

Latest REACT-1 findings show Omicron infections rising fast, while highlighting success of vaccination programmes

Over 97,000 volunteers in England took part in the study to examine the levels of COVID-19 in the general population between 23 November and 14 December.

The latest findings from Imperial College London and Ipsos MORI, covering 23 November to 14 December 2021 (round 16 of the study), detected 11 cases of the Omicron variant for data sequenced up to and including 11 December, with further sequencing underway for the remaining samples.

All other positive cases where a lineage was determined have been confirmed as the Delta variant or sub-lineages of Delta, but the proportion of Omicron cases in the results was increasing rapidly at the time reporting was stopped.

For samples collected up until 11 December, no cases of Omicron were detected in those who had received their booster jab, and the 11 who did test positive were double vaccinated and aged from 18 to 54 years.

The overall prevalence recorded in round 16 was 1.41%, meaning around one in 70 people were infected with the virus. This is a decrease from the 1.57% prevalence (one in 64 people infected) reported in round 15. However, prevalence continued to rise rapidly in round 16 from the beginning of December, after there had been a small dip at the end of November.

Prevalence in 12 to 17 year olds dropped by over half from rounds 15 to 16 and prevalence dropped by approximately two-thirds in those aged 75 and over. There was also a drop off in prevalence from rounds 15 to 16 in those aged 65 to 74.

As reporting for this round ended on 14 December, it only picked up the beginning of the large rise and the record number of cases now being reported across the England due to the prevalence of the Omicron variant.

Dr Jenny Harries, Chief Executive of the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), said:

I'd like to say a really big thank you to the members of the public who continue to take part in the REACT-1 study. It provides vital insight into the prevalence of COVID-19 and, crucially, is helping us understand more about the Omicron variant.

Omicron is spreading fast and the COVID-19 vaccine remains our best

line of defence against it.

I urge everyone who is eligible to come forward to receive their latest jab without delay – whether that’s a first, second, third or booster dose.

The main findings from the report are as follows:

There were 1,192 positives from 97,089 valid swabs in round 16, giving an overall weighted prevalence of 1.41%. This is down on the weighted prevalence recorded in round 15, which stood at 1.57%.

The highest weighted prevalence was recorded in London at 1.84%, a significant increase from the 1.23% recorded in round 15.

At a Lower Tier Local Authority level, 8 of the 10 highest estimates of prevalence based on a nearest neighbour method were found in London (Lambeth, Kensington and Chelsea, Hammersmith and Fulham, Southwark, Islington, Westminster, Wandsworth, Camden), with the 2 others, Cornwall and Plymouth, based in the South West.

BA.1 (Omicron) accounted for 1.69% (11 of 650) of the recorded COVID-19 infections where the sequencing was determined in this round (up to 11 December).

Of the 11 Omicron cases recorded in this round up to 11 December, 7 cases were symptomatic (5 with classic COVID-19 symptoms) and 2 were asymptomatic. The symptoms for the remaining 2 cases were unknown.

Based on the confirmed number of Omicron infections for swabs collected between 1 to 11 December, the estimated average prevalence of Omicron infections in England was 31,000 over this period.

In round 16 data the first Omicron infection was detected in London on 3 December, and subsequent confirmed Omicron infections appeared concentrated mainly in the South of England.

Prevalence in 12 to 17 year-olds dropped by over 50%, from 5.35% in round 15 to 2.31% in round 16. There was also a significant drop in prevalence from rounds 15 to 16 amongst the older age groups: 0.84% to 0.48% in those aged 65 to 74 and 0.63% to 0.21% in those aged 75 and over.

Prevalence in children between the ages of 5 and 11 was similar between rounds 15 and 16, 4.76% in the former and 4.74% in the latter, while there was a rise for those aged 18 to 24 0.93% (0.57%, 1.51%), 25 to 34 to 1.38% (1.10%, 1.74%) and 35 to 44 to 1.71% (1.48%, 1.98%).

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

The latest REACT-1 data is yet more evidence that boosters are vital in protecting us from the Omicron variant.

While infections may be rising rapidly across the country, you can protect yourself, your friends, family and community by getting boosted now – like 28 million others across the UK so far.

Professor Paul Elliott, director of the REACT programme from Imperial's School of Public Health, said:

The results reported in this round of REACT show that Omicron is spreading rapidly in England and especially in London, which now has the highest prevalence of COVID-19 in the country. Compared to the Delta variant, the proportion of Omicron cases is increasingly rapidly.

The positive news is that the both the teenage vaccination and booster programmes have already shown encouraging results, with prevalence amongst 12 to 17 year olds and those aged 65 and above dropping significantly since the beginning of November.

However, we have seen prevalence overall rise sharply again since the beginning of December, which aligns with the rapid increase in the Omicron variant and the growing number of COVID-19 cases being reported nationally. It is therefore vital that as many people as possible get vaccinated, including getting their boosters, and take sensible precautions such as mask-wearing to reduce the risk of infection.

Kelly Beaver, CEO at Ipsos MORI, said:

The latest REACT round finds an R number above 1 and high prevalence of COVID-19 in England, so it remains critical that people get vaccinated and boosted.

We have found a number of cases of the Omicron variant, demonstrating the speed at which it is becoming the dominant variant and highlighting why we must all exercise caution over the festive period to ensure that prevalence does not continue to rise even further in the new year.

[Emergency funding available for arts, culture and heritage doubled to £60](#)

million to tackle impact of Omicron

- Funding now totalling £60 million will give crucial support to museums, cinemas, theatres and heritage across the country, with more time to get applications in to benefit as many of those affected as possible
- Additional immediate support also announced for creative freelancers impacted by the pandemic over the Christmas period

An additional £30 million in emergency funding has been made available through the Culture Recovery Fund to support museums, cinemas, theatres and heritage organisations with the impact of the Omicron variant this winter.

Announced as part of [the Chancellor's £1 billion support package](#), this funding recognises how important the festive period is for the arts, heritage and creative sectors and will provide vital emergency grants, doubling the amount that was previously available in the latest round of the Culture Recovery Fund.

Now open for applications, emergency grants will safeguard local museums and heritage, independent cinemas and regional theatres so that they can continue to support jobs, contribute to the economy, and make sure everyone has access to culture and heritage on their doorstep. The government is also extending the application window by a week until January 18, to give more organisations a chance to apply to the fund and help protect even more jobs.

Government funding via Arts Council England will also provide an immediate £1.5 million to support freelancers affected by the pandemic, alongside a further £1.35 million contribution from the theatre sector. This will provide grants of £650,000 each directly to the Theatre Artists Fund, Help Musicians, and £200,000 to a-n, the Artists Information Company, a charity for visual artists which will distribute cash to freelancers over the coming weeks.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak said:

Our arts, culture and heritage sectors bring joy and enrichment to our day-to-day lives, and rarely more so than at Christmas. So we understand how devastating the uncertainty caused by Omicron has been.

This new funding, alongside the new grants of up to £6,000 we announced earlier this week, will support the sector as we together face this difficult time.

We've supported the cultural sector throughout the pandemic, and we'll continue to do so.

Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries said:

From pantos to carol singing to festive film releases, Christmas is a very important time of year for so many of our brilliant arts and culture organisations who have now found themselves impacted by the Omicron variant.

It is absolutely right that we support them through this challenging time which is why we've doubled the emergency funding available from the Culture Recovery Fund and allowed more time for organisations to come forward.

The best thing we can all do to help protect ourselves and to get back to the culture we love is to Get Boosted Now.

Arts Minister Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay said:

Thanks to the dedication and ingenuity of people working in the arts, culture and heritage – as well as unprecedented government support – these cherished sectors have already withstood many challenges over the course of the pandemic.

The new Omicron variant has added to those challenges by hitting at what is a crucial time of the year for so many artists and organisations. This additional emergency funding will make sure that those most at risk are able to receive the urgent help they need.

We are also working with Arts Council England and charities supporting artists across the sectors to help freelancers who have been particularly hit by the cancellation of productions in what should have been a busy and vibrant period. We will continue to work closely with groups and organisations across the sectors to see how we can best provide support to those affected.

Sir Nicholas Serota, Chair, Arts Council England, said:

We are once again grateful to government for their support and investment which continues on an unprecedented scale to meet the challenges facing our arts and cultural organisations and creative freelancers.

We will work closely with the government to deliver funding at pace and will continue to support freelancers and cultural organisations to explore all available funding to help navigate these difficult times.

So far more than £1.5 billion from the £2 billion Culture Recovery Fund has been allocated to around 5,000 organisations across the length and breadth of England, supporting them through the pandemic.

Notes to editors:

Organisations now will have until 18 January to submit their “Permission to Apply” forms or “Expression of Interest” forms to the relevant Arm’s-Length Body for the Emergency Resource Support strand of the Culture Recovery Fund.

The government’s £400 billion COVID-19 support package will continue to help businesses into spring next year and we will continue to respond proportionately to the changing path of the virus, as we have done since the start of the pandemic.

For more information on the Culture Recovery Fund, please visit:

[Arts Council England](#)

[British Film Institute](#)

[Historic England](#)

[National Lottery Heritage Fund](#)

A message to the private security industry for Christmas 2021

As 2021 ends and much of the country slows down for a holiday break, it is a chance to reflect on the past year and some of its highlights, as well as consider the opportunities ahead for partnership and improvements to public safety in 2022.

This year the private security industry once again played a critical role in helping society deal with the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. You protected the public in testing and vaccination centres, quarantine hotels and hospitals, as well as supermarkets, offices, and many other premises. Across the UK, security managers worked hard to keep their staff safe while still providing a service to their clients.

The year began with many venues closed and major events postponed or cancelled. Some security operatives left their existing roles for other jobs in security or left the security sector altogether. Then restrictions lifted and there was again a need for licensed, qualified security at festivals, gigs, and major sporting events.

We know that for some of you there has been illness, loss, and grief. We also know that despite this, we have received many reports of security operatives acting with kindness and bravery. On behalf of everyone at the SIA, thank you for your commitment and professionalism.

Please stay alert

In this festive season, many of you will be working and keeping the public safe in towns and cities across the UK, as you have continued to do in all weathers every day this year. As recent events in Essex and Liverpool remind us, threats of harm have not gone away. Vigilance throughout these winter months and the foreseeable future remains essential. The licensed security sector plays a critical part in preventing terrorist attacks and responding to them when they happen.

Public safety is paramount

Public protection remains the central focus of the SIA's role and work. In 2021 we updated the training required for four of the sectors we license. This included the two biggest sectors: door supervision and security guarding.

We launched free counter-terrorism e-learning courses for front line security operatives. We ran counter-terror exercises with the police, venues, and private security companies to test their response to terror-related incidents.

We also delivered a series of public safety campaigns on important issues such as preventing violence against women and girls.

Looking ahead to 2022

We will continue to deliver and improve our digital licensing services. At the same time, we are determined to increase our visibility across the UK and the impact of our compliance activities. You will hear more on how we deal with those who damage the public's trust in security through negligence, poor standards of behaviour, or wilful disregard of SIA regulation. You will also hear more examples of where the security sector has stepped up to protect the public.

At the SIA, we are proud to work with an industry that has risen to the challenges of this year and has demonstrated its commitment to protecting the public. Whatever the future holds, we share a dedication to quality and the pursuit of best practice in the security industry.

We wish you and your colleagues and families a safe and Happy Christmas as we see out this year and look ahead to 2022.

[Jewellery business set for festive](#)

export boost

- London-based firm TLKE works with brands such as Ralph Lauren and DKNY, distributing jewellery across Europe to markets including Germany and Poland
- The business received short-term financing support through the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) during the pandemic, and a loan guarantee through UK Export Finance's new General Export Facility
- With UK government support, TLKE is set to enjoy its busiest year ever as it prepares for a Christmas boost

A West London jewellery business is preparing for a Christmas spike in sales following a record year, backed by £300,000 in finance from HSBC UK with an 80% guarantee from UK Export Finance (UKEF).

TLKE works in partnership with an extensive network of international brands to distribute quality, branded jewellery into the UK and wider European market. It works with designers including Ralph Lauren and DKNY, and supplies household names such as House of Fraser, Fenwick and Ernest Jones.

The UKEF supported loan enabled TLKE to keep hold of major contracts as the Covid pandemic developed. Since the loan, the business is expanding to 30 additional Ernest Jones stores, recruiting more people, and preparing for an increase in orders over the Christmas period as retailers stock up. The flexibility of UKEF's General Export Facility (GEF) has helped TLKE to attract more high-value designer partnerships.

To date, 109,887 businesses have received vital support from the CBILS scheme throughout the pandemic. UKEF has also provided over £150 million worth of support for growing businesses through the GEF, since the scheme was set up in March to provide longer-term financing for growing UK exporters.

Minister for Exports Mike Freer MP said:

The Covid pandemic created unexpected obstacles for every business across the UK, and government support has helped TLKE through this difficult period. I'm incredibly encouraged to see growing businesses like TLKE continuing to sell from Britain to the world during the festive period.

Teresa Timberlake, founding partner at TLKE, said:

Like millions of other businesses, Covid has presented all kinds of challenges. We were put in a really tricky position and facing the need to take on a lot of debt to keep our supplier relationship. The UKEF support helped us navigate that. As well as Christmas sales, I'm excited about the years ahead and the brilliant brands

we might have the opportunity to work with as a result.

A cornerstone of TLKE's business model is letters of credit with its supplier in the US, allowing them to bring in and sell the stock before they need to submit payment. However, as the pandemic hit, TLKE almost lost the ability to underwrite these, meaning it was at risk of either losing its stock or taking on significant amounts of debt without more flexible financing.

After approaching UKEF, TLKE accessed the financing it needed under the GEF , allowing the business to protect the relationship with its supplier. It is now recruiting to boost its team of 10 in Kew, London, and also hopes to work with more retailers across Italy and France.

Hitesh Patel, Export Finance Manager at UK Export Finance, said:

TLKE is an exciting business and a great example of UK entrepreneurialism exporting to markets around the world. I'm pleased we were able to help it navigate a difficult situation during a time of unprecedented business volatility, and its future plans show the huge opportunity that lies in trading overseas.

NOTES TO EDITORS

For more details about GEF and how to access it, read the product page [here](#).

Christmas comes early for Bury fans

- £1 million government levelling up money will save historic Bury FC ground
- Fan-led group will reopen 12,000-seater Gigg Lane for the whole community

Bury football ground will be brought back to life after fans were handed £1 million of government levelling up funding to buy the club's historic Gigg Lane stadium.

The intervention by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is a huge boost for football fan power and for Bury's loyal supporters, who have been working tirelessly to get their beloved club back up and running.

The club, nicknamed The Shakers, was expelled from the English Football League in 2019 after 125 years of membership and placed into administration just over a year ago.

The grant from the Community Ownership Fund (COF) will help get football back to Gigg Lane for the 2022/23 season.

Gigg Lane is one of the world's oldest professional football stadiums and has been home to Bury FC since the club's founding in 1885.

The vital funding has been awarded to Bury Football Club Supporters Society and will transform the 12,500 seater ground into a cherished asset for the whole community, providing facilities for the men's and women's teams, youth football, local schools and the public.

The COF is backing communities to take control of much-loved local assets that might otherwise be lost, and is a key tool in the government's mission to level up across the United Kingdom.

Secretary of State for Levelling Up Michael Gove said:

The collapse of Bury FC is a stain on English football and the result of the game being ripped out of the hands of the supporters and communities who made it what it is by big business and corporate interest.

I pay enormous tribute to Bury's supporters, who have shown incredible resolve in their fight to bring their beloved club back to life. By helping rescue the historic Gigg Lane stadium, we are helping to put power back into their hands and securing a cherished asset for the wider community.

As we deliver on our central mission to level up the United Kingdom, we are backing community-led projects that bring people together, restore local pride and benefit towns and cities across the country.

The collapse of Bury FC in 2019 was a catalyst for the government to make a manifesto commitment to conduct a fan-led review of football governance at the last general election. This commitment was then triggered by the failed European Super League bid earlier this year, and we are now considering the review's findings.

The Bury FC case has shown how vital it is that football in England has the necessary regulation and governance structures in place to ensure its long-term sustainability.

Math Pickup, representing Forever Bury and Est 1885 said:

We welcome the news from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up Michael Gove, that our combined efforts with Forever Bury to receive the community ownership funding has been successful.

This funding will allow us the opportunity to complete the purchase

of Gigg Lane in order to bring football back to its historic home after a nearly 3 year hiatus.

There are still a few steps left in the process and we hope to provide a further update in the coming days when the legalities have been completed but we thank all the fans for their continued support.

We would also like to thank James Daly MP, Bury Council, Bury College and the football foundation for their support with our application.

Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Nadine Dorries said:

Football clubs are at the heart of our local communities and the fans are at the centre of our national game.

This is levelling up in action and I very much welcome the Community Ownership Fund's £1 million that will go towards ensuring that Gigg Lane continues to play an integral role in the community.

The fan-led review of football governance looked at ways to stop situations like Bury FC happening again, which is why we've endorsed the principle of an independent regulator to take action in this space

The funding announced today will transform Gigg Lane into a multi-use community asset and will include:

- An all-weather pitch and gymnasium for use by local schools and members of the public.
- An indoor facility for adult education, events for the elderly, public meetings and rehabilitation services.
- The redevelopment of the Manchester Road Stand to accommodate NHS diagnostic and physiotherapy provision.

The Shakers have a rich footballing history, lifting the FA Cup twice in the early 20th century and supporting the journeys of British footballing greats including Colin Bell, Terry McDermott and Neville Southall.

In 2018-19, Bury FC finished second in League Two, earning automatic promotion to the higher tier. However, due to longstanding financial difficulties the club was unable to start the season in August 2019 and was expelled from the EFL.

Bury fans were informed that they would need to complete the purchase of the stadium by Christmas in order to prevent it being sold to developers and lost to the community for ever.

Bury is not the only fan-led group set to benefit from the Community

Ownership Fund. The John Jenkins Stadium in Portsmouth will provide a new home to Portsmouth FC Women and Moneyfields FC.

'Pompey in the Community' secured almost £1 million to build the new football ground, where they will run programmes for thousands of school children, disability sports groups and members of the public all year-round.

Both Gigg Lane and John Jenkins Stadium will revitalise the grassroots game in the communities of Portsmouth and Bury. They will also be important to spur on growth of the women's game ahead of England hosting this summer's Euro 2022 competition.

The COF is supporting communities across the United Kingdom to purchase and refurbish vital assets at risk of closure, with 21 projects across the UK benefitting from the first round of the £150 million scheme.

The government has reopened the bidding process for those applicants whose bids were eligible but not funded in the first round, to support community groups who urgently need funding to save prized community assets. Further announcements of successful applications from community groups are expected in due course. The second round of COF will be opening in spring 2022.

At the Spending Review, the government announced a further £205 million to build or improve up to 8,000 multi-use sport pitches across the UK, in addition to £25 million being delivered this year.