

# Government sets out new action to tackle B1.617.2 variant

- Vaccine roll-out drive bolstered in Bedford, Burnley, Hounslow, Kirklees, Leicester and North Tyneside to protect the most vulnerable
- In partnership with local authorities, additional testing and contact-tracing measures being deployed across these locations to isolate cases and break transmission chains

The government has outlined new decisive actions to halt the spread of the B1.617.2 variant of concern first identified in India.

Following extensive COVID-19 surveillance, which has rapidly detected cases of the B1.617.2 variant first identified in India, additional surge testing, tracing and isolation support measures are being deployed at pace across Bedford, Burnley, Hounslow, Kirklees, Leicester and North Tyneside.

The government continues to work in close partnership with local authorities to ensure the right action is taken at the right time, and to boost uptake of the approved vaccines for those eligible in these areas.

We are also providing support to the Scottish Government, who are adopting similar action to control the spread of variants in Glasgow and Moray.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

We are determined to do all we can to ensure this new variant doesn't put our recovery at risk.

So we've acted fast, to guard the gains that we've made together. We are putting in place more testing – more testing sites – and on vaccinations, we are making more vaccinations available to everyone who's eligible.

To everyone in these areas, please exercise caution, get a test, and as soon as you're eligible, get the jab.

The latest data on the B1.617.2 variant shows the number of cases across the UK has risen to 2,967 cases. Most cases remain predominantly in the North West of England, with some in London.

While there is no evidence to show this variant has a greater impact on severity of disease or evades the vaccine, the speed of growth is of note and the government is working quickly to ensure the appropriate action is being taken.

Targeted activity will take place across Bedford, Burnley, Hounslow, Kirklees, Leicester and North Tyneside to continue to drive vaccine uptake

amongst eligible cohorts to protect the most vulnerable.

This includes, based on an assessment of local need, exploring opportunities to:

- expand existing assets – for example, extending opening hours and capacity of existing sites
- develop new capacity to support outreach directly to communities – for example, vaccine buses, additional pop-up sites
- utilise innovative methods of delivery where appropriate – for example, drive-through and roving delivery to workplaces via St John Ambulances
- co-locate vaccination sites with surge testing to support increased convenience for local residents
- increase local and targeted communications, working with community leaders to target underserved communities

Working in partnership with local authorities across Bedford, Burnley, Hounslow, Kirklees, Leicester and North Tyneside, strengthened testing operations are helping to control the spread of COVID-19 variants.

Testing will be ramped up to meet local needs, which will include additional mobile testing units, door-to-door testing and extra polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test kits for community testing sites.

In Bolton, a 100-strong Surge Rapid Response Team continues to support the local authority with door-to-door testing and encouraging residents to take a PCR test. The response team are now engaged with Bedford, providing some planning and coordination support to help them develop their testing strategy.

Additional measures will be implemented in areas where clusters of cases have been detected to stop further spread. These include:

- enhanced testing and contact tracing, including enhanced community and surge testing in areas defined by the local authorities and regional teams
- genomic sequencing of positive cases
- increased community engagement, including ensuring that messages are accessible in languages that are used by communities
- working closely with communities and community leaders to ensure that individuals are supported to test and self-isolate
- encouraging uptake for the age and risk groups currently prioritised for vaccination.

NHS Test and Trace works with each local authority to tailor the response to the local community to best meet local needs. Some of these areas are using genomic sequencing and enhanced contract tracing without more targeted testing, depending on the outcome of the public health assessment.

The government and its scientific experts are monitoring the evolving situation and rates of variants closely, and will not hesitate to take additional action as necessary.

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# Offender's sentence increased following intervention by the Solicitor General

News story

Mark Murphy has had his sentence increased following an intervention by the Solicitor General, Rt Hon Lucy Frazer QC MP.



A man has had his sentence increased following an intervention by the Solicitor General, Rt Hon Lucy Frazer QC MP.

Mark Murphy, 34, began messaging an online dating profile, unaware that it had been set up by an undercover police officer posing as a fourteen-year-old girl. He was arrested after arranging to meet at what he thought was the girl's home in Gloucester.

Murphy pleaded guilty and was sentenced to a three-year community order on 9 March 2021 at Gloucester Crown Court, and was also ordered to complete 200 hours of unpaid work and 40 days' rehabilitation activity.

Following the Court's decision, the Solicitor General referred Murphy's sentence to the Court of Appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme.

On 20 May 2021, the Court ruled that the sentence was unduly lenient and increased it to 2 years' imprisonment.

After the hearing at the Court of Appeal, the Solicitor General, Rt Hon Lucy Frazer QC MP, said:

I was shocked and appalled by Murphy's intentions and it was only thanks to the vigilance of our police that his criminality did not extend further. I welcome the decision of the Court of Appeal to

increase his sentence.

The Court of Appeal has decided that where a defendant sets out to sexually abuse a child, but in circumstances where the child happens to be an adult posing as a child, then the starting point for sentencing should be set by reference to the harm that the defendant intended to cause the fictional child. The fact that there was no real child for the defendant to abuse will then be reflected in a downward movement from that starting point. The extent of that reduction will be a matter for the court in individual cases to decide.

Published 20 May 2021

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## **New UK Government COVID Testing Centre opens in East Lothian**

The UK Government has today, Thursday 20 May, opened a new walk-through coronavirus testing centre at Ramsay Croft Car Park (EH22 1JD).

The test centre is part of the largest network of diagnostic testing facilities created in British history. In Scotland, this comprises eight drive through sites, 49 walk-through sites, 42 mobile units, plus the Glasgow Lighthouse Lab which is working round the clock to process samples.

In Scotland, the UK Government is providing all COVID testing and test processing outside of the NHS. PCR tests must be booked in advance at: [www.nhsinform.scot/test-and-protect](http://www.nhsinform.scot/test-and-protect) or by calling 119. People should only book at test if they have coronavirus symptoms (a high temperature, a new and continuous cough, or a loss or change to their sense of smell or taste) or have been instructed to do so by a clinician or NHS contact tracer.

Lateral Flow Test Kits are also now available for pick up without an appointment at the majority of our local walk-in or drive-through test sites from 3.30pm each day. Tests can also be ordered online or by phone by calling 119. For more information and to order a test kit online, go to: Coronavirus (COVID-19): getting tested in Scotland – gov.scot ([www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot))

Health Minister Lord Bethell said:

To respond to the coronavirus, we have built a major testing and tracing system from scratch. We are constantly working to expand and improve it with new technologies and innovations so everyone with symptoms can get a test.

New walk-in sites like this one makes it even easier to get a test no matter where you live. If you have symptoms of coronavirus, I urge you to book a test today and follow the advice of NHS Test and Protect if you are contacted to protect others and stop the spread of the virus.

UK Government Minister for Scotland, Iain Stewart said

The UK Government continues to provide the bulk of testing in Scotland, a programme which is vital to our recovery from this pandemic. Alongside the roll-out of UK Government-funded vaccines, testing is helping us to manage the virus, slow down the rate of transmission and protect communities.

I'd like to thank the public for continuing to do the right thing by coming forward to be tested if they show symptoms.

This new walk-through facility in Dalkeith is the latest in our extensive network of testing centres supporting people in all parts of the UK.

Simon Venn, Mitie Chief Government & Strategy Officer, said:

Our priority during the pandemic is to support the nation's efforts to fight COVID-19 and help keep the country running. Testing is a critical part of the UK's strategy to combat coronavirus and we're proud to support the UK Government with this vital task. A big thank you to all the NHS staff, Mitie employees and other frontline heroes in Dalkeith, who are working tirelessly to keep us all safe.

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## [Change of British High Commissioner to Mauritius: Charlotte Pierre](#)

Press release

Ms Charlotte Pierre has been appointed British High Commissioner to the Republic of Mauritius in succession to Mr Keith Allan.



Ms Charlotte Pierre has been appointed British High Commissioner to the Republic of Mauritius in succession to Mr Keith Allan who will be transferring to another Diplomatic Service appointment. Ms Pierre will take up her appointment during August 2021.

## Curriculum vitae

Full name: Charlotte Anik Rachel Pierre

Married to: Paul Norris

Children: Two

Date	Role
2019 to present	FCD0, Deputy Director, West Africa Department, Africa Directorate
2019	DFID, Acting Director, Middle East and North Africa
2018 to 2019	DFID, Deputy Director, Syria, Iraq and Turkey
2017 to 2018	DFID, Deputy Director, Country Programmes Cabinet
2016 to 2017	DFID, Head – National Security Team, Conflict Department
2015 to 2016	DFID, Chief of Staff – Middle East and North Africa, Afghanistan/ Pakistan Directorates
2013 to 2015	DFID, Head – Human Development Team, Ghana
2012 to 2013	DFID, Programme Manager, Jerusalem
2008 to 2012	DFID, Deputy Head, OPTs
2007 to 2008	DFID, Private Secretary, Top Management Group
2006 to 2007	FCO, Head – North/South Sudan Section, Sudan Unit
2000 to 2006	FCO and DFID, Fast Stream

## Further information

All the latest news is available on the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office page of the gov.uk website at: [www.gov.uk/fcdo](http://www.gov.uk/fcdo)

Published 20 May 2021

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# Charity regulator launches inquiry into financial concerns at The Knightland Foundation

Press release

The Charity Commission has opened a statutory inquiry and appointed two interim managers to a London-based grant-making charity, due to serious concerns surrounding the charity's governance and finances.



The Commission has engaged with the Knightland Foundation since 2016, when its proactive review of the charity's accounts revealed a number of concerns, including around insufficiently documented loan agreements and transactions to connected companies. In March 2017, the Commission issued the charity's trustees with an action plan to address these matters.

The Commission continued to monitor the charity and due to unresolved concerns, it escalated its engagement to a statutory inquiry on 24 February 2021. An inquiry gives the regulator access to the full range of its legal and enforcement powers.

The inquiry will examine whether potential conflicts of interest and connected party transactions have been properly managed and whether there has been any unauthorised trustee benefit. It will also look at wider concerns around the charity's financial and resource management and the trustees' compliance with their legal obligations.

The Commission has also exercised its powers under the Charities Act 2011 to appoint joint interim managers, John Dickinson and Joseph Colley, of Carter Backer Winter LLP, on 7 April 2021 to help address the concerns at the charity.

**Ends.**

**Notes to editors:**

1. [View the charity's entry on the register of charities.](#)
2. The trustees have appealed the appointment of the interim managers to the Charity Tribunal and the hearing is expected to take place in early summer.
3. The Charity Commission is the independent, non-ministerial government department that registers and regulates charities in England and Wales. Its purpose is to ensure charity can thrive and inspire trust so that people can improve lives and strengthen society.
4. The Commission may extend the scope of the inquiry if additional regulatory issues emerge.
5. It is the Commission's policy, after it has concluded an inquiry, to publish a report detailing what issues the inquiry looked at, what actions were undertaken as part of the inquiry and what the outcomes were. Reports of previous inquiries are available on [GOV.UK](#).
6. Section 76(3)(g) of the Charities Act 2011 gives the Commission power to appoint interim managers to a charity. Interim managers are appointed as a temporary and protective measure where the Commission has identified misconduct and/or mismanagement in the administration of a charity, or where there is a need to protect a charity's property.
7. This appointment is a temporary and protective power that will be reviewed at regular intervals. It will continue until the Commission makes a further order for its variation or discharge.

Published 20 May 2021