

# More than 90% of people receive first dose of COVID-19 vaccine

Over 90% of the UK population aged over 12 have now received a first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

To protect against the Omicron variant, the Prime Minister and NHS England launched the Get Boosted Now campaign on the 12 December, urging all eligible adults to come forward for their booster before the New Year.

The national campaign has also led to an increase in first doses, with an almost 50% surge in people coming forward for their first jab. More than 51.7 million first doses have now been delivered up and down the country.

The primary course offer remains open to anyone who has not yet come forward. Everyone should get all three doses as soon as they are able – while two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine provides strong protection against the Delta variant, data from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) shows two doses of the vaccine are not enough to protect from Omicron, but a third dose boosts protection against symptomatic infection back up to over 70%.

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

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

I want to be clear – it is never too late to come forward for your vaccine. The first jab is the first step towards getting boosted to protect yourself against Omicron.

The NHS is ready for you and has been working around the clock for over a year to jab more than 90% of the UK population, an incredible 51.7 million jabs.

Vaccines Minister Maggie Throup said:

It is brilliant to see more and more people rolling up their sleeves to get their first dose of a lifesaving COVID-19 vaccine.

It is never too late to get your first jab. The programme has been turbocharged and we are opening up more vaccination sites all the time, making it even easier for people to come forward.

More pop-up sites have come online with local areas looking at the most

convenient sites for their communities – from trucks and buses in parks and cathedrals to football stadiums and leisure centres.

There are now around 3,000 sites across England, which includes double the number of hospitals offering jabs to the public – going from 30 to 71 in two weeks.

There was a record festive period of vaccinations in England. Vaccinators were working at sites up and down the country to give people their boosters over Christmas. More than 214,000 jabs were reported across Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day, including 184,445 boosters.

There were 306,574 vaccinations on Tuesday 28 December – the highest Bank Holiday total recorded – and 244,078 vaccinations on Monday 27 December.

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

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## [Strong steroid found in ‘natural’ skin cream](#)

Individuals who have purchased Dermaved Sensitive Cream via the company’s website are today being asked to stop using it and return the product after it was found to contain a potent steroid.

The MHRA, who issued the recall, has worked to ensure that Dermaved Sensitive Cream is removed from sale.

Dermaved Sensitive Cream is not a licensed medicine and has been marketed in the UK as a natural Ayurvedic product for sensitive skin.

The MHRA’s analysis of the product found the presence of the steroid clobetasol propionate. This is the active ingredient in topical (on the skin) Prescription-Only medicines used for the treatment of a range skin conditions such as psoriasis and eczema.

Creams containing steroids should be used sparingly and as directed by the prescriber. They should also not be used on children under 1 year of age. Long-term use can rarely cause local complications such as skin thinning and if inappropriately used, can worsen conditions such as eczema.

MHRA has previously issued warnings for products called [Zudaiifu](#) cream and [Yiganerjing Cream](#) which contained the same steroid ingredient.

“Anyone who has purchased Dermaved Sensitive Cream should stop using it immediately, particularly on young children or babies, and return it to the manufacturer. This is because it has been found to contain a strong steroid

which can have adverse effects.

“Whilst some steroid creams are available in pharmacies, they must be authorised by the MHRA and carry clear instructions for use. Where creams containing potent steroids are prescribed by a healthcare professional, use should be in line with their advice on where, how often and for how long they should be used. Steroids can infrequently suppress the skin’s response to infection, cause long-term thinning of the skin, and if applied long-term over a wide area, particularly in babies and children, can cause other medical problems.

“If you have had any side effects from using this cream or after stopping using it, please talk to a doctor or pharmacist. Suspected side effects should also be reported via the [Yellow Card Scheme](#).

“Selling creams directly to the public that contain strong steroids is illegal as they can be dangerous if used without medical supervision.”

### Notes to editors:

1. If you are unsure about the safety of a medicine claiming to be “natural” or “herbal” you should check for a Marketing Authorisation (MA) or Product Licence (PL) number or [Traditional Herbal Registration \(THR\) number](#) / the THR logo. This means the product has been assessed by MHRA for safety and has been manufactured correctly. For more information, visit [NHS Choices](#).
2. If you are aware of Dermaved Sensitive Cream being sold elsewhere, please report it to MHRA at [Borderline\\_medicine@mhra.gov.uk](mailto:Borderline_medicine@mhra.gov.uk).
3. [The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency](#) is responsible for regulating all medicines and medical devices in the UK. All work is underpinned by robust and fact-based judgements to ensure that the benefits justify any risks.
4. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (‘the agency’) has three centres. The MHRA, the [National Institute for Biological Standards and Control \(NIBSC\)](#) and the [Clinical Practice Research Datalink \(CPRD\)](#). The agency is an executive agency of the Department of Health and Social Care.

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## [Welsh Secretary’s thanks for continued efforts in Covid-19 fight](#)

Secretary of State for Wales Simon Hart has thanked people across Wales for their continued sacrifices in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic in the past year.

In a New Year Message, the Welsh Secretary has looked back at a year in which

the ongoing global pandemic continued to be a huge factor in everyone's lives as, but which also saw the roll-out of the UK's ground-breaking vaccination programme.

Welsh Secretary Simon Hart said:

I want to thank everyone in Wales for the sacrifices they continue to make in the pandemic. People the length and breadth of the country have once again displayed the best of Wales in 2021 – whether it's helping to look after their communities, providing help and support for neighbours and family or simply by following the regulations.

The magnificent vaccine programme has set us on the road to defeating the virus and I also thank everyone who has been a part of that effort – from those who developed and produced it, to our health workers in the front line of the pandemic and the Armed Forces who continue to give vital assistance in its roll-out.

The incredible effort to roll out the vaccine – and recently a booster – in 2021 has brought much greater safety to large numbers of the population and it undoubtedly means we are in a better place than 12 months ago. We still have a way to go, and I encourage anyone not yet vaccinated or boosted to get their jabs now.

Supporting the UK through the pandemic has been our priority and the world leading procurement and roll-out of vaccines was only the beginning. The UK Government's unprecedented package of support – including 18 months of furlough – did a huge amount to protect businesses and livelihoods. A third of Welsh jobs, around 500,000 jobs were supported by our furlough and self-employed schemes, helping insulate families from the economic storm.

We will continue to work alongside the Welsh Government to protect lives and livelihoods in Wales for as long as the pandemic continues.

The Welsh Secretary also reflected on the UK Government's delivery for Wales in 2021, and looked ahead to 2022 as the UK Government seeks to build back better from the pandemic and deliver its key levelling up agenda.

He said:

It may be difficult to imagine at the moment but I am confident that in 2022 we will have much to be optimistic about.

In Wales, every part of the country is now covered by a growth deal. These significant economic schemes represent huge opportunities to help re-balance the Welsh economy. The UK and Welsh Governments are working hand in hand, alongside local

authorities and business, to unleash the full potential of our different regions.

Levelling up is at the centre of the UK Government's ambitions and Wales stands to benefit hugely from our plans. We launched the Levelling Up Fund, Community Renewal Fund and Community Ownership Funds last year and over 175 projects right across Wales – a higher proportion than the other UK nations – have already been given more than £165m in direct funding for schemes ranging from improvements to road infrastructure in the Rhondda to money for Gwynedd locals to help buy their local pub.

After these funds were announced in the Autumn Budget I was able to visit several of the projects which had received funding. The plans I saw at the Muni Arts Centre in Pontypridd, at the tourism sites of the Dee Valley and at Cyfarthfa greenhouses in Merthyr, which I visited with Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove, were incredibly exciting. Communities across Wales will be transformed over the coming years as this funding kicks in.

Wales is one of the traditional homes of the UK's Armed Forces and I was delighted to see the announcement that number of defence personnel based in Wales would be increasing. The relocation of the Welsh Cavalry to Monmouthshire was hugely significant and welcome news. I was also proud to announce the creation of a Veterans Commissioner for Wales, to be recruited in 2022 and bringing Wales in line with the other UK nations who already have commissioners in place.

The UK this year hosted COP 26, the United Nations' conference in Glasgow, which brought together the world to tackle the other great crisis of our times – the climate emergency.

Wales can lead the world in this green revolution. We are investing massively in renewables such as wind and tidal off Anglesey and in the Celtic Sea while businesses across the country are transitioning to new technologies and opportunities.

Whether it is our green ambitions, digital connectivity plans, or our commitment to bring at least one freeport to Wales, the coming year will be about job creation and recovery. We can approach 2022 with optimism. We have negotiated trade deals with Australia, New Zealand and others with more to come. Welsh farmers will be able to export lamb to the United States for the first time in 30 years and a large area of north west Wales enters the New Year as a UNESCO world heritage site poised to feel the benefits of a higher profile and increased tourism after its magnificent slate landscape was rightly recognised.

Though we cannot be certain when the pandemic will finally be behind us, we are clear in the scale of the UK Government's ambition for Wales. We will continue our work to level up the

nations and regions of the UK, prioritise health and the vaccines and boost jobs and prosperity throughout the United Kingdom.

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## HMRC fraud squad takes back £1 billion from offenders

More than £1 billion has been recovered from the proceeds of crime and tax offenders since the formation of a specialist HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) fraud squad 5 years ago.

Launched in April 2016, the department's Fraud Investigation Service (FIS) has now recovered assets equivalent to funding around 20,000 NHS nurses for an entire year.

FIS has been proactively pursuing the suspected proceeds of crime using enforcement powers, both criminal and civil, to disrupt the movement of cash and assets. Since 2016, more than 1,200 seizures of cash and assets have been made while on operational duty, including gold bars worth £750,000 from a passenger at Manchester Airport and £48,000 found in a freezer drawer, hidden among chicken nuggets at a house in Blackpool.

Simon York, HMRC's Director of Fraud Investigation Service, said:

To reach this £1 billion milestone in 5 years speaks volumes to the dedication, hard work and skill of FIS to recover the proceeds of crime from those who try to cheat the system.

Whether it's cash seizures, confiscation orders or account freezing orders, recovering these assets stops criminals bankrolling their lavish lifestyles and funding further crimes that harm our communities, such as drugs, guns and human trafficking. Crucially, this money goes back into the public purse, helping fund our vital services such as schools and hospitals.

HMRC deploys cutting-edge technology to investigate unexplained wealth and uncover hidden assets. Last year alone, we recouped more than £218 million from proceeds of crime.

We are committed to recovering criminal assets and today the message is clear – crime doesn't pay.

Some of the bigger and varied seizures and confiscations include:

- £750,000 of gold bars seized from a lunchbox at Manchester Airport,

- which were auctioned off with proceeds going back into the public purse
- a £1.7 million confiscation order imposed on a payroll fraudster who had to stump up the cash or face having 4 years added to his nine-and-a-half year sentence
  - gold jewellery and £180,000 cash seized from a safety deposit box in Birmingham as part of a £194,280 tax fraud
  - more than £840,000 in cash was seized at a residential garage in Sydenham, south-east London, after FIS helped dismantle a gang responsible for a £9.5 million tobacco fraud
  - £48,000 found in a freezer drawer, hidden among chicken nuggets at a house in Blackpool, as part of a £16 million tobacco fraud
  - a convicted fraudster was ordered to hand over poker winnings twice in 2018 and 2019 totalling £99,030 to satisfy an outstanding confiscation order

The formation of FIS in 2016 brought together HMRC's criminal and civil investigators – a world-first for tax enforcement. This partnership allows HMRC's investigators to unlock the most complex financial crimes.

Criminal cash is seized by HMRC officers under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. If the courts are satisfied the cash is from a crime, or was going to be used in a crime, they can order a forfeiture. In uncontested cases, HMRC can administratively order forfeiture of the cash.

HMRC also obtains Account Freezing Orders to freeze balances in bank accounts where it is suspected they contain criminal money. A financial investigator uses a range of tools at their disposal to investigate the cash or account and any criminality. This may involve interviewing the suspect, obtaining production orders on identified bank accounts and assessing whether the cash was seized alongside illegal items such as non-duty paid alcohol or tobacco. Uncontested cases can be administratively dealt with by HMRC, while others would be determined in a court.

Confiscation orders can be imposed on tax fraudsters after conviction. Investigators will assess the criminal benefit from their crimes and evaluate any assets they hold. If the assets held by the convicted criminal at the time of the order are less than the benefit derived from the fraud, then any future assets can be confiscated up to the value of the benefit of the fraud.

The courts make the final decision on a confiscation order. Failure to pay leads to default sentences and many more months or years in jail and they will still owe the money when released. The recovered money is returned to the public purse.

The [Contractual Disclosure Facility \(CDF\)](#) is another tool for FIS to deal with serious fraud cases. The CDF allows tax evaders to admit their fraud and agree to pay the tax in full, along with interest and penalties due. However, if FIS discovers that individuals have not made a full and frank disclosure via the CDF, it can and does criminally investigate and prosecute.

HMRC secured 157 criminal convictions in the UK during the 2020 to 2021 financial year and recouped more than £218 million from the proceeds of crime

– sending a very clear message that crime doesn't pay.

As part of HMRC's broader attack on serious and organised crime, the department is increasingly using powers to freeze and recover unexplained assets. During the 2020 to 2021 financial year in the UK, HMRC issued 151 Account Freezing Orders to the tune of more than £26 million.

Anyone with information about people or businesses involved in tax fraud can contact our Fraud Hotline on 0800 788 887 or [can report information on GOV.UK](#).

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## [New support to help vulnerable countries tackle Omicron](#)

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has pledged up to £105 million of UK emergency aid to help vulnerable countries tackle the Omicron Covid-19 variant, with a particular focus on Africa.

The vital aid will be delivered through trusted partners and will:

- Scale-up testing – especially in parts of Africa where testing rates for Covid-19 remain lowest – allowing health systems to track and respond to the spread of the virus more effectively. This is in addition to the UK's world-leading genomic sequencing support.
- Improve access to oxygen supplies for ventilators – a surge in demand for oxygen is a significant risk for some countries.
- Provide communities with hygiene advice, products and access to handwashing facilities and support deep cleaning in schools, health centres and other public places. This will build on the successful global hygiene campaign between UK aid and Unilever which has reached over 1.2 billion people since its launch in 2020.
- Fund the UK's ground-breaking science and research into the spread of variants like Omicron to enable innovative evidence-based policy responses in low and middle-income countries.
- Ready the UK's own expert emergency teams for deployment overseas to crisis hotspots, including with new medical equipment.

The government has also confirmed today that over 30 million vaccines have been delivered so far as part of the UK's pledge to donate 100 million doses to the world, benefitting more than 30 countries.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

The UK is providing vital assistance to help tackle the spread of new variants around the world. This is key to securing our freedom



and ending this pandemic once and for all.

I am proud that we have also delivered over 30 million vaccines to benefit our friends around the world this year. The UK is helping other countries most in need. No one is safe until everyone is safe.

Doses donated by the UK have reached four continents and provided vital protection from Covid-19 in countries including Angola, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Malawi, Nepal, and Rwanda.

Of the more than 30 million doses now donated, 24.6 million have been received by COVAX for delivery to countries and 5.5 million have been shared directly with countries in need including Kenya, Jamaica, and Indonesia.

Millions more vaccines will be sent to other countries in 2022, including 20 million Oxford-AstraZeneca doses and 20 million Janssen doses.

The UK has been at the forefront of the global response to Covid-19. Today's announcement builds on the £1.3 billion in UK aid committed to the international health response early on in the pandemic, supporting vaccines, health systems and economic recovery in developing countries.

The Government also invested more than £88 million to support the development of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, and the UK became the first country in the world to approve the jab a year ago today.

Thanks to AstraZeneca's commitment distribute the vaccine on a non-profit basis, 2.5 billion doses have been used in more than 170 countries, two thirds of which are low- and middle-income countries.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

The global pandemic has challenged health systems around the world and the best way to overcome this awful disease is to unite and stand side by side with our international partners.

By supporting countries with the UK's ground breaking science and research into the spread of variants, improving access to oxygen and scaling up testing we will help those most in need chart their course out of the pandemic.

I am proud that we have already delivered over 30 million vaccines to our friends abroad. The UK, as a global leader, is helping other countries most in need. No one is safe until everyone is safe.

Dr Seth Berkley, CEO of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, said:

We welcome the UK's commitment in new funding to protect the most

vulnerable, particularly in Africa; the UK's continued focus on COVAX and equitable global access to COVID19 vaccines, both through early financing commitments made at UNGA 2020, as well as meeting the Prime Minister's G7 commitment to dose sharing – the 30m target set by the end of 2021.

We look forward to operationalising the remainder of the UK's dose sharing commitment via COVAX in 2022, while we also work with the UK Government on continuing to support Gavi's ambitious 2021- 2025 routine vaccination programmes, of which the United Kingdom is the largest funder through the PM's commitment made at the UK-hosted Global Vaccine Summit in June 2020.

#### Notes to editors:

- The UK will fund testing and oxygen supplies through the COVID-19 response mechanism C19RM, established by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. This is a proven, rapid, and highly effective approach designed to respond to the needs of countries and communities in low- and middle-income countries.
- The UK continues to offer our world-leading expertise to help identify new Covid-19 variants. The UK is the second largest contributor of genomic data to the global initiative mapping the spread of Covid-19, providing around a third of the total number of sequences so far uploaded.
- The UK kick-started efforts to establish COVAX, pledging £548 million to the scheme. COVAX has so far provided 811 million doses to 144 of the world's poorest countries.
- The UK's Health Security Agency continues to help countries effectively identify, assess, and track new SARS-CoV-2 variants among their population through the New Variant Assessment Platform (NVAP).
- Planning for future pandemics is crucial and that is why the UK will host a replenishment conference in March 2022 to support the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) to raise funds for vaccine research and development. CEPI aim to cut the time it takes to develop a vaccine to 100 days which could avert future pandemics, save millions of lives, and avoid trillions of pounds of economic damage.
- The UK donates vaccines through COVAX as well as directly to countries. So far, doses donated by the UK have arrived in Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Belize, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Dominica, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Grenada, Guyana, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Laos, Malawi, Malaysia, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Rwanda, Saint Vincent & Grenadines, Senegal, Thailand, Uganda, Vietnam, and Zambia.
- The UK continues to proactively manage our vaccine supply and does not hold a stockpile of coronavirus vaccines. All procured, regulated doses are either used rapidly by our domestic programme or shared internationally with countries in need, meaning the domestic booster rollout is not impacted by donations