

Prime Minister's address to the nation on booster jabs: 12 December 2021

Good evening,

over the past year we have shown that vaccination is the key to beating Covid, and that it works.

The UK was the first country in the world to administer a vaccine,

we delivered the fastest roll-out in Europe,

and we've begun the fastest booster campaign too, with over half a million jabs delivered yesterday alone.

And these achievements

made possible by the extraordinary efforts of our NHS, including thousands of GPs and volunteer vaccinators –

have literally saved countless lives and livelihoods in this country.

But I need to speak to you this evening,

because I am afraid we are now facing an emergency in our battle with the new variant, Omicron,

and we must urgently reinforce our wall of vaccine protection to keep our friends and loved ones safe.

Earlier today, the UK's four Chief Medical Officers raised the Covid Alert level to 4, its second highest level,

because of the evidence that Omicron is doubling here in the UK every two to three days.

We know from bitter experience how these exponential curves develop.

No-one should be in any doubt: there is a tidal wave of Omicron coming,

and I'm afraid it is now clear that two doses of vaccine are simply not enough to give the level of protection we all need.

But the good news is that our scientists are confident that with a third dose – a booster dose –

we can all bring our level of protection back up.

And I know there will be some people watching who will be asking whether Omicron is less severe than previous variants,

and whether we really need to go out and get that booster.

And the answer is yes we do.

Do not make the mistake of thinking Omicron can't hurt you; can't make you and your loved ones seriously ill.

We've already seen hospitalisations doubling in a week in South Africa.

And we have patients with Omicron in hospital here in the UK right now.

At this point our scientists cannot say that Omicron is less severe, and even if that proved to be true, we already know it is so much more transmissible,

that a wave of Omicron through a population that was not boosted would risk a level of hospitalisation that could overwhelm our NHS and lead sadly to very many deaths.

So we must act now.

Today we are launching the Omicron Emergency Boost,

a national mission unlike anything we have done before in the vaccination programme –

to Get Boosted Now.

A fortnight ago I said we would offer every eligible adult a booster by the end of January.

Today, in light of this Omicron Emergency, I am bringing that target forward by a whole month.

Everyone eligible aged 18 and over in England will have the chance to get their booster before the New Year.

And we have spoken today to the Devolved Administrations, to confirm the UK Government will provide additional support to accelerate vaccinations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

To hit the pace we need, we'll need to match the NHS's best vaccination day yet – and then beat it day after day.

This will require an extraordinary effort.

And as we focus on boosters and make this new target achievable,

it will mean some other appointments will need to be postponed until the New Year.

But if we don't do this now, the wave of Omicron could be so big that cancellations and disruptions, like the loss of cancer appointments, would be even greater next year.

And I know the pressures on everyone in our NHS

– from our GPs, doctors and nurses to our porters –

all of whom have worked incredibly hard and we thank them for the amazing job they have done.

But I say directly to those of you on the front line,

I must ask you to make another extraordinary effort now,

so we can protect you and your colleagues – and above all your patients – from even greater pressures next year.

So from tomorrow in England, we are opening up the booster to every adult over 18 who has had a second dose of the vaccine at least three months ago.

The NHS Booking System will be open for these younger age groups from Wednesday,

and that's the best way to guarantee your slot,

but in some places you can walk in from tomorrow.

We will also assist this emergency operation by

deploying 42 military planning teams across every region,

standing up additional vaccine sites and mobile units,

extending opening hours so clinics are open 7 days a week, with more appointments early in the morning, in the evening, and at weekends,

and training thousands more volunteer vaccinators.

And we'll set out further steps in the days ahead.

It's because of the threat from Omicron that I announced on Wednesday we will move to plan B in England.

You must wear a face covering in indoor public spaces.

From tomorrow, work from home if you can.

And from Wednesday, subject to a vote in parliament, you'll need to show a negative lateral flow test to get into nightclubs and some large events if you're not double vaccinated.

These measures will help slow the spread of Omicron.

But we must go further and get boosted now.

If you haven't yet had a vaccine at all, then please get yourself at least some protection with a jab as quickly as possible.

If you've already had your booster, encourage your friends and family to do the same.

We are a great country. We have the vaccines to protect our people.

So let's do it. Let's Get Boosted Now.

Get Boosted Now for yourself, for your friends and your family.

Get Boosted Now to protect jobs and livelihoods across this country.

Get Boosted Now to protect our NHS, our freedoms and our way of life.

Get Boosted Now.

Thank you very much.

[UK coronavirus \(COVID-19\) alert level increased from Level 3 to Level 4](#)

Transmission of COVID-19 is already high in the community, mainly still driven by Delta, but the emergence of Omicron adds additional and rapidly increasing risk to the public and healthcare services.

Early evidence shows that Omicron is spreading much faster than Delta and that vaccine protection against symptomatic disease from Omicron is reduced. Data on severity will become clearer over the coming weeks but hospitalisations from Omicron are already occurring and these are likely to increase rapidly.

When vaccine protection is reduced in the way that is happening with Omicron it is essential to top up that protection with a booster. Both booster vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) increase the immune response substantially and show good effectiveness although with some reduction compared to Delta.

The NHS is currently under pressure mainly driven by non-COVID-19 pressures. With a variant spreading with increased transmissibility and reduced vaccine effectiveness, we are likely to see this pressure rise soon.

It is extremely important that if you are eligible, you get your COVID-19 vaccination now – whether this be your first, second or booster dose.

People should continue take sensible precautions including ventilating rooms, using face coverings, testing regularly and isolating when symptomatic.

Chief Medical Officer for England, Professor Chris Whitty

Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland, Professor Sir Michael McBride

Chief Medical Officer for Scotland, Professor Gregor Smith

Chief Medical Officer for Wales, Dr Frank Atherton

NHS England National Medical Director, Professor Stephen Powis

[Webinar: The Global Honey Supply Chain](#)

Please note that this webinar took place on 19 January 2022 at 15:30 GMT. Following the webinar further information has been added to this page to address questions and comments that arose during the webinar.

Further information

Thank you for your interest in this webinar on the Global Honey Supply Chain which was well attended by industry experts and other stakeholders. We'd like to thank attendees for their input, and we will reflect on the comments made and consider them as part of our ongoing dialogue on honey authenticity issues.

This webinar and [the consequent e-seminar](#) is part of a suite of activities Defra, FSA, FSS and the Government Chemist are jointly working on to address some of the underpinning scientific issues that have emerged on the subject of honey testing and a number of workstreams are in progress.

Two further e-seminars, which will assist in disseminating information on honey authenticity testing, are in production. These cover using NMR testing for the determination of exogenous sugars in honey and best practice in establishing and curating databases for food authenticity. Work is also underway to develop guidance on applying a weight of evidence approach for food authenticity analysis, to pilot accreditation of non-targeted authenticity testing methods, to improve consistency and confidence in testing and reporting and to explore a data trust framework to share information on the honey supply chain and testing between interested communities. This will be followed by activity to standardise a protocol for the collection of authentic honey samples and to establish a framework for the scrutiny of authenticity databases. We are collaborating with key stakeholders on all these initiatives to secure the best outcome for all.

[FSA's blog on the complexities of honey authenticity](#), includes links to the

recently published Government Chemist independent review of methods for honey authenticity testing and of the analytical reports underpinning recent allegations of honey fraud.

Watch the webinar:

[The Global Honey Supply Chain](#)

Presentations

[Honey supply presentation by Michelle McQuillan](#) (PDF, 679 KB, 13 pages)

The slides from Cathal Henigan's presentation form the basis of [this e-seminar](#).

Webinar information (please note that the webinar already took place)

During this webinar Michelle McQuillan, Team Leader of the Food Compositional Standards team, Defra will give an overview of standards and regulations governing the production and composition of honey. Cathal Henigan, Purchasing Director at Valeo Foods, will explain the complexity of the global honey supply chain and provide an overview of the process of honey production, from the honeybee and beekeeper to the packer and retailer. He will also highlight areas of supply chain vulnerability to food fraud.

The presentations will be followed by a Q&A session chaired by [Selvarani Elahi MBE](#).

This event is intended for individuals currently working within the honey authenticity testing arena, the food industry and those involved with the UK official control system

This is the third webinar in the Quarterly Webinar Series of the Joint Knowledge Transfer Framework for Food Standards and Food Safety Analysis, which is a cross-government project (funded by [Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs](#), [Food Standards Agency](#), [Food Standards Scotland](#) and the Government Chemist) aimed at disseminating knowledge from government funded research to stakeholders to support UK laboratory capability and promote best practice in food safety and standards analysis.

Speakers

Cathal Henigan, Procurement Director, Valeo Foods, UK

Cathal has been in the food industry for 30 years with a focus on procurement and supply chain. For the last 20 years he has worked as Procurement Director at Kerry Foods, Wellness Foods and Valeo Foods UK. Rowse Honey which is the UK's leading honey packer was latterly a subsidiary of Wellness Foods and now of Valeo Foods UK. Cathal has had direct responsibility for the

procurement/supply chain of honey in Rowse for 12 years. He became Chairman of BHIPA (British Honey Importers and Packers Association) in 2016 and has held that position since, representing the association at national and EU level.

Michelle Mcquillan, Team Leader of the Food Compositional Standards team, Defra

Michelle is Team Leader of the Food Compositional Standards team in Defra's Agri-Food Chain Directorate. She has a PhD in chemistry and has been a civil servant for over 25 years. She's had various roles across the food area in Defra, the FSA and MAFF. Currently she is responsible for policy on specific foodstuffs of which honey is one. Michelle was involved in the negotiations on the Honey Directive in 2001 including its most recent amendment in 2014. She was also involved in the development of the international Codex Honey Standard.

G7 Foreign Ministers' Statement on Russia and Ukraine

News story

The G7 Foreign Ministers and the High Representative of the European Union issued a statement on Russia and Ukraine.



Statement from the Foreign Ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America and the High Representative of the European Union:

We, the G7 Foreign Ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America and the High Representative of the European Union, are united in our condemnation of Russia's military build-up and aggressive rhetoric

towards Ukraine.

We call on Russia to de-escalate, pursue diplomatic channels, and abide by its international commitments on transparency of military activities as President Biden did in his call with President Putin on 7 December. We reconfirm our support for the efforts of France and Germany in the Normandy Format to achieve full implementation of the Minsk Agreements in order to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

Any use of force to change borders is strictly prohibited under international law. Russia should be in no doubt that further military aggression against Ukraine would have massive consequences and severe cost in response.

We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the right of any sovereign state to determine its own future. We commend Ukraine's posture of restraint.

We will intensify our cooperation on our common and comprehensive response.

Published 12 December 2021

Daily rapid testing for COVID-19 contacts launches this week

- Those who test positive or develop symptoms will need to self-isolate
- Unvaccinated adults must continue to self-isolate for 10 days if they are a contact of someone with COVID-19
- It follows a significant rise in Omicron cases in the UK with the new variant expected to become the dominant strain by mid-December

From Tuesday 14 December, people who are fully vaccinated and identified as a contact of someone with COVID-19 – whether Omicron or not – should take an NHS rapid lateral flow test every day for 7 days to help slow the spread of COVID-19.

The practical move comes as Omicron infections are rising significantly in the UK and it is expected to become the dominant strain in the UK by mid-December. It aims to reduce pressures on people's everyday lives by replacing the requirement for Omicron contacts to isolate for 10 days, while protecting the public by identifying asymptomatic cases and stopping the chains of transmission. Testing daily will also help us understand how and where the

virus is spreading.

Close contacts of people who test positive are at higher risk of getting COVID-19 and, with 1 in 3 people asymptomatic, daily testing will help ensure people are not unknowingly passing the virus on to others.

As now, anyone whose rapid test comes back positive or who develops COVID-19 symptoms should self-isolate and take a confirmatory PCR test to verify the result. If the PCR result comes back positive, contacts must self-isolate for 10 days from the day they took the positive rapid test or developed symptoms. They do not need to continue taking rapid tests during that 10 day isolation period. If the PCR result comes back negative, contacts can leave self-isolation but should continue to take rapid tests for the remainder of the 7 days.

Anyone identified as a contact with a negative rapid lateral flow result is strongly advised to limit close contact with other people outside their household, especially in crowded or enclosed spaces and with anyone who is more vulnerable. They should also follow government guidance on wearing a face covering and working from home where possible.

Unvaccinated adults are not eligible for this new daily testing policy, they must self-isolate for 10 days if they are a contact of someone who tests positive for COVID-19 – Omicron or not – unless eligible for an existing workplace daily contact testing.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

The Omicron variant is quickly gaining ground in the UK and is expected to become the dominant strain by mid-December.

We are taking this proportionate and more practical measure to limit the impact on people's day to day lives while helping to reduce the spread of Omicron.

Vaccines remain our best defence and I urge anyone yet to get a first and second jab to come forward and those eligible for a booster to get boosted as soon as possible.

Dr Jenny Harries, UKHSA CEO said:

If you are identified as a contact of someone with COVID-19, taking a rapid daily test – and only needing to isolate if it is positive – will help reduce the spread of the virus and minimise its impact on our everyday lives over the coming weeks and months. Rapid tests are freely available in pharmacies and online.

Our latest analysis shows that boosters provide the best protection against the Omicron variant, please go forward when you are called. If you haven't had any vaccine, a first and second dose still gives you protection against becoming seriously unwell. Don't worry about stepping forwards now – you will be warmly welcomed by our vaccination staff and I would strongly advise you to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

People will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace by phone, email or text or they will receive a notification from the NHS COVID-19 app to tell them they are a contact of someone who tested positive and what action they need to take.

They will be advised to get a box of 7 lateral flow tests free of charge from NHS Test and Trace either through pharmacies, schools or home delivery by ordering online. People are encouraged to use the tests they already have at home before ordering more. People should take these tests from the day they are notified as being a contact and report their results to NHS Test and Trace on GOV.UK or by calling 119.

Testing with isolation remains a vital tool in controlling the spread of Omicron given how quickly it passes from person to person. Extensive clinical evaluation shows lateral flow tests are accurate and sensitive enough to be used in the community and detect 80 to 90% people that are highly infectious very quickly, so more people who are at a high likelihood of spreading the virus isolate and prevent the variant from spreading to others.

The Prime Minister confirmed on Wednesday 8 December that England will move to Plan B following the rapid spread of the Omicron variant in the UK. This means people are advised to work from home where possible and face coverings are compulsory in most indoor venues, such as cinemas, theatres and places of worship.

The UK Health Security Agency published preliminary data on Friday showing COVID-19 booster vaccines provide around 70 to 75% protection against symptomatic infection from the Omicron variant. The data showed that 2 doses of AstraZeneca and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines alone provided much lower levels of protection against symptomatic infection compared to the protection that they provide against Delta, stressing the importance of people getting their booster jabs.

The government and NHS have expanded the booster programme to all adults and all over-18s in England will be offered a top-up dose by the end of January. People aged 30 and over will be invited to book from Monday 13 December and the NHS will invite younger people in due course in order of age.

To speed up the booster programme, around 450 military personnel have been drafted in to support deployment, with 1,500 community pharmacy sites, additional hospital hubs and pop-up sites opening in convenient locations across the country. Extra financial support to GPs, community pharmacies and primary care staff will help boost capacity and encourage more visits to

those who are housebound.

Daily rapid testing applies to all contacts who are:

- fully vaccinated adults – people who have had 2 jabs
- all children aged 5 to 18 years and 6 months, regardless of their vaccination status
- people who can prove they are unable to be vaccinated for clinical reasons
- people taking part, or have taken part, in an approved clinical trial for a COVID-19 vaccine

Under 5s are exempt from self-isolation and do not need to take part in daily rapid lateral flow testing.

On Tuesday 14 December the government will amend guidance on requiring all contacts of suspected or confirmed Omicron cases to self-isolate. This system will be in guidance rather than law initially, but this will be kept under review.