

New measures to boost response to the B1.617.2 variant

- The government is closely monitoring the variant first identified in India (B1.617.2) and taking action along with NHS Test and Trace and local authorities
- A new Surge Rapid Response Team is being deployed in Bolton, additional surge testing will shortly launch in areas such as Formby, and enhanced contact tracing is in place across England
- Ministers are also considering a range of options which could include bringing forward second doses for eligible groups

The B1.617.2 variant of concern is beginning to spread increasingly rapidly in certain areas across the country and decisive action is being taken to further control its spread including additional surge testing, increased genomic sequencing and enhanced contact tracing.

While there is no firm evidence yet to show this variant has any greater impact on severity of disease or evades the vaccine, the speed of growth is concerning and the government is considering additional action if deemed necessary, including how to best utilise the vaccine roll-out to best protect the most vulnerable in the context of the current epidemiology.

The latest data on the B1.617.2 variant, published by PHE this evening, shows the number of cases across the UK has risen from 520 last week, to 1313 cases this week. Most cases are in the North West of England, with some in London.

Working in partnership with local authorities, additional measures are being put in place to help control the spread of COVID-19 variants and rapidly break chains of transmission.

To help identify variant cases, surge testing is already being deployed in 15 areas across England to suppress transmission, with more than 800,000 additional PCR test kits distributed. Over 4,400 cases and over 14,000 close contacts have been traced and instructed to self-isolate. Over 200 existing test sites and 130 schools have distributed test kits, with Mobile Testing Units deployed to provide PCR testing for people without symptoms.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Matt Hancock, said:

This data demonstrates why our swift and decisive measures are in place. Everyone has a part to play in controlling this variant, from participating in surge testing, to following the rules, to getting the jab. We are committed to working with local areas and deploying our world-leading genomic sequencing to get this variant under control. We are supporting areas where the cases of this variant are rising.

We are monitoring the situation very carefully and will not

hesitate to take further action if necessary.

It is imperative we all continue to be vigilant, and if you live in one of the 15 areas where we've introduced surge testing, make sure you get a free PCR test. And everyone who's eligible needs to come forward and get a jab.

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
- Increased genome 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
- Ensuring access to vaccination in the age and risk groups currently prioritised for vaccination and encouraging uptake

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.

The Surge Rapid Response Team in Bolton will include 100 nurses, public health advisers and environmental health officers, and will provide support to the local authority through door to door testing and encouraging residents to take a PCR test.

These teams were used recently in the London borough of Lambeth, where support was deployed hours after being requested. Over 5,000 households were visited in Lambeth over three days, helping many more residents to access testing.

In London, all positive tests with a high enough viral load are also being prioritised for genomic sequencing to check for variants, and surge testing can begin immediately if it is needed.

The public is being urged to continue to take up the offer of two free rapid tests a week, to help identify asymptomatic cases. Anyone who does test positive should take a follow up PCR test, which can be sent for genome sequencing to help catch new variant cases.

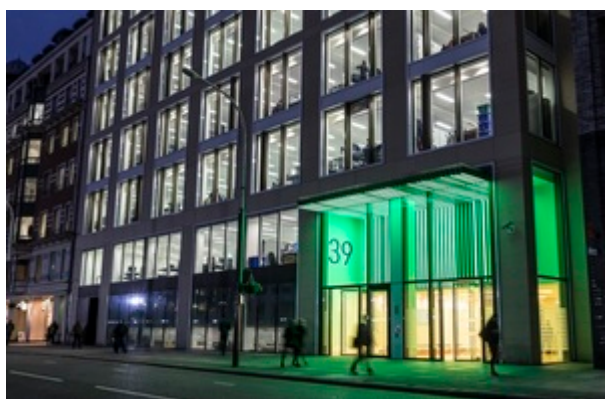
The best way for people to protect against the virus is to continue following the public health advice in their area – taking a test, getting their vaccine when asked, and following the rules on hands, face, space and fresh air.

As set out in the roadmap, we cannot rule out re-imposing economic and social restrictions at a local or regional level if evidence suggests they are necessary to contain or suppress a variant which escapes the vaccine.

Surge testing to be deployed in Formby, Sefton

Press release

NHS Test and Trace is providing additional testing in Formby, Sefton where the variant first identified in India has been found.



Everyone over the age of 16 who lives, works or studies in Formby, Sefton should take a COVID-19 PCR test.

Working in partnership with the local authority, NHS Test and Trace is providing additional testing and genomic sequencing targeted in Formby, Sefton. It follows the identification of confirmed cases of the variant first identified in India (B.1.617).

The confirmed cases have self-isolated and their contacts are being identified.

Everyone who lives, works or studies in the targeted areas is strongly encouraged to take a COVID-19 PCR test, whether they are showing symptoms or not from Friday 14 May.

Enhanced contact tracing will be used for individuals testing positive with a variant of concern (VOC). This is where contact tracers look back over an extended period to determine the route of transmission.

By using PCR testing, positive results can be sent for genomic sequencing at specialist laboratories, helping us to identify VOC cases and their spread.

If you have symptoms you should book a free test online or by phone so you can be tested at a testing site or have a testing kit sent to your home. If you have no symptoms, you should visit the [Worcestershire council website](#) for more information.

People in this area should continue using twice-weekly rapid testing

alongside the PCR test as part of surge testing.

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[Every school with Reception class offered early language training](#)

Every state school with a Reception class in England can now apply for training and resources through an early years catch-up programme funded by the Government, to support thousands more pupils with vital communication skills.

Delivered by the Nuffield Foundation and backed by an extra £8 million of investment, recruitment has launched for the second wave of the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI), a programme proven to be effective in raising outcomes in Reception-age children's early language, communication and speech skills – particularly those who need the most support to overcome the disruption of the pandemic.

Part of the Government's major investment to build back better from the pandemic, it builds on last summer's £9 million investment to launch the [first wave](#) of NELI, which means 62,000 four and five-year-olds are receiving extra support to get their education back on track after time spent away from the classroom.

Visiting All Saints C of E Primary School in Merton, one of more than [6,600 schools](#) already receiving the intervention through its first wave, Children and Families Minister Vicky Ford spoke to staff delivering the programme about the positive changes on Reception children's confidence with language and communication and how the it has helped them re-engage with their classmates.

Children and Families Minister Vicky Ford said:

We know the first years of a child's life can be the most formative, which is why this Government is making it a priority to make sure all children have the best start in life.

Speaking and communicating with confidence sets a child up for success in life, so it's vital that we support children to grow in confidence with these skills – especially those for whom English is not their first language or who have been more isolated during the pandemic than their peers.

The early results from Nuffield are very encouraging and I

encourage every school with a Reception class to sign up in this second phase.

The £8 million expansion was [announced](#) by the Prime Minister in February as part of the new £700 million package to tackle lost learning, following the original £9 million investment as part of the National Tutoring Programme in June 2020.

The expansion for the 2021-22 schools year will be managed and delivered by the Nuffield Foundation on the Government's behalf, supported again by the University of Oxford and Oxford University Press.

Developed by researchers at the Universities of Oxford, Sheffield and York, NELI helps young pupils identified as needing targeted language support, offering individual and small-group language teaching sessions to between three and six pupils, run by a trained teaching assistant or early years professional.

Nearly 20,000 staff members have already received online training and the intervention is run over 20 weeks. Sessions with the children feature 'Ted' the NELI puppet for games that help them concentrate on their speaking, listening and learning.

Angela Filsell, headteacher of All Saints' Church of England Primary School, said:

We are incredibly proud to welcome children from all communities to All Saints', many of whom join us with little or no knowledge of English. Over the years, we've observed that many children in the later years of primary school struggle to write full and coherent sentences that feature good vocabulary choices, so we have looked at how we can improve that support.

By electing to take part in the NELI programme we recognised the need to take a 'bottom up' approach in order improve speaking and listening skills, which in the long run increases children's progress and attainment across the curriculum. This programme compliments, and is layered on top of, our wide curriculum offer, which includes elements of Talk for Writing. We are very proud of our child-led curriculum here.

Eleven children were highlighted in the NELI screening process, which was easily accessed online. We run two groups three times each week, alongside additional one-to-one sessions. We've also invested time and made NELI a key priority. This commitment has yielded great results, even prior to the midway point being reached.

A further outcome has been improved behaviour, as the children become less frustrated socially and can communicate their wants and needs. The online training for staff was engaging and Ted [the

puppet used in NELI training] is a favourite with the children.

Findings from the most recent trial of NELI funded by the Education Endowment Foundation found that children receiving the intervention made an extra three months additional progress in their oral language skills compared to children who did not.

Josh Hillman, Director of Education at Nuffield Foundation, said:

The disruption to early education caused by the pandemic is far from over, with opportunities for pre-school children to develop their language skills significantly reduced by restrictions on social interaction.

Rigorous evaluations have proven that NELI helps children, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with English as an additional language, to accelerate their language development and early literacy skills. We would encourage all schools who have not yet done so to register to receive the free training and resources to deliver this successful programme.

Alongside the investment in NELI, the government also announced in February a £10 million investment for an early language programme to help nursery-age children affected by the pandemic. The Department for Education is separately investing £20 million in a professional development programme for staff working in pre-reception early years settings to boost standards in early language, literacy and maths among young children in disadvantaged areas.

Children in reception year will also benefit from the government's £650m catch up premium for schools, to ensure they have the support they need to make up for lost teaching time. Sir Kevan Collins has been appointed as Education Recovery Commissioner to help develop and implement long term solutions to help pupils most impacted by time out of the classroom.

Schools can find out more information and complete their registration to receive NELI [here](#). Places on the programme are limited and registration is offered on a first come first served basis.

Draft legislation: The Motor Fuel (Composition and Content) and Biofuel

[\(Labelling\) Amendment Regulations 2021](#)

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[Draft Legislation: The Railway \(Licensing of Railway Undertakings\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2021](#)

As part of the government's EU transition programme, the Department for Transport, working with colleagues in other government departments, has been in discussion with France on bilateral arrangements to support the continuation of cross-border services, which provide significant economic and social benefit to the United Kingdom.

While other bilateral agreements remain under discussion in relation to the Channel Tunnel, the critical agreement relates to the recognition of operator licences, which are needed to operate rail services. Agreement in principle has now been reached with France at a technical level, subject to final legal checks, and the agreement is expected to be concluded in the coming weeks, with ratification through the UK and French parliaments then to follow.

Through these Regulations (which will amend earlier 2005 and 2019 Regulations), the government intends to take the necessary steps to ensure that the above-mentioned bilateral agreement on the rail operator licensing framework for the Channel Tunnel can be ratified, supporting the continued smooth operation of cross-border rail services.

The Regulations will enable cross-border operators to continue to operate as they do now and will not introduce any new requirements on them. Without this legislation, there is a real risk that rail freight services (excluding Eurotunnel shuttles) and Eurostar passenger services through the Channel Tunnel would cease to operate from 30 September 2021, when the current EU contingency legislation applicable to the Channel Tunnel expires.

The Regulations are being published in draft 28 days before they are due to be laid for affirmative debate. This is required under paragraph 14 of Schedule 8 to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 because the 2005 and

2019 regulations which are being amended were originally made under the European Communities Act 1972.

See the [draft Regulations and accompanying Explanatory Memorandum](#).