

Veterans UK Enquiry Centre Festive Opening Hours

News story

Details of the Veterans UK enquiry centre festive opening hours for customers.



Veterans UK Helpline Festive Opening Hours

Date	Opening hours
Monday 20 December	08.00 – 16.00
Tuesday 21 December	08.00 – 16.00
Wednesday 22 December	8.00 – 16.00
Thursday 23 December	08.00 – 16.00
Friday 24 December	08.00 – 12.00
Monday 27 December	Closed
Tuesday 28 December	Closed
Wednesday 29 December	08.00 – 14.00
Thursday 30 December	08.00 – 14.00
Friday 31 December	08.00 – 14.00
Monday 3 January	Closed
Tuesday 4 January	08.00 – 16.00

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[UK announces new Special Envoy to the](#)

Western Balkans

The Prime Minister has appointed a Special Envoy to the Western Balkans as part of the UK's ongoing commitment to stability and prosperity in the region.

[Sir Stuart Peach](#) will take on the role after stepping down as Chairman of the NATO Military Committee earlier this year, a role he held since 2018. He also formerly served as the UK Chief of the Defence Staff.

As the PM's Special Envoy, Sir Stuart will work with Western Balkans leaders, others across the region and our allies in the US and Europe to support and strengthen regional stability. His work will also involve promoting strong democratic institutions and open societies, helping to tackle serious and organised crime and other joint security challenges, and encouraging resolution of legacy issues such as War Crimes and Missing Persons. Linked to the latter, the UK will also continue to lead work to advance gender equality and implement the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sir Stuart's work will support that of the international High Representative, Christian Schmidt, who continues to have the full support of the UK. On Serbia and Kosovo, he will work with our partners in support of the EU-facilitated Serbia-Kosovo Dialogue.

The High Representative has warned that Bosnia and Herzegovina is currently facing the greatest existential threat in its post-war period, and that there is a real prospect of further division and conflict. Along with international partners, the UK is working to tackle any threats to stability in line with the Dayton Peace Agreement which has underpinned 26 years of hard-won progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The UK is also helping to address other regional challenges, including supporting the normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo, and combatting organised crime groups. The UK will play an important role, working closely with the governments of the region and its international partners.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

The UK is deeply committed to European security. The Western Balkans are experiencing the biggest threat to their stability and security in over two decades. We have a responsibility to do all we can to preserve the gains achieved through peace and dialogue – we cannot allow any return to the violence and division of the past. Sir Stuart's extensive experience and expertise will reinforce international efforts to protect peace and promote Euro-Atlantic integration in this crucial region.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

Sir Stuart's appointment is a clear demonstration of Britain's

commitment to the Western Balkans and to the defence and promotion of freedom and democracy in the region. I look forward to deepening our economic and security ties with the Western Balkans and working together to deter malign actors. Sir Stuart will play a key role in that work.

The political situation in the Western Balkans was discussed at the NATO Foreign Ministers' meeting in Riga, and will be on the agenda at the G7 Foreign Ministers' meeting in Liverpool, which was announced earlier this week.

Background:

The countries in the Western Balkans are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. Sir Stuart will also work with wider regional stakeholders including neighbouring countries and relevant international organisations.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach **GBE, KCB, ADC, DL**

Previously Sir Stuart was the 32nd Chairman of the Military Committee of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); the most senior and longest standing military structure in the Alliance.

Air Chief Marshal Peach was NATO's most senior military officer and the Military Adviser to the Secretary General and the North Atlantic Council. In addition, he was the United Kingdom's most senior serving officer.

He was educated in the West Midlands, attended the University of Sheffield (BA), University of Cambridge (MPhil in International Law and International Relations), RAF Staff College and the Joint Services Command and Staff College (HCSC). He holds four honorary Doctorates from UK Universities: Hull, Kingston, Sheffield and Loughborough, in Technology and Letters (DTech, DLitt).

Commissioned into the Royal Air Force in 1974, Sir Stuart qualified as a nuclear, weapons and electronic warfare instructor.

Operational service includes Belize, Hong Kong and Germany in the 1980s. After several staff tours he was Air Commander (Forward) in HQ KFOR (NATO) in Kosovo and was Deputy Senior British Military Adviser in US HQ Central Command 2001-2002.

He was Director General Intelligence Collection in the Ministry of Defence

2003-2006 and Chief of Defence Intelligence and Deputy Chairman of the UK Joint Intelligence Committee 2006-2009, where he held the UK seat at the NATO Intelligence Board. He held the appointment of Chief of Joint Operations at PJHQ from March 2009 to December 2011, commanding all UK Force Elements in support of NATO operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

He was then the first Commander of the UK Joint Forces Command from December 2011 to Apr 2013. He was Vice Chief of the Defence Staff from May 2013 to May 2016 and was responsible for all UK military personnel in NATO. He was Chief of the Defence Staff from July 2016 to June 2018 and assumed the role of Chairman of the Military Committee of NATO in June 2018, his fourth four-star appointment.

He is a Fellow of the Royal College of Defence Studies, an Honorary Fellow of the Downing College Cambridge and Royal Institute of Navigation. He was knighted by HM The Queen (KCB) in 2009, and became a Knight Grand Cross of the British Empire (GBE) in 2016.

Air Chief Marshal Peach is married with two children.

[Government agrees new deals to future proof vaccine rollout in light of new variant](#)

- Deals include 60 million additional doses of the Moderna vaccine and 54 million more Pfizer/BioNTech doses
- New agreements to future proof booster programme sped up in light of new variant

The government has signed new contracts to secure the supply of our vaccine stock to future proof the country's vaccine programme.

The new contracts with Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna were accelerated in light of the new variant, as part of the ongoing efforts to ensure the government is doing everything it can while scientists across the world learn more about Omicron. These future supply deals include access to modified vaccines if they are needed to combat Omicron and future Variants of Concern, to prepare for all eventualities.

The agreements signed through the Vaccine Taskforce are building on existing partnerships with the vaccine companies, and will see the government procure a total of 114 million additional doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines for 2022 and 2023. This is in addition to the 35 million additional doses of Pfizer/BioNTech ordered in August for delivery in the second half of next year, and the 60 million Novavax and 7.5 million GSK/Sanofi doses

expected in 2022.

Following the emergence of the new variant, the Health and Social Care Secretary asked the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) for rapid advice on extending the booster programme to all those aged 18 and over. The advice was accepted this week, with operational plans being set out to speed up the vaccine programme and offer all eligible adults in England a vaccine by the end of January.

To speed up the vaccination programme, around 400 military personnel will be 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. More than 3,000 sites are already open in England – more than double the number in February. The government already has enough supply of both Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech for the expanded booster programme, and the new deal makes sure we will continue to have the supplies we need moving forward.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Thanks to the Vaccines Taskforce, we have an excellent track record of securing the vaccines the country needs to keep this virus at bay.

These new deals will future proof the Great British vaccination effort – which has so far delivered more than 115 million first, second and booster jabs across the UK – and will ensure we can protect even more people in the years ahead.

This is a national mission and our best weapon to deal with this virus and its variants is to get jabs in arms – so when you are called forward, get the jab and get boosted.

For the booster programme, the JCVI has advised that mRNA vaccines are offered made by Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna.

Data from the COV-BOOST trial indicate that booster doses of COVID-19 vaccines are generally well tolerated and provide a substantial increase in vaccine-induced immune responses. In particular, mRNA vaccines provide a strong booster effect.

As well as ensuring we have supply to protect the public in this country, the UK remains committed to donating 100 million doses to countries in need by mid-2022. We will have donated more than 30 million vaccines by the end of 2021 and have announced plans for donations totalling 70 million doses so far.

We will continue to work to ensure that any vaccine that the UK does not need is reallocated to other nations who require it wherever possible.

The latest data shows why boosters are so vital. The most recent evidence

from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) shows that protection against symptomatic disease from the Delta variant falls from 65%, up to 3 months after the second dose, to 45% 6 months after the second dose for the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, and from 90% to 65% for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. Protection against hospitalisation falls from 95% to 75% for Oxford/AstraZeneca and 99% to 90% for Pfizer/BioNTech.

The first UK real world study from the UK Health Security Agency published in November showed that boosters give over 90% protection against symptomatic COVID-19 in adults over 50, reinforcing how vital the boosters are keeping people safe ahead of winter.

These findings show that two weeks after receiving a booster dose, protection against symptomatic infection in adults aged 50 years and over was 93.1% in those with Oxford/AstraZeneca as their primary course and 94.0% for Pfizer/BioNTech.

MHRA approves Xevudy (sotrovimab), a COVID-19 treatment found to cut hospitalisation and death by 79%

Another COVID-19 treatment, Xevudy (sotrovimab), has today been approved by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) after it was found to be safe and effective at reducing the risk of hospitalisation and death in people with mild to moderate COVID-19 infection who are at an increased risk of developing severe disease.

This follows a rigorous review of its safety, quality and effectiveness by the UK regulator and the government's independent expert scientific advisory body, the Commission on Human Medicines, making it the second monoclonal antibody therapeutic to be approved following [Ronapreve](#).

Developed by GSK and Vir Biotechnology, sotrovimab is a single monoclonal antibody. The drug works by binding to the spike protein on the outside of the COVID-19 virus. This in turn prevents the virus from attaching to and entering human cells, so that it cannot replicate in the body.

In a clinical trial, a single dose of the monoclonal antibody was found to reduce the risk of hospitalisation and death by 79% in high-risk adults with symptomatic COVID-19 infection.

Based on the clinical trial data, sotrovimab is most effective when taken during the early stages of infection and so the MHRA recommends its use as soon as possible and within five days of symptom onset.

Like [molnupiravir](#), it has been authorised for use in people who have mild to moderate COVID-19 infection and at least one risk factor for developing severe illness. Such risk factors include obesity, older age (>60 years), diabetes mellitus, or heart disease.

Unlike molnupiravir, sotrovimab is administered by intravenous infusion over 30 minutes. It is approved for individuals aged 12 and above who weigh more than 40kg.

It is too early to know whether the omicron variant has any impact on sotrovimab's effectiveness but the MHRA will work with the company to establish this.

Dr June Raine, MHRA Chief Executive said:

"I am pleased to say that we now have another safe and effective COVID-19 treatment, Xevudy (sotrovimab), for those at risk of developing severe illness.

"This is yet another therapeutic that has been shown to be effective at protecting those most vulnerable to COVID-19, and signals another significant step forward in our fight against this devastating disease.

"With no compromises on quality, safety and effectiveness, the public can trust that the MHRA have conducted a robust and thorough assessment of all the available data."

Professor Sir Munir Pirmohamed, Chair of the Commission on Human Medicines, said:

"The Commission on Human Medicines and its COVID-19 Therapeutics Expert Working Group has independently reviewed the data and agrees with the MHRA's regulatory approval of Xevudy (sotrovimab).

"When administered in the early stages of infection, sotrovimab was found to be effective at reducing the risk of hospitalisation and death in high-risk individuals with symptomatic COVID-19. Based on the data reviewed by the Commission and its expert group, it is clear sotrovimab is another safe and effective treatment to help us in our fight against COVID-19."

Sotrovimab is not intended to be used as a substitute for vaccination against COVID-19.

The government and the NHS will confirm how this COVID-19 treatment will be deployed to patients in due course.

Notes to editors

- The [Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency](#) is responsible for protecting and improving the health of millions of people every day through the effective regulation of all medicines and medical devices in the UK by ensuring they work and are acceptably safe. All our work is underpinned by robust and fact-based judgements to ensure that the

benefits justify any risks.

- The MHRA is a centre of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency which also includes the [National Institute for Biological Standards and Control \(NIBSC\)](#) and the [Clinical Practice Research Datalink \(CPRD\)](#). MHRA is an executive agency of the [Department of Health and Social Care](#).
- The [Commission on Human Medicines \(CHM\)](#) advises ministers on the safety, efficacy and quality of medicinal products. The CHM is an advisory non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department of Health and Social Care.
- The MHRA's Conditional Marketing Authorisation for sotrovimab is valid in Great Britain only. An emergency use authorisation has been granted for Northern Ireland to ensure access across the whole of the United Kingdom. Both authorisations were made on the basis of the same rigorous evaluation.
- More information can be found in the [product information](#)