives once the drugs are available to the NHS.

Anyone over the age of 50 or between 18 to 49 with an underlying health condition can sign up to the study as soon as they receive a positive PCR or lateral flow test result. They need to be experiencing COVID-19 symptoms that began in the last five days to be eligible to enrol.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

The vaccines are critical as a first line of defence, but antivirals form a vital part of our approach as we learn to live with COVID by preventing the most vulnerable from being hospitalised.

If you're eligible, please step forward for the PANORAMIC trial and play your part in a vital mission – helping us to learn more about medicines which could save thousands of lives.

The UK-wide study, run by the University of Oxford and supported by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), launched at the start of December 2021 and currently has around 4,600 trial participants signed up,

but needs thousands more to sign up as soon as possible to gather the data necessary. This will ensure medical experts can learn more about the potential benefits these treatments bring to vaccinated patients, and will help the NHS to develop plans for rolling out the antivirals to further patients later this year.

It is open to anyone living in the UK who meets the following criteria:

- Have received a positive PCR or lateral flow test for COVID-19 and feel unwell with symptoms of COVID-19 that started in the last five days; and
- are aged 50 and over, or 18 to 49 years old with an underlying medical condition that can increase the risk of developing severe COVID-19.

While vaccines remain the most important first line of defence against the virus, antivirals are used after someone contracts the virus to slow it down, make symptoms less severe and complications less common.

The antiviral, molnupiravir, that is part of the PANORAMIC trial, was granted approval for use by the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Authority (MHRA) in November 2021, and so far no unexpected safety findings have been reported in clinical trials.

The government, through the Antivirals Taskforce, has procured 4.98 million courses of antivirals – including 2.23 million courses of molnupiravir and 2.75 million courses of PF-07321332/ritonavir.

Professor Sir Jonathan Van-Tam, Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England, said:

If you're eligible for PANORAMIC please give some serious consideration to taking part. This will help us decide how to use COVID-19 antiviral drugs for many years to come.

Eddie Gray, Chair of the Antivirals Taskforce, said:

Antivirals are a hugely important addition to our response to COVID-19 and we have secured access to two important products for NHS patients.

Getting people enrolled onto this study is vital, not just in protecting the most vulnerable now, but in ensuring we can deploy these medicines more widely as soon as possible.

Case studies

Pippa Erskine, double lung transplant recipient who lives with Cystic Fibrosis, accessed antivirals after testing positive for COVID-19 at the start of January. Pippa said:

Even after three vaccines, testing positive for COVID-19 after avoiding the virus for more than 18 months was worrying. Knowing antivirals would help ease my symptoms and help prevent potential complications was a huge relief.

With restrictions easing, it's so important that those vulnerable to COVID-19 have the best possible chance of staying protected against the virus and, most importantly, staying out of hospital. Antivirals are essential to this.

I'd urge anyone eligible for the trial to put themselves forward to help make antivirals more widely available, and to protect themselves and others.

Mr Harkishan Mistry, age 58, is General Secretary of Bradford Hindu Council said:

After testing positive for COVID-19 last Monday on a lateral flow, a friend recommended I look into the antivirals trial. As I'm over 50 and was experiencing symptoms such as sore throat, headache, and achiness, I was eligible and was selected to receive the antiviral treatment by Monday afternoon.

The whole process was so simple – a courier delivered the capsules the next morning and I began taking the course straight away. While I'm still testing positive and remain in isolation, my symptoms eased daily and I feel much better.

I'd really recommend anyone who's eligible for the trial to sign up – why would you not if we can help others and ease pressure on the NHS.

Hazel, a pharmacist from Whitley Bay, got COVID-19 early in January and so signed up to the trial immediately to help find antiviral medicines to treat the virus. Hazel said:

I enrolled online when I got COVID-19 and the process was really simple. I got a call from a nurse right away who took me through everything and since then I've just had to keep a short online daily diary which takes less than a minute to do.

The process really couldn't be simpler, and it's so exciting to be part of this world leading effort to find a treatment for COVID-19.

Both as someone who got COVID-19 and as a pharmacist, I know the damage this virus can do and would urge anyone eligible to visit the website and really consider getting involved as it could save lives.

Stakeholder quotes

Fiona Loud, Policy Director at Kidney Care UK, said:

We welcome the development and provision of antiviral treatments for people who are vulnerable to COVID-19.

This trial is one of the ways to make them more widely available so we would like to encourage everyone who is eligible, including those with kidney disease, to take part in this study.

While we continue to encourage people to take up the offer of vaccinations, antiviral treatments are going to be a vital tool to give more protection to people who are most at risk from COVID-19, including those with kidney disease.

Vanessa Hebditch, Director of Policy at the British Liver Trust, said:

The introduction of new treatments for COVID-19 for the most vulnerable is an important and welcome development in the tackling of the pandemic. People with liver disease and liver transplant recipients are among the highest risk from COVID-19 and have less immunity from vaccines so treatments are vital to reduce their risk of hospitalisation should they catch the virus.

We urge people living with a liver condition to consider signing up for trial to protect themselves and ensure that more people can access these treatments.

David Ramsden, chief executive of Cystic Fibrosis Trust, said:

It is vital for that we continue to focus on the development and evaluation of new treatments for COVID-19.

This is a really important study and we would encourage all eligible people with cystic fibrosis to get involved.

[Wales Veterans Commissioner launched in new UK Government Veterans Strategy](#)

Action Plan

A [Veterans Commissioner for Wales](#) will be appointed this year, the UK Government has announced.

The Veterans Commissioner for Wales will work to enhance support for veterans in Wales, as well as scrutinising relevant policy in the country.

The role builds on the success of counterpart roles in Scotland and Northern Ireland and will mean that all devolved nations have a veterans commissioner.

It comes as the Office for Veterans' Affairs publishes the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan. The plan includes 60 commitments from across government, including the launch of the new Welsh commissioner role, to support veterans, totalling more than £70 million in funding.

The plan will increase employment, step up health and wellbeing services and improve data and understanding of the veteran community.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Leo Docherty said:

The Wales Veterans Commissioner will be an independent voice on veterans issues and help champion the interests of the ex-forces community.

Regardless of where veterans are in the UK, we want them to be able to access the best quality support.

Secretary of State for Wales Simon Hart said:

The Armed Forces have a long and important tradition in Wales and we are exceptionally proud of our Welsh veterans. Our ex-servicemen and women and their families deserve recognition, support and respect throughout the duration of their service and beyond.

The appointment of a Veterans Commissioner for Wales will increase and coordinate the support available and highlights the UK Government's commitment to the welfare of the men and women who serve in our Armed Forces.

Welsh Government Deputy Minister for Social Partnership, Hannah Blythyn said:

I'd like to welcome the decision to appoint a Veterans Commissioner for Wales, this will add value to the established wealth of support and services we deliver for veterans in Wales.

From our unique Veterans NHS Wales service, that supports veterans

with mental health issues to our Armed Forces Liaison Officers providing support to veterans and their families with information on local support available in key areas such as healthcare and housing, supporting charities to tackle loneliness and social isolation and resources to support organisations in the employment of veterans.

As a Government we remain committed to provide services and support for our veterans in Wales and today's announcement adds to that.

The Welsh Government also provides support for veterans in devolved areas, such as the Veterans NHS Wales service that ensures every local health board has a specialist veterans therapist. The Welsh Government also supports the UK Government's Great Place to Work initiative, as well as the Veterans Railcard.

Commitments in the Veterans Strategy Action Plan include:

- The Welsh Government supporting the Veterans NHS Wales specialist mental healthcare service and Veterans Trauma Network (VTN) Wales service for veterans with complex physical injuries
- The Welsh Government will work with Armed Forces Liaison Officers (AFLOs) and partners including regional suicide and self-harm prevention coordinators to promote mental health first aid training
- The Welsh Government will review and publish a new "Armed Forces Covenant, Healthcare Priority for Veterans Guidance."

Building a more peaceful, stable future for the Libyan people

Thank you Madam President,

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Ms Saudi for briefing the Council today. I also thank Ambassador Tirumurti for his update. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General's Special Adviser Stephanie Williams for her tireless work and extensive outreach across Libya. As we've heard today, and as set out in the Secretary-General's report, Libya is at a critical juncture and the delay to elections planned for last December was disappointing. We must maintain momentum. In that regard, I would like to make three points today.

First, I reaffirm the UK's full support for the UN-facilitated, Libyan led and owned political process. Successful free, fair and inclusive elections will continue to be a crucial step in this process. The Libyan people have made clear their aspirations to have a say in who governs them.

However, if we are to move forward and avoid continued delays and uncertainty it is vital that the challenges that prevented elections from going ahead in December are addressed. And I listened carefully to Ms Saudi's remarks on the importance of accountability.

It is important that we all continue to support UNSMIL's work to bring together the political, security and economic tracks in support of Libya's stability, sovereignty, and national unity. This is why we have proposed a draft resolution to renew UNSMIL's mandate.

Second, we continue to call for the full, equal and meaningful inclusion of women and youth in the peace and wider political process. We note that approximately 1 million of the 2.8 million registered voters are female. However, of the 98 individuals who registered to stand in the Presidential Elections planned for last December, just two were women. A process that represents only half the population is not a sustainable or inclusive one. Women must be able to participate as both candidates and voters without fear of reprisals or intimidation. I am grateful to those women who put themselves forward to represent their communities despite these challenges.

Finally, it is more important than ever that international actors withdraw all foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya without further delay. We recommend the Joint Military Commission's Action Plan as an important initial step but it is now incumbent on all to support its implementation. We encourage further progress on a plan to monitor and verify the presence and withdrawal of all foreign forces and mercenaries.

As ever, the UK stands ready to work with Libya and our international partners to build a more peaceful, stable future for the Libyan people.

UK open for travel with all restrictions removed for eligible vaccinated arrivals

- From 4am on 11 February all testing requirements will be removed for eligible fully vaccinated arrivals, with only a Passenger Locator Form (PLF) now required.
- Arrivals who are not recognised as fully vaccinated will only need to take a pre-departure test and a PCR test on or before day 2 after they arrive in the UK.
- Children aged 12-15 in England will be able to prove their vaccination status or proof of prior infection via a digital NHS COVID Pass from 3 February for outbound travel.
- Travel changes come in ahead of February half term, and follow the success of the booster programme.

All testing measures for eligible fully vaccinated travellers arriving in the UK will be removed from 4am on 11 February, as the government goes one step further to reopen the travel sector.

The changes announced today (24 January 2022) mean that the UK has one of the most free-flowing borders across Europe in addition to having the most open economy and society.

The simplification of travel rules comes just before half term, providing welcome news for families looking to travel abroad during the school holidays, as well as an extra boost for the tourism industry.

Thanks to the success of the UK's vaccine and booster rollout, the government is now able to reduce the number of travel restrictions, ensuring there is a more proportionate system in place for passengers. Before the end of February, eligible fully vaccinated travellers will only need to fill out the [passenger locator form](#) (PLF), which will be simplified, confirming their vaccination status, travel history and contact details, and people will have an extra day to fill it out before travelling.

The framework set out today is intended to be one that will last. It aims to provide stability for travellers and the travel industry throughout 2022, ensuring the UK remains one of the best places in the world to do business. Meanwhile, friends and families can make the most of their global connections, while saving around £100 for the average family with the removal of testing.

Children aged 12-15 in England will be able to prove their vaccination status or proof of prior infection via a digital [NHS COVID Pass](#) from 3 February for outbound travel, making it easier for children and families to travel to countries which require proof of vaccination or prior infection to gain entry, avoid isolation, or access venues or services.

It will also enable families to plan holidays for February half term with greater confidence, as parents can be reassured they will quickly be able to evidence their child's vaccination status or proof of prior infection for outbound travel and meet the requirements of different countries more easily.

For inward travel, all under-18s regardless of their individual vaccination status will continue to be considered as fully vaccinated.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

We made the right calls at the right time and thanks to our vaccine and booster rollout it's paying off – allowing us to safely remove nearly all COVID-19 travel restrictions for vaccinated travellers.

We already have one of the most open economies in Europe with the least restrictions, and because of the changes today we now have a travel sector to match it.

This final step in our stable and safe full return to international

travel is a major boost for UK tourism, setting Britain free ahead of the crucial half term and spring holiday season.

One of the first western European countries to lift isolation requirements for all arrivals who do not qualify as fully vaccinated, the UK will also scale back travel restrictions for unvaccinated arrivals. From 11 February, individuals who are not fully vaccinated will only need to take a pre-departure test and a [PCR test](#) on or before day 2 after they arrive in the UK, as well as filling out the simplified PLF. They will not need to self-isolate on arrival, and will only need to do so on receipt of a positive result.

We will be further reconnecting with key global markets, and from 4am on 11 February, we will recognise vaccine certificates from 16 further countries and territories at the border, including China and Mexico. This will bring the total list to over 180 countries and territories worldwide, and [the full list of eligible countries and territories can be found on gov.uk](#).

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

We have entered a new chapter in our fight against COVID-19 and we're taking a balanced approach as we learn to live with the virus.

Thanks to the success of the vaccination programme, now is the right time to take this additional step towards opening up international travel once again.

Extending the NHS COVID Pass to children aged 12-15 in England will also make the outward journey easier for families and I am delighted we have taken this step in time for February half term.

While the red list will continue to remain in place as our first line of defence against future variants of concern arriving from abroad, the government is looking to replace the hotel quarantine policy with other contingency measures including home isolation and further details will be set out on this later in the spring.

Throughout the pandemic, the government has taken a balanced approach to COVID-19 measures, considering the freedoms of individuals together with public health concerns. Omicron is now the dominant variant of COVID-19 in the UK and around the world and the latest data indicates that vaccinated individuals are less likely to have severe outcomes if they catch Omicron, in comparison with Delta. Taken with the success of the booster programme, now is the right time to take proportionate steps to further remove travel restrictions.

Tim Alderslade of Airlines UK said:

This is a landmark day for passengers, businesses and UK plc.

Nearly two years since the initial Covid restrictions were introduced, today's announcement brings international travel towards near-normality for the fully vaccinated, and at last into line with hospitality and the domestic economy. It will offer further reassurance to those planning to travel, both overseas and into the UK, and demonstrates again that following the success of the vaccine programme, the UK can lead the world in our recovery from the pandemic.

With the all-important half-term week approaching, passengers should now get booking, and airlines look forward to using the connectivity they're proud to facilitate to turbo-charge the economic recovery for all of the UK.

Charlie Cornish, Group CEO of MAG, said:

This important announcement is excellent news for our sector's recovery.

This change will be welcomed by the millions of vaccinated people who are desperate to travel and will now be able to do so – restriction-free – for the first time in more than a year.

With Britain reopened for business, we're looking forward to helping people across the country get back to visiting exciting new places, finding fresh trading opportunities overseas, and travelling to see friends and loved ones again.

UK Chamber of Shipping Chief Executive Sarah Treseder said:

We are delighted to see the government has eased restrictions, bringing travel back towards near normality for fully-vaccinated people. Millions of passengers enjoy travelling by sea each year and although it will take time for confidence to fully return to normal, this landmark decision will help the tourism and travel sector at a vitally important time for the industry.

[Upcoming changes to COVID-19 international travel restrictions](#)

It is less than 2 months since the first cases of Omicron were confirmed in the UK – the most infectious variant to emerge since the start of the

pandemic. A real setback to our plans to safely reopen international travel.

But thanks once again to the nationwide army of medical staff and volunteers, and the huge public response to the booster programme, today (24 January 2022), with over 137 million jabs administered, including nearly 37 million boosters, Britain is one of the most vaccinated countries in the world. And Omicron is in retreat.

Thanks to the decisions taken by the Prime Minister, we have managed to turn the tide on the virus in remarkable time while keeping our domestic society one of the most open in the world.

Today, I can confirm to the House that our international travel regime will also now be liberalised, as part of our efforts to ensure that 2022 is the year in which restrictions on travel, lockdowns and limits on people's lives, are firmly in the past.

Mr Speaker, from 4am on the 11th February, and in time for the half-term break, eligible fully vaccinated passengers arriving in the UK will no longer have to take a post-arrival, lateral flow test.

That means that after months of pre-departure testing, post-arrival testing, self-isolation and additional expense, all that fully vaccinated people will now have to do to when they travel to the UK is verify their status via a [passenger locator form](#).

Mr Speaker, we promised we would not keep measures in place a day longer than necessary, and it is obvious to me now that border testing for vaccinated travellers has outlived its usefulness.

We are therefore scrapping all travel tests for vaccinated people. Not only making travel much easier, but also, of course, saving around £100 for the average family on visits abroad. Providing certainty to passengers, carriers, and our vital tourism sectors for the spring and summer seasons.

So Mr Speaker, let me explain to the House how this will actually work in practice.

For now, we will maintain our current definition of [fully vaccinated](#) for the purpose of inbound travel into the UK. That means 2 doses of an approved vaccination, or 1 dose of the Janssen vaccine.

And we will go further.

The measures for those arriving into the UK who do not qualify as fully vaccinated have not changed since last March. So the time has come to review their position too.

Today I can announce that passengers who do not qualify as fully vaccinated will no longer be required to do a day 8 test after arrival or, indeed, to self-isolate. They will still need to fill out a passenger locator form to demonstrate proof of a negative COVID test taken 2 days before travel, and they must also take a post-arrival PCR test.

This is a proportionate system that moves us a step closer to normality while maintaining vital public health protections.

For kids, travelling to the UK under 18s will continue to be treated as eligible fully vaccinated passengers, which means they will not face any tests at the UK border. I am also pleased to confirm that, from 3 February, 12 to 15 year olds in England will be able to prove their vaccination status via the digital [NHS Pass](#) for international outbound travel.

Again – this should help families plan holidays for February half term.

Mr Speaker, reconnecting with key markets not only to boost the UK economy, but will also help our hard-hit aviation industry take back to the skies. So I can also confirm that from 4am on 11 February, we will recognise, at the UK border, vaccine certificates from a further 16 countries and territories. Including important nations like China and Mexico, bringing the vaccine recognition total to over 180 countries and territories worldwide.

Mr Speaker, one of the consequences of COVID, and of rapidly-changing infection patterns across the world, has been a border regime that, while necessary, has at times been complex, confusing and difficult to navigate. I know this has been something of a challenge for many travellers over the last 2 years.

So, we will simplify the passenger locator form, making it quicker and easier to complete. And from the end of February, we'll also make it more convenient by giving people an extra day to fill it out before they travel.

Whilst the option for a red list of countries will remain in place, to provide a first line of defence against future variants of concern arriving from other countries, we are looking to replace the managed quarantine system with other contingency measures, including home isolation, provided we can develop new ways to ensure high levels of compliance.

In the meantime, our contingency measures remain available – and as the House knows there are no countries on the red list currently. But I must make clear, these contingency measures are only to be applied if there's a variant of concern that poses a substantial risk. One which is even greater than Omicron.

The UK Health Security Agency will continue to monitor threats and will maintain our highly-effective surveillance capacity, monitoring COVID infections overseas.

But I can announce today that over time, we intend to move away from blanket border measures to a more sophisticated and targeted global surveillance system. I'm also committing today to the development of a full toolbox of contingency options to provide more certainty on how we will respond against future variants. The government will set out our strategy, including how we'll deal with any future new strains of the virus next month.

And we will continue to work with international partners, including the World Health Organization, to help all countries achieve a level of genomic

sequencing to monitor variants, which is much closer to our own world-leading capacity.

Mr Speaker, we are moving into a new phase of the fight against COVID.

Instead of protecting the UK from a pandemic, our future depends on us living with endemic COVID. Just as we live with flu, for example. We will set out our strategy for that transition in the spring.

But as we navigate our recovery and our return to more normal travel next month our advice to all eligible adults who have not been vaccinated stays the same.

Please, get jabbed as soon as possible. And if you've had two jabs, please get boosted.

I've been speaking to my opposite numbers around the world recently and they've made it clear to me that regardless of what we do, they are very likely to require booster jabs from this summer. So my advice to anyone who wants to travel anywhere this summer, is don't leave it too late to get your booster, you're very likely to be required it by the third party country you are flying to.

Mr Speaker, we already have one of the most open economies and societies in Europe, with the result being that our GDP has outpaced that of other G7 neighbours.

With these changes today, we will have one of the most open travel sectors in the world. Of course we know COVID can spring surprises but everyone should feel confident about booking holidays, business trips and visits to families and friends abroad.

But be in no doubt, Mr Speaker, it is only because this government got the big calls right on vaccinations, on boosters, on dealing with Omicron that we can open up travel and declare Britain is open for business.

Today we are setting Britain free.

And I commend this statement to the House.