

# Government takes action to mitigate workforce disruption

- Prime Minister tasks ministers to develop robust contingency plans for workplace absences and other disruption caused by high levels of Omicron cases
- government is stepping up response, led and coordinated by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
- departments working closely with their sector specialists to anticipate and mitigate any potential disruption and manage workforce absences

The Prime Minister has tasked ministers to work closely with their respective sectors to test preparations and contingency planning so that disruption caused by increased COVID-19 infection is minimised in public services and supply chains.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Steve Barclay, is chairing regular meetings with ministers to closely monitor the impacts of Omicron on workforces and supply chains and monitor schools ahead of the return of pupils in the new year.

The government is also working with the public and private sector to develop plans to manage absences in order to ensure sectors are prepared and disruption is minimised.

The Committee has already agreed a number of interventions and will meet regularly to monitor developments and agree where further action needs to be taken.

So far, disruption caused by Omicron has been controlled in most parts of the public sector, but public sector leaders have been asked to test plans against worst case scenarios of workforce absence scenarios of 10%, 20% and 25%.

They have identified a range of mitigations, including identifying additional staff – such as volunteers in the public sector or former teachers in schools -prioritising service delivery and reducing bureaucracy.

While the booster programme continues to go from strength to strength, with more than 33 million people – almost two-thirds of adults in the UK – now receiving their third dose, the high levels of positive COVID-19 cases and increased transmissibility of Omicron could mean that UK businesses and public services face disruption over the coming weeks.

With a third vaccine dose boosting protection by up to 75%, all government departments, led by the Department for Health and Social Care, are also renewing efforts to make sure that critical public sector and key workers get their booster jabs.

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Steve Barclay said:

As people return to work following the Christmas break, the high transmissibility levels of Omicron mean business and public services will face disruption in the coming weeks, particularly from higher than normal staff absence.

We have been working through the Christmas period to prepare where possible for this, with all departments liaising closely with public and private sector leaders who are best placed to operationally manage their workforces.

The best way to combat Omicron is to get boosted and I encourage anyone who is eligible to get boosted now.

A number of steps have already been taken to minimise any potential workforce or supply chain disruption, including:

- reducing the isolation period from 10 to 7 days with 2 negative tests
- introducing daily contact testing to prevent widespread need for self-isolation where someone hasn't tested positive for COVID-19
- investing over £462 million to support workforce recruitment and retention in the adult social care sector
- using digital staff passports for NHS staff which allow them to move between hospitals easily
- extending the Infection Control Fund until March 2022 to support staff self-isolation payments, testing and covering the costs of staff vaccination in care homes, supported by £388 million
- boosting the numbers of HGV drivers through quicker testing and skills bootcamps
- asking qualified teachers who are no longer in the profession to sign-up to temporarily fill absences and support schools to remain open in the new term
- adding care worker roles to the Shortage Occupation List to bolster our social care workforce
- working to speed up the registration of overseas nurses to practice in the UK – as a result 800 nurses have been able to register with the Nurse and Midwifery Council this week alone

Regular data is being fed into the Cabinet Office to identify early any potential disruption and take any steps to mitigate them. The contingency planning utilises the New Government Situation Centre and a central taskforce of civil servants based in the Cabinet Office and working across government and with the devolved administrations.

Should disruption occur the government stands ready to make sure that any necessary burdens to businesses are cut. There is work ongoing to identify potential regulatory, policy or operational changes which could minimise or alleviate potential disruption.

---

## More support to keep pupils in the classroom

Thousands of new air filters and further temporary measures will be introduced to protect face-to-face education and minimise disruption, ahead of the pupils returning to the classroom this week.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi has announced an additional 7,000 air cleaning units to be provided to early years, schools and colleges to improve ventilation in teaching spaces – further helping to strike the balance between managing transmission risk along with reducing disruption to in-person learning.

Face-to-face education remains a top priority, as the evidence shows it is the best place to be for children's education and wellbeing.

To maximise the number of children in school and college for the maximum amount of time, the Government is temporarily recommending that face coverings are worn in classrooms and teaching spaces for students in year 7 or above, in light of the Omicron variant surge.

The advice is short term only to support pupils and teachers as they return to schools this term and builds on the existing proportionate guidance that recommends face coverings for all adults in communal areas of all settings.

The advice on face coverings in classrooms will be in place until the 26 January, when Plan B regulations are currently scheduled to expire, at which point it will be reviewed.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

Being in the classroom is undoubtedly the very best place for children and I'm looking forward to welcoming pupils back next week to continue their face-to-face learning, which is so important for their education and wellbeing.

There is no doubt that the Omicron variant presents challenges but the entire education sector has responded with a Herculean effort, and for that I thank each and every one of you.

The Prime Minister and I have been clear that education is our number one priority. These measures will bolster our support schools as we do everything in our power to minimise disruption.

Additional support for school leaders will also be in place, as Ofsted will not ask inspectors who are also school, college and early years leaders to

undertake inspections, so they can focus on their leadership responsibilities at this critical time. This will be a temporary measure from the start of January.

Ofsted has already confirmed that it will not be inspecting secondary schools during the first week of term in January, as schools undertake on-site pupil testing.

Ofsted will also encourage early years settings, schools and colleges that are significantly impacted by COVID-related staff absence to ask for their inspection to be deferred.

The 7,000 new air purifiers will be for areas where quick fixes to improve ventilation are not possible, such as being able to open a window, and will help to improve ventilation in schools. This builds on the 1,000 air purifiers announced for special schools and alternative provision settings.

Feedback from schools suggests that the 350,000 carbon dioxide monitors rolled out across the country are also acting as a helpful tool to manage ventilation.

---

## **UK marks 132 million life-saving COVID-19 vaccinations in 2021**

Around 132 million COVID-19 vaccinations were administered across all four nations of the UK in 2021, as part of the largest vaccination programme in British history.

It marks the end of a monumental year for the NHS, with over 1.6 million people in the UK receiving a booster or third dose in the final week of 2021 – meaning almost 34 million people now have the protection they need from the Omicron variant at the start of the New Year. Around 50 million received a first dose this year and over 47 million received a second of a COVID-19 vaccine. Over 90% of those aged 12 and over have now had their first dose, and 82.4% have had their second.

This week, the government confirmed it had met its target to offer all eligible adults in England the chance to get a COVID-19 booster jab by the end of December – with the latest data showing 28.4 million adults in England have received a top-up dose. 3 in 4 eligible adults in England have now received a booster.

Recent data published by the UKHSA shows just how important it is to get the jab, with people who haven't been vaccinated being up to eight times more likely to be hospitalised with COVID-19 and the booster vaccine was shown to be 88% effective in preventing people from ending up in hospital due to

Omicron.

COVID-19 cases continue to rise across the country and the world – ONS data published on Friday shows 1 in 25 people in England had COVID-19 last week, which increased to 1 in 15 in London.

The government is urging people to exercise caution as they begin to make post-holiday plans, by doing regular testing and making sure to get their booster as soon as possible to protect against the variant.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

The COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the biggest challenges our health service has ever faced and our historic vaccination programme has been vital in helping us step up to meet this challenge.

132 million vaccinations in a single year is astounding and a true reflection of the fantastic work of our NHS and its volunteers – I want to thank each and every one of them.

But we need to make sure people continue to come forward for their life saving jab. As we go into the New Year, make sure you Get Boosted Now to kick off 2022 with the best possible protection from Omicron.

The COVID-19 booster vaccination programme has been a national effort for both the NHS and the public, with tens of thousands of volunteers stepping up to support NHS staff and millions of people queuing up to secure the protection for themselves and others.

On 30 November, the government set out its ambition to offer all eligible adults the chance to get their top-up jab by the end of January. This target was brought forward by the Prime Minister and the NHS last month through the national Get Boosted Now campaign, aiming to offer all eligible adults a booster by the New Year in response to the emerging threat of the Omicron variant, to protect the public as quickly as possible.

The campaign led to a huge increase in vaccination rates, with over 8 million top-up jabs administered in just over two weeks in England (a 45% increase), between 12 December when the Prime Minister set out the new ambition and Thursday 30 December.

The NHS in England has broken record after record in that time – including the highest number of vaccinations ever recorded in a single day: 830,000 top-ups reported on Saturday 18 December. This was also the day the UK hit over one million vaccinations in total, including first, second, third and booster doses – jumping from 928,000 the previous day.

This week, the NHS ensured over 1.5 million appointments were still available between 27 December and tomorrow (Monday 3 January), allowing anyone eligible

who hadn't yet had the booster the opportunity to book their appointment. Millions more slots are available beyond 3 January.

To meet the ambitious target and ensure the country was offered protection against the new variant, the COVID-19 vaccination programme was accelerated and scaled up significantly over the past month. This included:

- opening over 3,000 vaccination sites, with 180 new sites having opened in December – including at football stadiums, shopping centres and at Christmas markets, with extended opening hours and some sites working around the clock;
- sending over 30 million people invites from the NHS during 2021– including over 3.9 million letters, 26.7 million text messages and 14.7 million emails inviting people to book online;
- sending a text to everyone in the country urging them to get boosted;
- drafting in 750 armed forces personnel to support deployment, alongside a renewed drive that has meant the recruitment of tens of thousands of volunteers; and
- temporarily suspending the 15-minute observation period following Pfizer or Moderna booster jabs, where clinically safe and appropriate to do so, in order to get more jabs in arms.

Vaccines Minister Maggie Throup said:

The UK COVID-19 vaccination programme is something we can all be proud of – having provided tens of millions of people with protection from this deadly virus over the past year.

I want to thank the NHS and volunteers who have worked incredibly hard for this achievement.

To those eligible who have not yet come forward – Get Boosted Now to keep yourself and your loved ones safe as we begin the New Year.

While two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine provides strong protection against the Delta variant, data from the UK Health Security Agency shows two doses is not enough to protect people from Omicron – but a third dose provides around 70% protection against symptomatic infection from Omicron two to four weeks after the booster is given.

It is vital to get a first and second jab, in order to be eligible for a booster to get the vital protection against Omicron. Recent UKHSA data shows people who are unvaccinated are up to eight times more likely to be hospitalised than those who are fully vaccinated.

If someone has contracted COVID-19 and has not yet received their booster, after 28 days have passed they are encouraged to book their jab as soon as they can.

Those eligible for a booster vaccine who have delayed making an appointment because of other acute illnesses are also encourage to book as soon as they

are fully recovered.

All adults can get the jab by booking online through the National Booking Service or by visiting their nearest walk-in vaccination centre.

Head of the NHS Vaccination Programme, Dr Emily Lawson, said:

The NHS COVID-19 vaccination programme has delivered more than 111 million life-saving doses across England, with three in four eligible adults having received their vital booster jab thanks to the rapid expansion of the booster programme over the last few weeks.

While more than 28 million people have already taken up the offer of a top-up dose, many people may not have yet been able to, for example because they have had COVID-19, and I would urge anyone yet to get their booster jab to book in as soon as possible.

---

## [Work of Strategic Command personnel recognised in New Year's Honours List](#)

News story

Past and present members of Strategic Command have been recognised in Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth's New Year's Honours List 2022 for their services to defence.



The following individuals from Strategic Command have been recognised:

### **Companion of the Order of Bath (CB)**

- Royal Air Force Air Vice-Marshal C S Walton

## **Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE)**

- British Army Colonel A Mistlin

## **Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE)**

- Royal Marines Colonel R C Morris MBE
- Royal Air Force Group Captain Richard David Grimshaw
- British Army Lieutenant Colonel O J M Bartels
- British Army Lieutenant Colonel D R J Calder
- British Army Lieutenant Colonel T P James
- Royal Air Force Wing Commander D F O Holland

## **Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE)**

- British Army Lieutenant Colonel L J Butler
- British Army Lieutenant Colonel G A Fitchett
- British Army Lieutenant Colonel A G Maund
- British Army Lieutenant Colonel S K Siemieniuch
- Royal Air Force Wing Commander N Foster
- British Army Major J R Chacksfield
- British Army Major B Metherell
- British Army Warrant Officer Class 1 L J Ware
- Royal Air Force Chief Technician L O Betts
- Royal Air Force Corporal C S Rimmer

## **Member of the Royal Red Cross (RRC)**

- Royal Air Force Group Captain F M Bradley
- British Army Lieutenant Colonel M Hodge

## **Ordinary Associate of the Royal Red Cross (ARRC)**

- British Army Major T A Buckingham
- British Army Major D L Harvey
- Royal Air Force Squadron Leader S L McBain
- Royal Air Force Squadron Leader E F Paxman
- Royal Navy Chief Petty Officer K J Brechany
- Royal Navy Chief Petty Officer C Stuart
- British Army Staff Sergeant J Fulford
- Royal Air Force Flight Sergeant H A Chambers
- Royal Air Force Sergeant V L Van Der Wel

## **British Empire Medal (BEM)**

- Civil Service L Al-Khalidi



## **Queen's Volunteer Reserves Medal (QVRM)**

- British Army Warrant Officer Class 1 B Armstrong

## **Meritorious Service Medal (MSM)**

- British Army Warrant Officer Class 2 A J Briggs
- Royal Navy Warrant Officer Class 1 J P Edgar
- British Army Warrant Officer Class 1 T L Halliday
- British Army Warrant Officer Class 1 L M Peet

## **Vice-Chief of Defence Staff Commendation**

- British Army Colonel I K Dzisiewska
- Royal Marines Lieutenant Colonel A T Whitmarsh
- German Air Force Lieutenant Colonel D Mueller
- Civil Service A Cajigas

## **Commander Strategic Command Commendation**

- Royal Navy Captain R A New
- Royal Navy Captain I J Stidston
- Royal Navy Commander S Whitehall
- British Army Lieutenant Colonel M G Billingham
- British Army Lieutenant Colonel P A Buck
- British Army Lieutenant Colonel T H Fell
- British Army Lieutenant Colonel R Moorhouse
- British Army Lieutenant Colonel N P Short
- British Army Lieutenant Colonel S J Williams
- Royal Australian Navy Commander R A E Levitt
- Royal Navy Lieutenant Commander S T J Nolan
- Royal Navy Lieutenant Commander B E Fawcett
- Royal Navy Lieutenant Commander S A Henderson
- Royal Navy Lieutenant Commander M J Hine
- Royal Navy Lieutenant Commander N C Stratton
- Royal Navy Lieutenant Commander C Taylor
- British Army Major J Buchan
- British Army Major S A Manning-Degobertière
- Royal Air Force Squadron Leader A M Avery
- Royal Air Force Squadron Leader S Kirk
- Royal Air Force Squadron Leader J Marlowe
- Royal Air Force Flight Lieutenant M Kinton
- British Army Warrant Officer Class 1 M S Baxter
- Royal Navy Chief Petty Officer B R Staite
- Royal Air Force Flight Sergeant N J Dehavan
- British Army Sergeant L Keeley
- Civil Service K Bond
- Civil Service A J Lock
- Civil Service R M Penney
- Civil Service D T H Rice

- Civil Service V Robbins
- Civil Service R Sendall

### **Commander Strategic Command Commendation Team Awards**

- Defence Digital Operation Fortis Planning Team
- Defence Strategic Fuels Authority Operations Team
- Medical Information Systems Operations Team
- Medical Operations Team

### **Chief of the General Staff Commendation**

- British Army Lieutenant Colonel R P Castro
- British Army Major J R Barklem
- British Army Major D L Krause-Harder-Calthorpe MBE
- British Army Captain A R Miller

### **Chief of the Air Staff Commendation**

- Royal Air Force Wing Commander T W Robbins
- Royal Air Force Warrant Officer L Potter

### **Commander Field Army Commendation**

- British Army Lieutenant Colonel J A G Somerville
- British Army Major P J Martin
- British Army Warrant Officer Class 1 C Gathercole
- British Army Corporal A J Kolber

### **Commander Standing Joint Command (UK) Commendation**

- British Army Major J M Petch
- British Army Major J Roberts

### **Commander Home Command Commendation**

- British Army Sergeant E Cartwright

### **Deputy Commander Operations (RAF) Commendation**

- Royal Air Force Wing Commander M P Clarkson

### **Air Officer Commanding 1 Group Commendation**

- Royal Air Force Wing Commander A N Watson
- Royal Air Force Flight Sergeant N Nolan
- Royal Air Force Corporal O J Scullion
- Royal Air Force Senior Aircraftman J D Simpson

## **Air Officer Commanding 2 Group Commendation**

- Royal Air Force Wing Commander I K Evans
- Royal Air Force Wing Commander M E Williamson

## **Air Officer Commanding 22 Group Commendation**

- Royal Navy Commander C Sloan-Murphy
- Royal Air Force Squadron Leader M R Whitfield

Published 1 January 2022

---

## **UKHSA Chief Executive and colleagues recognised in the Queen's New Year honours list**

UKHSA Chief Executive, Dr Jenny Harries, has received the title of Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire for her outstanding service to public health.

Jonathan Turner, Head of Scientific and Technical Services has been awarded an MBE with Professor Kevin Fenton, London Regional Director of Public Health, Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, awarded a CBE.

Dr Harries has worked tirelessly to keep the nation safe during the COVID-19 pandemic with a focus on providing advice and support to the most vulnerable people in the country. Throughout the pandemic, she has provided health advice to the public at critical times in her role as Deputy Chief Medical Officer.

Dr Harries is now the Chief Executive of the newly formed UK Health Security Agency which brings together Public Health England and NHS Test and Trace, including the Joint Biosecurity Centre, with a remit to plan and prepare for current and future threats to our health. Dr Harries is uniquely placed to understand the national challenges the nation faces and the importance of working closely with local and regional colleagues to address them, particularly supporting the most vulnerable in our communities.

Prior to becoming Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Dr Harries was the Deputy Medical Director at Public Health England, where she played a leading role in the UK's response to Ebola in West Africa. She also provided crucial expertise to the Zika epidemic response, helping provide scientific advice and input to early studies to provide reassurance to expectant mothers across the UK at a time of considerable concern.

She also led the successful responses to the detection of MERS in the UK and the first UK cases of Monkeypox, ensuring dangerous infectious diseases were swiftly contained. Using knowledge from her previous role as PHE Director for the South of England, Dr Harries was instrumental in shaping both the national and local public health response to the Novichok attack in Salisbury. Her public health advice helped contain the risk to the public.

Dame Dr Jenny Harries said:

I am hugely honoured to receive this award. It is accepted on behalf of the countless brilliant and committed colleagues in clinical and scientific communities as well as those who provide such dedicated operational response through every health protection incident and emergency. It is they, who have inspired and supported me throughout my career and who continue to work tirelessly to make the UK a safer place, often largely out of sight of the public.

In the response to COVID-19, and in so much else, the unprecedented speed and diligence of scientific endeavour has saved many thousands of lives and I hope that today's award will encourage more people, especially women, to pursue careers in science and public service.

Ian Peters, UKHSA Chair, said:

Jenny has made an enormous contribution to protecting the country's health during an outstanding career. She has repeatedly provided leadership in helping to resolve the most challenging health issues in the UK and overseas, providing expert advice and a reassuring voice during incredibly critical times. From the outset in the pandemic firstly as Deputy CMO, and since April as CEO of UKHSA she has combined her public health knowledge and her wide experience, with an integrity and calmness of approach which has led to the saving of many lives. Her honour is thoroughly deserved

Jonathan Turner, Head of Scientific and Technical Services, has worked as a Biomedical Scientist for over 30 years to develop patient-centred and health protection focused public health microbiology services in the South West and across the national network.

Jonathan Turner said:

I am thrilled and honoured to accept this award but do so on behalf of the team in Bristol and the wider diagnostic community. I recognise the efforts of all the team, the support staff, our administrators, warehouse staff, logisticians, and managers as well as our clinicians and scientists. I also need to recognise the volunteers that came to our aid, without whom we would not have

been able to achieve this response.

Professor Kevin Fenton, London Regional Director of Public Health, Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, has received a CBE for his 30 years of service and leadership across all domains of public health.

This includes a recognition of his work in improving health outcomes in complex public health programmes including HIV prevention, sexual and reproductive health, child obesity, mental health, health equity and social regeneration, and leading London's public health response during COVID-19.

Professor Kevin Fenton said:

I am honoured and humbled to receive such a prestigious award alongside other outstanding individuals. As we enter the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic response I am continually inspired by the professionalism, resilience and contributions of so many amazing colleagues who work relentlessly to keep us all safe and well.

I am accepting this award on behalf of all the incredible public health and NHS teams I am privileged to lead and work with in London and around the nation, who are committed to improving health, tackling health inequalities, building resilient communities and providing high quality health and care services to all. They exemplify the best of public health and should be proud of all they have achieved.