

# CICA Christmas and New Year opening hours

News story

An update on how to contact CICA over the festive period.



Our telephone helpline and live chat will be open during the following hours:

<b>Day</b>	<b>Opening Times</b>
<b>Friday 24 December</b>	8.30am to 3.30pm
<b>Monday 27 December</b>	Closed
<b>Tuesday 28 December</b>	Closed
<b>Wednesday 29 December</b>	10am to 5pm
<b>Thursday 30 December</b>	08.30am to 5pm
<b>Friday 31 December</b>	08.30am to 3.30pm
<b>Monday 3 January</b>	Closed
<b>Tuesday 4 January</b>	Closed

From Wednesday 5 January these services will return to the following opening hours.

<b>Day</b>	<b>Opening Times</b>
<b>Monday</b>	8.30am to 5pm
<b>Tuesday</b>	8.30am to 5pm
<b>Wednesday</b>	10am to 5pm
<b>Thursday</b>	8.30am to 5pm
<b>Friday</b>	8.30am to 5pm

You can continue to use our [online application service](#) throughout this time.

- [Live chat](#)
- Telephone: 0300 003 3601

- From outside the UK: +44 20 3684 2517
- [Relay UK](#) (if you cannot hear or speak on the phone): 18001 0300 003 3601
- [Find out about call charges](#)

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## [UK telecoms tower merger risks higher mobile costs](#)

Cellnex is an independent supplier of telecommunications infrastructure, currently active across several European countries. CK Hutchison is a multinational conglomerate that currently owns and operates the Three mobile network in the UK.

The proposed deal, in which Cellnex has agreed to buy CK Hutchison's UK passive infrastructure assets forms part of a broader set of transactions – worth £8.6bn (€10bn) in total – involving the sale of CK Hutchison's assets in several European countries. Passive infrastructure assets are structures, such as towers and masts, that mobile network operators and other wireless communication network providers attach electronic equipment to in order to operate their networks. This includes the sites that the structures are built on.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) launched an inquiry into the proposed deal in May 2021 and it was referred for an in-depth investigation by an independent inquiry group in July.

At present, Cellnex is one of only 2 large independent suppliers of passive infrastructure in the UK, having established a market-leading position through the acquisition of the telecommunications division of Arqiva in 2020. The only other supplier with a similar presence is Cornerstone Telecommunications Infrastructure Limited (CTIL), a Joint Venture between O2 and Vodafone that was originally set up to provide services for its parent companies but became an independent supplier in early 2021.

Like many telecoms operators, CK Hutchison has historically used its passive infrastructure assets mainly to service its own telecoms business but has, in recent years, considered how to commercialise these assets, including by selling them to an independent supplier of telecommunications infrastructure. The commercialisation of these assets is intended to help CK Hutchison pursue its broader commercial objectives, including contributing to funding the development of its UK mobile network.

Having reviewed a range of evidence in relation to CK Hutchison's internal decision-making, the CMA has provisionally found that, if the deal with Cellnex had not been agreed, then CK Hutchison's passive infrastructure assets would most likely have been sold to an alternative buyer. This evidence shows that CK Hutchison had a range of options to commercialise these assets and that the deal with Cellnex was not the only option available to it to pursue its broader commercial objectives.

The CMA's investigation has provisionally found that the sale of the CK Hutchison business to Cellnex may raise significant competition concerns. In particular, the sale of this business to Cellnex, rather than an alternative buyer, may prevent the emergence of a third major national player – instead leaving a duopoly in which Cellnex and CTIL would account for over 90% of the market. This may materially reduce competition to supply the infrastructure requirements of mobile networks in future contract negotiations, running the risk of those networks facing higher prices and more onerous contracts.

As a result, the CMA has provisionally concluded that the sale of CK Hutchison's assets to Cellnex, rather than to an alternative buyer, would lead to a substantial lessening of competition. The CMA is concerned that this could result in higher prices or lower quality services for mobile network operators, with a knock-on adverse impact for users of mobile networks across the UK.

Richard Feasey, Chair of the independent inquiry group, said:

Mobile phones are an essential part of everyday life for people and businesses. This deal may prevent the emergence of a third major national provider of the critical infrastructure on which mobile operators depend, leaving them with only a choice of only 2 major suppliers. Less competition could mean higher prices or worse terms for both mobile operators and their customers.

The CMA is now inviting submissions on its provisional findings by Friday 14 January 2022 and its notice of possible remedies, which sets out potential options for addressing its provisional concerns, by 7 January 2022, ahead of a final decision by Monday 7 March 2022.

For more information, visit the [Cellnex / CK Hutchison merger inquiry page](#).

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## **Public Expenditure System**

News story

We have played a central role, working with HM Treasury, to set several

discount rates which are used in the accounting valuation of over half of central government's liabilities.



The Government Actuary's Department (GAD) has played a key role in helping HM Treasury to set several discount rates used in central government accounting.

## Valuation of liabilities

The discount rates are used in the valuation of more than half of central government's liabilities, including:

- the net public sector pension liability of around £1.9 trillion according to the [2018/19 Whole of Government Accounts](#)
- general provisions of over £300 billion (e.g. provisions for nuclear decommissioning costs and clinical negligence)
- financial instruments (e.g. government guarantees on around £80 billion of loans to businesses under the Coronavirus Loan Schemes)

## GAD's involvement

Actuaries in GAD helped HM Treasury to set the discount rates in line with the requirements of the Financial Reporting Manual and applicable accounting standards.

The discount rates were promulgated via HM Treasury's Public Expenditure System note to central government departments in time for the preparation of their supplementary estimates.

## Several challenges

GAD actuary Steve Lewis led on the project. He said: "GAD has played a central role in this process. There were a number of challenges along the way, and in particular the announced changes to the Retail Prices Index widely expected to come into force in 2030.

"This made setting discount rates in excess of inflation (used for discounting liability cashflows that increase with inflation) more challenging than in previous years."

The new discount rates are lower than those previously in force, which would

be expected to lead to a higher value being reported in the 2021/22 accounts for the relevant liabilities and assets.

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## [25m boosters in UK as public urged to Get Boosted Now](#)

- Record daily figures as 25 million people in the UK have now had their COVID-19 booster vaccine or third dose
- Huge expansion of the booster programme this week, with all adults over 18 able to get their jab at a walk-in centre or book online
- Thousands of volunteers have signed up to support booster campaign as part of Herculean effort to get as many jabs in arms as quickly as possible

More than 25 million people in the UK have had a COVID-19 top up jab, as the vaccination programme is turbocharged to get all eligible adults boosted as soon as possible.

All eligible adults aged over 18 are able to get their lifesaving booster jab from a walk-in vaccination centre or book online through the National Booking Service following updates to the programme this week.

A total of 750 armed forces personnel have been drafted in to support deployment of booster vaccines across the UK, tens of thousands of volunteers have stepped up to support the national mission, and extra vaccine centres and pop-up sites have opened to make it as easy as possible for people to get vaccinated.

More than 745,000 booster and third doses have been administered in the UK yesterday and a total of 25,477,345 million people have had their top-up jabs as the vaccination programme rapidly accelerates.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

One thing is absolutely clear – we have no time to waste in the race between virus and the vaccine. Booster jabs are absolutely critical for strengthening our defences, and today's milestone of 25 million top-up jabs is a testament to the enthusiasm of people up and down the country who are rolling up their sleeves to get boosted now.

I want to say a heartfelt thank you to everyone working on this national mission across all corners of the United Kingdom – from

the brilliant NHS and Armed Forces to the tens of thousands of heroic volunteers who have signed up to help with deployment of our booster vaccines.

This week also saw the temporary suspension of the 15-minute observation period following administration of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, in a bid to help get jabs in arms more quickly with rising cases of Omicron. The advice from the four UK Chief Medical Officers includes first, second and booster jabs and will be kept under review.

Vaccines Minister Maggie Throup said:

Today's milestone is an absolutely brilliant achievement. I would like to thank our NHS, GPs, cleaners, porters, volunteer vaccinators, armed forces personnel and all of the fantastic frontline heroes who have helped to turbocharge our booster campaign in response to the highly transmissible Omicron variant.

There is a real sense of public spirit, with everyone playing their part to protect themselves and their loved ones. Please, keep coming forward for your jabs. It is one of the single most important things you can do this winter.

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

Vaccines are the best way to protect people against COVID-19 and data from the UK Health Security Agency shows a booster vaccine tops up protection against symptomatic infection from the Omicron variant to around 70%.

Dr Emily Lawson, director of the NHS covid-19 vaccination programme said:

The NHS has had a record-breaking week for booster jabs with 626,000 jabs delivered yesterday alone in England – this is thanks to the incredible efforts of NHS staff and volunteers who continue to do everything in their power to protect the nation.

We know that boosters are the best protection against the variant and so it has never been more important to come forward and book your slot for that lifesaving jab.

People [sign up to volunteer for the booster rollout](#)

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# Pregnant women urged to come forward for COVID-19 vaccination

There is growing evidence showing that women who are pregnant are at increased risk of serious consequences from coronavirus (COVID-19) and as a result, they should be considered a clinical risk group within the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

Given that the majority of pregnant women who have been admitted to hospital with severe COVID-19 are unvaccinated, the key priority is to increase the number of pregnant women completing their primary course (2 vaccine doses 8 weeks apart).

Recent data published by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) adds to the existing international evidence, which has not identified any safety concerns of vaccinating women during pregnancy.

Additional efforts focused on improving vaccine uptake amongst pregnant women will require a coordinated response from professional groups including midwifery, charities and support from local community leaders.

Pregnant women who have completed their primary vaccine course should book their COVID-19 booster if they had their second vaccine dose at least 3 months earlier.

Professor Wei Shen Lim, Chair of JCVI COVID-19 Immunisation, said:

There is no evidence to suggest that COVID-19 vaccines used in pregnancy increase the risk of miscarriage, stillbirths, congenital abnormalities or birth complications. Having a UK approved COVID-19 vaccine is safer than having COVID-19 itself.

Women who are pregnant are strongly encouraged to have a first, second or booster vaccine dose as appropriate in order to better protect yourself and your baby from any serious consequences from COVID-19.

Dr Gayatri Amirthalingam, UKHSA, said:

The serious risks posed to women who become infected with COVID-19 during pregnancy have become increasingly clear.

We know that the vaccines used in the UK COVID-19 vaccination programme have been highly effective in preventing serious complications and those recommended for pregnant women have a good safety record.

I would urge all pregnant women to come forward and get their vaccine without delay. This is the best way to protect you and your baby.

Dr Edward Morris, President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) said:

We welcome the announcement from the JCVI that recognises pregnant women are more vulnerable to severe illness should they get infected and will therefore be prioritised for vaccination. This is something we have been calling on the JCVI to introduce and we are pleased they have listened.

It is vital that pregnant women can easily access the booster vaccine to ensure that a good level of protection against COVID-19 and the new variant is maintained.

Women who do develop symptomatic COVID-19 have an increased risk of giving birth prematurely, and stillbirth. The latest data from UKHSA shows only a fifth of women who gave birth in August were vaccinated and we would strongly recommend that all pregnant women get vaccinated as soon as possible, as it's the best way to protect themselves and their baby against COVID-19.

We encourage the government to consider all available options to ensure that pregnant women are given priority when booking their COVID-19 vaccines.

Gill Walton, Chief Executive of the Royal College of Midwives (RCM), said:

Today's announcement is good news. The RCM together with the RCOG and other organisations have been calling for pregnant women to be prioritised in the vaccination and booster programme. What is crucial now is that women are able to access vaccination hubs or clinics close to where they are receiving their maternity care.

We are aware of reports of pregnant women waiting for hours in queues at walk-in centres or even when they have appointments and this is unacceptable.

Providing clinics in or very near antenatal clinics, staffed by vaccination teams, is a great way to encourage uptake and will also ensure that midwives, already in short supply, aren't taken away from their core work.

It's also vital that all vaccinators and vaccination centres are not only aware that pregnant women are recommended to be vaccinated and have the booster and pregnancy, but are trained in supporting them through the process too.



We know that the best way to protect pregnant women and their babies from COVID-19 is through vaccination. That's why the government must take immediate action on the recommendations we have laid out with the RCOG to ensure that there are no barriers for women in accessing the vaccine.

Professor Marian Knight, Professor of Maternal and Child Population Health at the University of Oxford and chief investigator of the UKOSS national study of pregnant women admitted to hospital with COVID-19, said:

This new data clearly shows that outcomes of COVID-19 for pregnant women and their babies are getting worse. However, it also shows the very strong protection that receiving a vaccination provides.

With several hundred thousand pregnant women across the world having received a vaccine, it is clear that vaccination in pregnancy is safe. As infections increase, pregnant women can be reassured that getting a vaccine is the best way to protect them and their babies.

## **Background information**

Data from [UKOSS](#) and [MBRRACE-UK](#) reveals that clinical outcomes following COVID-19 in pregnant women have worsened over the course of the pandemic.

The [UKOSS study](#) found that the vast majority of pregnant women who were admitted to hospital with COVID-19 were unvaccinated.