

# Armed Forces support Storm Arwen response in Scotland and northern England

Military personnel have deployed at pace in response to urgent requests for assistance from civil authorities in Scotland and northern England.

297 personnel from the British Army and Royal Marines are supporting civil authorities in areas impacted by the storm. Those on task are conducting door-to-door checks on vulnerable people in their homes and providing reassurance to local communities.

Today (4 December), 80 soldiers of 4 Royal Artillery based at Alan Brook Barracks in Topcliffe have deployed to Northumberland to check on vulnerable people and identify where additional support is required. Yesterday, 83 personnel from The Royal Lancers deployed from Catterick Garrison to aid Durham County Council, working with remote and isolated communities.

In Aberdeenshire, [134 soldiers and marines from 3 SCOTS, 39 Engineer Regiment and 45 Commando began on task on 2 December.](#)

Soldiers deployed to northern England are part of the UK Standby Battalion North, ready to deploy at extremely short notice to respond to emergencies and crisis events. The military remain on standby to provide further support, including delivering of vital supplies, if requested.

## **UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson said:**

My thoughts are with all those who are still affected by the terrible damage from Storm Arwen. I want to thank the emergency responders and engineers who have been working tirelessly this week to try and restore power.

I also want to thank our brilliant Armed Forces who have been deployed rapidly to support those communities which are worst affected.'

## **Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:**

Our dedicated Armed Forces personnel are working side by side with civil authorities to provide essential support to communities impacted by Storm Arwen.

The ability to deploy quickly to wherever in the UK assistance is requested makes us all safer and ensures we are able to look protect the most vulnerable in our society.

Thousands of military personnel are on standby to support resilience tasks across the UK, including the response to the coronavirus.

Support to the storm response is provided through [Military Aid to the Civilian Authorities \(MACA\) requests](#), the official process for Defence to provide assistance to other government departments and civil authorities for responding to emergencies, maintaining supplies and essential services during a crisis. The Ministry of Defence will continue to engage with civil authorities and other government departments to support where appropriate.

Over the past seven days, emergency teams have been working tirelessly to restore power in affected areas. Around 1 million people have been affected in total and power has now been restored to 99% of those affected.

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## [Unvaccinated mothers urge pregnant women to get jabbed](#)

- Pregnant women are being urged to get the vaccine by unvaccinated mothers
- Powerful new video shows their experiences of severe COVID-19 during pregnancy
- 98% of pregnant women in hospital with symptomatic COVID-19 are unvaccinated
- Vaccines continue to provide tens of thousands of pregnant women and their babies with vital protection from the virus

Unvaccinated women who suffered with COVID-19 during their pregnancies have told their harrowing stories of battling the virus, from being hospitalised to having emergency c-sections, as part of a new campaign encouraging expectant mothers to get the vaccine.

The video features three women who experienced serious complications after contracting COVID-19 before they'd been vaccinated, as well as the doctors and frontline staff who treated them, to warn of the dangers of the virus for pregnant women and their babies.

Medical expert Professor Asma Khalil from Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) is also interviewed as part of the powerful new film and provides further reassurance on the importance of the vaccine.

Data published last week by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) shows the vaccines are safe for mothers and their babies, with good birth outcomes for vaccinated women who had their babies up to August this year. There were no consistent differences between vaccinated women and all women in the figures for stillbirths, low baby birthweights and premature births.

Nearly 1 in 5 COVID-19 patients who are most critically ill are pregnant women who have not been vaccinated. Of those pregnant women in hospital with symptomatic COVID-19, 98% are unvaccinated, and no fully vaccinated pregnant women were admitted to intensive care with COVID-19 in England between February and the end of September 2021. Around 1 in 5 women who are hospitalised with the virus need to be delivered preterm to help them recover and 1 in 5 of their babies need care in the neonatal unit.

The women who feature in the new, short film have issued an urgent plea calling on expectant mothers to take up the vaccine as soon as possible to protect themselves and their babies.

Christina, a mental health therapist from Guildford who was hospitalised with COVID-19 in her third trimester and had to give birth via emergency c-section, said:

I went into hospital in my third trimester, and I thought I was going to deliver a baby but the next thing I know, I was being told I had COVID-19. Symptoms started to arise and I quickly deteriorated. I was rushed in for a CT scan because the doctors feared I was having a pulmonary embolism.

I had to give birth via emergency c-section because there was concern that I could have a stillbirth. It was terrifying.

I don't know what the future holds for me and my baby; I'm still suffering with symptoms now along with the anxiety of not knowing how or when I'll recover. I would urge pregnant women to get vaccinated because I don't want anyone to experience what I went through.

Tanviha, who works in anaesthesiology and research in Manchester, spent two months in hospital with COVID-19 following an emergency c-section, said:

I caught COVID-19 during my second pregnancy in February earlier this year. At the time, the vaccine wasn't available to me and I quickly took a turn for the worse. I was rushed into hospital and went straight into intensive care where my condition deteriorated and my son was delivered by emergency c-section.

I was put to sleep and intubated, and my family were told it was unlikely I'd survive and to prepare for the worst. The day after I was intubated, the nurse told them they were going to switch the machine off, but instead I was transferred to an Extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) machine, which is a last resort for patients with severe heart and lung failure, and it saved my life.

The first time I saw my son he was two months old. It's the scariest experience of mine and my family's life but I'm just grateful that me and my son are alive. If you're unsure about

getting vaccinated please come forward and get your jab, not everyone's as lucky as I am.

Joanne, a makeup advisor from Lincolnshire suffered complications with her pregnancy after catching COVID-19, she said:

I had been unsure what was the right thing to do about getting vaccinated while pregnant. I was planning on having the jab after my daughter was born but I caught COVID-19 when I was 35 weeks pregnant and became seriously ill, I couldn't get out of bed for a week.

I had nearly recovered but something just didn't feel right. I couldn't feel my baby kicking so I made an urgent appointment to see my midwife. The team at the hospital quickly spotted the baby's growth had dropped and her fluid was low.

Her heartbeat was going down and down so the consultant rushed me off for an emergency caesarean when Mollie-Ann was born. I'm so grateful to the maternity team for keeping me and my baby safe and I just wish I'd been vaccinated sooner.

The vaccines are safe for pregnant women and have no impact on fertility, which has been made extremely clear by the government, its senior clinicians and a range of independent experts from stakeholder groups such as RCOG, the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) and the British Fertility Society.

Since April 2021, around 84,000 pregnant women have received one dose and over 80,000 have received two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Out of all women between the ages of 16 and 49 on ECMO – a form of life support for the sickest of patients – in intensive care, pregnant women make up almost a third (32%) – up from just 6% at the start of the pandemic in March 2020.

Professor Lucy Chappell, Chief Scientific Adviser at the Department of Health and Social Care and Honorary Consultant Obstetrician, said:

The stories shared as part of this film are heartbreaking and provide invaluable, first-hand insight into why accepting the offer of a COVID-19 vaccine is so important for mothers and their babies.

Getting the vaccine is one of the most vital ways in which you can protect yourself and your baby from COVID-19, which can be really dangerous for pregnant women – of those pregnant women in hospital with symptomatic COVID-19, 98% are unvaccinated.

Watch the film, speak to your clinician or midwife if you have any questions or concerns, and book in your vaccine without delay.

Professor Asma Khalil, spokesperson for Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, said:

We are very concerned about the number of pregnant women who haven't been vaccinated against COVID-19.

We know that the COVID-19 can cause severe illness in pregnant women with a disproportionate number of unvaccinated pregnant women in intensive care. If a woman contracts COVID-19, evidence shows they are more likely to have a preterm birth or stillbirth.

Our message is clear, COVID-19 vaccination in pregnancy is safe, it is not linked to an increased risk of miscarriage or stillbirth, and it's the best way of protecting you and your baby from the virus. We are recommending all pregnant women have their COVID-19 vaccines, including their third dose booster vaccine when they are offered it.''

The proportion of women who gave birth and were vaccinated during pregnancy has been steadily increasing since 16 April 2021, when the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advised all pregnant women should be offered two vaccine doses at the same time as the rest of the population, based on their age and clinical risk group.

Pregnant women aged 40 and over who are health or social care workers, or are in an at-risk group, are now also eligible for booster vaccines three months after their second dose and will soon be able to book an appointment. Younger age groups will be invited by the NHS in order of age in due course.

The government is working closely with RCOG, RCM and other key stakeholders on engaging with women who are either pregnant or thinking about pregnancy and providing them with the latest advice and information at every possible opportunity. It's also working with faith and community leaders to increase vaccine uptake, holding regular meetings to discuss the best ways to provide information to their communities.

The Chief Midwifery Officer for England, Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent, has also written to fellow midwives and GP practices across the country stressing the need to encourage pregnant women to get the jab.

Liz, head of maternity at Epsom and St Helier Hospital Trust who features in the film, said:

We are treating more and more unvaccinated pregnant women with COVID-19. The vaccine is safe for pregnant women and is the best way to keep you and your baby, safe and out of hospital. Getting vaccinated works: across England, no pregnant woman that has had two vaccinations has been admitted to hospital due to COVID-19.

You can receive vaccination at any time in pregnancy, but the risks

that unvaccinated pregnant women face of becoming severely unwell if they catch COVID-19 show exactly why we advise you to do so as soon as possible. This film is another stark reminder of the devastating impact COVID-19 can have on women and their babies.

Vaccines Minister Maggie Throup said:

Nearly 1 in 5 COVID-19 patients who are most critically ill are pregnant women who have not been vaccinated, which shows just how important it is that expectant mothers get the vaccine to keep themselves and their babies safe.

Over 81,000 pregnant women have so far received their first dose, with 65,000 being double-jabbed, which is fantastic, but there's still more to be done.

The COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective for pregnant women and I urge everyone to get their vaccines as soon as they can to secure this significant protection”.

Gill Walton, chief executive of the Royal College of Midwives, said:

Having COVID-19 can double the chance of stillbirth and triples the chance of a preterm birth, which can have long-term health impact for the baby.

We know that the vaccine is a safe and effective way of preventing this, with hundreds of thousands of pregnant women worldwide having been vaccinated with no adverse effects.

## **Background:**

You can watch the film here:

The UKHSA safety data can be found [here](#)

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## **Government levels playing field for SMEs on Small Business Saturday**

This government is intent on giving smaller businesses better access to the £50 billion worth of public contracts, which can include anything from supplying hospital equipment to providing public sector pensions, which are

tendered each year.

The guide includes advice on where business owners can look online for Government contract opportunities and also includes tips on how SMEs can make sure they are showcasing their strengths during the bidding process. This will be backed up by online webinar sessions for small businesses.

The guide also gives guidance on how businesses can secure work through supply chains by working with larger companies to help deliver things such as long-running IT or catering projects.

It also goes a step further, advising how the government considers Social Value when choosing suppliers. This will then allow agile, smaller enterprises to highlight the work they do in their communities and ultimately offer them a better chance of winning government contracts.

Cabinet Office Minister Lord Agnew said:

In the most recent figures, SMEs won more than £15 billion in government contracts.

But we want it to be easier for them to work with government and this guide, published in support of Small Business Saturday, will help small businesses navigate what can be a complex world of public procurement.

That's why we're also bringing in sweeping procurement rules changes, to make it easier and more flexible for SMEs to win government work.

The Cabinet Office has previously announced other measures which aim to level the playing field for SMEs in the Transforming Public Procurement green paper. The changes contained in the paper will completely overhaul the current EU rules, removing barriers for smaller suppliers by getting rid of unnecessarily complicated regulations. Bureaucratic rules can put SMEs off bidding for contracts so the new reforms will open the door to public procurement for small and medium-sized companies.

We are simplifying the bidding process to make it easier for SMEs to secure contracts by creating one single central platform which suppliers have to register on, so they only have to submit their data once to qualify for any public sector procurement.

Small Business Crown Representative, Martin Traynor OBE said:

Smaller organisations can offer excellent value for money and a rich source of innovation, as well as a more agile business model than larger suppliers. They play a vital role in helping government to deliver efficient, effective public services that meet the needs of our citizens.

We are fully committed to breaking down barriers for SMEs who want to supply to the Government either directly or in the supply chain. I welcome the publication of this guide as part of the support on offer.

Small Business Minister Paul Scully added:

From the pubs, restaurants and shops that make our high streets tick to personal care services like hairdresser, small businesses are at the heart of our way of life.

I urge everyone to back their local businesses on Small Business Saturday. The Government is leading the way, supporting firms with this new handbook as well as ground-breaking schemes like Help to Grow: Digital which will help businesses to level up with discounted software and free tech support.

As well as the £352 billion in support provided to firms to help them through the pandemic, the government is also helping small businesses to level up through the Help to Grow schemes.

Help to Grow: Digital will provide business leaders with the advice and funding they need to embrace digital technology and help their business grow through discounted software and free advice and support, while Help to Grow: Management offers business leaders management and leadership training. Designed to be manageable alongside full-time work, businesses receive 50 hours of training across 12-weeks as part of the Help to Grow: Management course provided at participating business schools.

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## [Cat microchipping to be made mandatory](#)

- 99% of people support compulsory microchipping for cats according to recent Government consultation
- Owners will be required to microchip their cats by the time they reach 20 weeks of age
- Microchipping cats will help reunite thousands of lost or stray pets every year

Lost or stray pet cats are more likely to be reunited with their owners and returned home safely under new pet microchipping rules announced by the Government today.

Under the new plans, all keepers must ensure their pet is microchipped before they reach the age of 20 weeks and their contact details stored and kept up to date in a pet microchipping database. Owners found not to have



microchipped their cat will have 21 days to have one implanted, or may face a fine of up to £500.

The new microchipping rules follow a [Government call for evidence and consultation](#) on the issue in which 99% of respondents expressed support for the measure.

The introduction of compulsory cat microchipping was a key manifesto commitment and the Government pledged to introduce it under its flagship [Action Plan for Animal Welfare](#).

There are over 10.8 million pet cats in the UK, with as many as 2.8 million unchipped, meaning that it would be very difficult to reunite them with their owner if they get lost or stolen. Eight out of 10 stray cats coming into Cats Protection's centres are not microchipped.

The simple procedure involves inserting a small chip with a unique serial number under a cat's skin. This number can be read by a scanner and checked against a microchip database to help reunite lost pets quicker with their registered keeper, saving heartache and concern.

### **Animal Welfare Minister Lord Goldsmith said:**

Cats are much-loved parts of our families and making sure that they're microchipped is the best possible way of making sure that you are reunited with them if they are ever lost or stolen.

These new rules will help protect millions of cats across the country and will be brought in alongside a range of other protections we are introducing under our Action Plan for Animal Welfare.

### **Cats Protection's Head of Advocacy & Government Relations Jacqui Cuff said:**

As the UK's leading cat charity, we have been at the forefront of the campaign for compulsory microchipping of pet cats. Every day, we see how important microchipping is for cats and for the people who love them – whether it's reuniting a lost cat with their owner, identifying an injured cat, or helping to ensure an owner can be informed in the sad event that their cat has been hit and killed by a car.

Microchipping is by far the most effective and quickest way of identifying lost cats and can help ease the pressure on rescue charities like Cats Protection. Without a microchip, a lost cat will most likely end up being rehomed to a new home as there is often no trace of their original owner.

Earlier this year the Government also worked closely with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons to introduce new guidance which requires vets to scan the microchips of healthy dogs to help ensure they are not put down unnecessarily. In addition, the Government is also carrying out a review of the regulations on dog microchipping and the related microchipping database systems to consider whether improvements can be made.

The new cat microchipping rules will be implemented once this review has completed to ensure that any changes to the operation of the microchipping regime are brought in at the same time as the new microchipping rules for cats.

The commitment to microchipping is part of a wider Government effort to build on our existing world-leading standards and follows a number of recent announcements aimed at improving companion animal welfare, including [tackling puppy smuggling](#) in the [Animal Welfare \(Kept Animals\) Bill](#) and introducing a [new pet abduction offence](#) to crack down on theft.

### **Further Information:**

- Statistics available in Cats Protection's Cats and Their Stats Report, October 2021.

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## **[Mental health benefits of visiting UK Woodland's estimated at £185 million](#)**

Visits to the UK's woodlands boosts mental health and is estimated to save £185 million in treatment costs annually, a landmark report published by Forest Research finds today (4 December).

The report, published during 'National Tree Week' and funded by the Forestry Commission, Scottish Forestry and the Welsh Government, is the first time the health and wellbeing benefits of the UK's woodlands have been quantified.

For England specifically, woodlands save £141 million costs associated with mental health illnesses, including visits to GPs, drug prescriptions, inpatient care, social services and the number of days lost due to mental health issues. The figures are based on evidence of the reduced incidence of depression and anxiety resulting from regular visits to woodlands.

During the coronavirus pandemic, the prevalence of mental illness has increased. Access to trees, woods, forests, and other natural environments including urban parks and green spaces has become even more important for individuals to support and maintain their wellbeing. Of visits to all greenspace over the past 10 years, from farmland and countryside to parks and playing fields), 14.1% of these were made to woodlands.

In urban areas, trees and woodlands are essential for communities, supporting wellbeing, reducing pollution and improving quality of life. Supporting this, the report finds that the value of street trees through avoided antidepressant costs related to mental health issues is £16 million.

The report also finds that longer term, the value over the next 100 years is estimated to be just over £11 billion for the mental health benefits of visits to woodlands, and a further £1 billion for the mental health benefits of street trees.

**Forestry Commission Chair, Sir William Worsley, said:**

This report demonstrates just how vital it is to invest in healthy trees and woodlands. It makes medical sense, because it will mean better health for all; economic sense, by saving society millions of pounds and it makes environmental sense, helping us to tackle the twin challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss.

This National Tree Week, let's all step outside, enjoy trees in town and countryside and reap the benefits of being close to nature.

[Almost half the population say that they are spending more time outside than before the pandemic](#), while the majority of adults surveyed by [Forest Research](#) agreed that their level of happiness when in woodlands and nature has increased.

As recent hosts of the climate change summit COP26, and President of the G7, the UK is leading the climate change agenda. Today's report highlights the role of nature as our most precious asset, reiterating the reliance of economies, livelihoods and well-being on nature.

The Government has committed to trebling tree planting rates by the end of this Parliament. It's new England Trees Action Plan will deliver unprecedented rates of tree planting, helping to create diverse treescapes across the country which will benefit wildlife, the environment and people's wellbeing.

[Read the 'Valuing the mental health benefits of woodlands' report here.](#)

[For more information on wellbeing opportunities in our nations forests, please visit the Forestry England site.](#)

**Supportive quotes:**

**Welcoming the study, Scottish Government Environment Minister Màiri McAllan said:**

Scotland's forests and woodlands offer so many environmental, social and economic benefits to society. During Covid-19 pandemic,

access to woodlands has become even more important to individuals in supporting and maintaining their well-being.

It is widely recognised that spending time in woodlands can have a positive effect on alleviating conditions such as depression and anxiety. This study is important because we now have a clear monetary value on how much our woodland resource could be worth in tackling poor mental health.

**Welsh Deputy Climate Change Minister, Lee Waters, said:**

Earlier this year I issued a national call to arms for us to plant more trees in Wales and one of the reasons for doing so was the benefit they have on our health and mental wellbeing.

I welcome this report, which makes for fascinating reading and provides yet more evidence as to why we need to plant more and more trees if we are to create a stronger, greener, fairer Wales.

According to the Climate Change Committee, to reach net zero, we need to plant 43,000 hectares of new trees by 2030, rising to 180,000 hectares by 2050. That means planting around 86 million trees over the next nine years. To achieve this, we have big ambitions that include creating a network of high quality, multi-purpose woodland across Wales and today's report really does show how much of a positive impact this work will have.

**Stephen Buckley, Head of Information for mental health charity Mind said:**

Spending time outdoors – especially in woodlands or near water – can help with mental health problems such as anxiety and mild to moderate depression. This might be due to combining regular physical activity and social contact with being outside in nature. Being outside in natural light can also be helpful if you experience seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a type of depression that affects people during particular seasons or times of year. Although many of us feel like hibernating in winter, getting outside in green spaces and making the most of the little daylight we get can really benefit both your physical and mental health.