

# Delivering equitable vaccine access and a sustainable solution to conflict in Syria

Thank you, Mr President, and to our UN briefers, USG Lowcock and Special Envoy Pedersen.

I would like to start by focussing on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

In February, the Security Council unanimously adopted and co-sponsored resolution 2565 on global distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine in conflict situations.

We agreed on the importance of bringing the Security Council's full weight to bear on ending this appalling pandemic.

We recognised the vital need for equitable access to COVID19 vaccines.

And we all acknowledged the negative impact that any impediments, including on logistics, supply and administration, could have on efforts to ensure that all people, no matter where they live, have access to the vaccine.

With resolution 2565 in mind, the UK welcomes the first delivery to Syria of over 250,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine via the COVAX facility last week. This is a small, but important step towards realising the ambition of 2565 across Syria.

Having pledged over \$700 million in support, the UK has played a leading role in setting up the COVAX facility – it is a vital tool towards ensuring the equitable access we all called for just two months ago.

As we have heard today, vaccines arrived in North West Syria via the mandated border crossing at Bab al-Hawa last week. They will provide a vital lifeline to health workers on the frontline.

So we express our utmost concern at the predicted disruption, as outlined in the Secretary General's latest report and by USG Lowcock today, to future vaccine deliveries in North West Syria should this Council fail to renew the Bab al-Hawa mandate.

Such a failure would impede the global fight against COVID19 and contradict this Council's own ambition, as set out in 2565.

The UN has told us what it needs: a cross border response for 12 more months.

The life-saving aid currently provided via the crossing at Bab al-Hawa also includes World Food Programme deliveries serving millions of people and facilitates NGO operations that run services in protection, health, water, and sanitation.

The UK welcomes the UN's continued efforts to establish access into the North West inside Syria – but we need to heed the Secretary General's warnings: even if deployed regularly, cross-line convoys cannot replicate the size and scope of the cross-border operation.

The experience in Yaroubiyah, where needs and supply shortages have risen since the border crossing was closed last year, has demonstrated the importance of an 'all modalities' approach driven by humanitarian needs on the ground.

It is clear that this Council must heed the calls of Syrian people and humanitarians on the ground: the provision cross-border aid commensurate with humanitarian needs.

Turning to the political track, we welcome the Special Envoy's ongoing efforts to facilitate a sustainable resolution to the conflict.

We re-emphasise that full implementation of resolution 2254 is the only path to a sustainable solution to the crisis in Syria.

The core of that UN-facilitated Syrian-led process is the establishment of a new constitution, followed by free and fair elections, administered under supervision of the UN, pursuant to this new constitution. This sequence was deliberate, and designed to find an inclusive way forward for Syria based on dialogue and cooperation between Syrians.

Holding presidential elections at the end of May under the previous constitution runs counter to this process and, at a time when the Special Envoy is attempting to convene a sixth round of Constitutional Committee talks, risks destabilising his efforts.

Furthermore, elections that take place in the absence of a safe and neutral environment, in an ongoing climate of fear, when millions of Syrians depend on humanitarian aid, are displaced or living as refugees and are prevented from voting and running for the office, do not confer political legitimacy, but instead demonstrate disregard for the Syrian people.

Instead of prioritising vanity elections, the regime should focus on actively and genuinely participating in the implementation of resolution 2254.

Thank you, Mr President.

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## **UK Minister for the Commonwealth visits Rwanda ahead of CHOGM**

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, UK Minister of State for the Commonwealth, will visit Rwanda as it prepares to host Commonwealth leaders in June.



Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, UK Minister of State for the Commonwealth, will visit Rwanda as it prepares to host Commonwealth leaders in June. The Minister will see first-hand the Government of Rwanda's preparations for a safe and successful event.

The 26th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) is scheduled to take place in Kigali in June. At CHOGM, the UK will hand over to Rwanda the role of Commonwealth Chair-in-Office.

As outgoing Commonwealth Chair-in-Office, the UK has worked with our Commonwealth partners over the last three years to deliver over 40 projects across 6 continents, supported by £500m of UK funding, to create a better future for the Commonwealth's 2.4bn citizens.

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon said:

The UK commends Rwanda's work on its planning for a safe and secure meeting of the Commonwealth family at CHOGM 2021.

As Commonwealth Chair-in-Office for the past three years, the UK has worked in partnership across the Commonwealth to deliver the aspirations and commitments which Leaders set out on fairness, security, sustainability and prosperity at CHOGM in 2018.

The UK-funded Girls' Education Challenge, for example, is supporting up to 1.5 million marginalised girls across the world, including in 11 Commonwealth countries, ensuring they benefit from quality education. In Rwanda, the UK is proud to have supported education for 8,268 girls through the programme.

The UK has helped Rwanda to lift almost 2 million people out of poverty since 2005. As one of Rwanda's largest and most long-standing bilateral development partners, the UK is committed to supporting Rwanda's development and helping to build on the significant economic and social progress that has been made since the genocide twenty-seven years ago.

During his two day visit (29-30 April), Lord Ahmad will lay a wreath at the

Kigali Genocide Memorial. The Minister will meet with figures from the Government of Rwanda to discuss bilateral and Commonwealth issues, including climate change. He will also meet with human rights activists and journalists.

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## [Health and Social Care Secretary's statement on coronavirus \(COVID-19\): 28 April 2021](#)

Good afternoon and welcome to Downing Street for today's coronavirus briefing.

I'm joined by Professor Jonathan Van Tam, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, and Dr Nikki Kanani, the Medical Director for Primary Care at NHS England.

Today we've got an update on our fight against coronavirus, both here at home and around the world.

### **Support for India**

I'll start by talking about events around the world.

We've all seen the harrowing pictures of what's happening in India.

I think it pains each one of us who's seeing those scenes.

Not least because the bonds between our countries are so strong. And there are ties of family and friendship.

I've been in constant contact with my Indian counterpart.

And we worked over the weekend to put together our first package of support of ventilators and oxygen concentrators.

More supplies will be arriving later this week.

I've also been working with the Health Minister for Northern Ireland, Robin Swann, to donate large scale oxygen production equipment from Northern Ireland which is capable of producing over 1,000 litres of oxygen per minute – which is one of the main needs of the people of India.

I'd like to thank Robin for the incredible hard work he's done in getting this to the position it is so we can get it sent to India where it can

produce that oxygen that is so badly needed.

Everyone across this whole United Kingdom stands side-by-side with the people of India in these troubled times because in this battle against coronavirus, we're all on the same side.

This fight is a global fight.

And when other nations face their hour of need, as we have faced our hour of need here at home: we'll be there.

The situation in India is a stark reminder that this isn't over yet.

It shows how important it is that we're vigilant here at home.

Professor Van Tam will take us through the data in a moment.

## **Transmission data**

Just before we do, I want to give an update on the vaccination programme.

This morning we published new data, giving the first concrete evidence of how much vaccines reduce transmission within households.

We've seen already that a vaccine reduces your chance of catching COVID by around two thirds.

This new data looked at people who tested positive after having received one dose of the vaccine and found that they were up to 50 per cent less likely to pass on the disease to someone else in their household.

And we're looking at whether the second dose gives an even bigger effect.

We know that indoor settings have the highest risk of transmission.

So these results are very encouraging in terms of the impact of the vaccine on reducing transmission.

We're finding out more and more about the layers of protection you get from a vaccine, and how its impacting in the real world.

In summary, we think you get around two thirds protection against catching the disease at all, around four fifths reduction in your likelihood of ending up in hospital and around 85 per cent protection from dying of COVID.

That's the protection you get from one dose.

And in addition to all that, you're up to half as likely to pass it on to somebody else that you live with.

We expect the benefits to be even greater after two doses and we are monitoring that carefully.

What this means is the evidence is stacking up that the vaccine protects you,

protects your loved ones, and is the way out of this pandemic.

## **Vaccination programme**

The overall effectiveness of the vaccination programme comes from just two things.

One, how effective the vaccine is – that's the science if you like.

And two, how many people get the jabs. That of course is on all of us.

I just want to turn to the second of those for a moment as well.

First animation, please.

This shows the proportion of people who've had a jab, according to age group.

Green bars represent people who've had one dose, and the blue represent people who've had two.

And you can see they are growing over time as the vaccination programme reaches more and more people who are younger and younger.

As you can see, across the United Kingdom, uptake of the first dose among the over 50s is phenomenally high, at over 95 per cent.

And is rising sharply in people in their late forties who have been now able to receive the vaccine for a couple of weeks.

This is great progress, and it's something we can all celebrate, because we all have a part to play in this.

I'm delighted we've been able to offer the vaccine to even more people.

So anyone who's 42 or older can now come forward and get the jab.

I'm delighted about this, not just because it shows the progress we're making, I'm also delighted because it means I can get my jab too.

Just like every other 42 and 43 year old, I got a text from the NHS yesterday.

I went online and booked it for myself. It takes less than a minute.

And I'm looking forward to getting my jab first thing tomorrow morning.

In the words of our new campaign "every vaccination brings us hope".

## **Antibody data**

So, we've looked at the effectiveness of the vaccine and we've looked at the take up of the vaccine.

And now I want to turn to a combination of the two.

What I'm about to show you is not how many people have had the jab, but how many people have got the antibodies that make the jab effective. These antibodies that protect you from coronavirus.

This isn't a measure of the vaccination programme directly. This is a measure of the protection that we have, collectively, built up in people right across the country.

Can we have the second chart, please.

This data, released today by the ONS, is from a national survey where they visit over 20,000 people, and actually measure the antibodies in people's bloodstream.

The blue area shows the proportion of people who have COVID-19 antibodies.

As you can see, in the older age groups who got vaccinated first they are much more likely to have COVID-19 antibodies.

So more and more people are getting protection.

And now 7 in 10 adults have protective COVID antibodies. This is the vaccination programme in action.

It makes me so proud of what we've done.

We have been working on the vaccination programme for more than a year now.

And there's a massive team to it, and I'm grateful to them all.

But the thing that makes me proudest is how, when the call came, the whole nation who has been asked has effectively stepped forward.

This vaccination programme depends, yes, on the effectiveness of the science and that is crucial. But it depends on everybody stepping forward.

## **Booster programme and Pfizer doses**

The vaccine is helping us to bring back our freedom and we must protect this progress.

The biggest risk to that progress is the risk posed by a new variant.

So we're working on our plans for booster shots too.

To keep us safe and free here while we get this disease under control across the whole world.

We've been working on a programme of booster shots again for over a year now.

And we've backed some of the only clinical trials in the world looking specifically at booster shots.

I'm delighted to be able to tell you that we've secured a further 60 million doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

And that will be used, alongside others, as part of our booster shot programme from later this year.

And that is all about protecting the progress that we've made.

## **Conclusion**

We have a clear route out of this crisis.

But, this is no time for complacency, it's a time for caution.

So that we can keep the virus under control, while we take the steps, safely, back to normal life.

So please remember the basics of hands, face, space, and fresh air.

And crucially, if like me you get the call, join me and get the jab.

Now I'd like to hand over to Professor Van Tam to talk through the latest data and then to Dr Kanani to talk through some of the detailed data about that extraordinarily high take up of the vaccine

Thank you.

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## **UK secures extra 60 million Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccines**

- The government's Vaccines Taskforce has purchased an additional 60 million doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine
- Move will ensure people have the strongest possible protection from COVID-19

An extra 60 million doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine have been secured by the UK government to help support the booster COVID-19 vaccination programme beginning from the Autumn.

To protect the most vulnerable ahead of the winter, the government is preparing for a booster programme based on clinical need to ensure people have the strongest possible protection against COVID-19.

The additional Pfizer/BioNTech jabs will be used alongside other approved COVID-19 vaccines for the booster programme.

This comes as new data from Public Health England shows that one dose of a



COVID-19 vaccine reduces household transmission of the virus by up to half.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

Our vaccination programme is bringing back our freedom, but the biggest risk to that progress is the risk posed by a new variant.

We're working on our plans for booster shots, which are the best way to keep us safe and free while we get this disease under control across the whole world.

These further 60 million doses will be used, alongside others, as part of our booster programme from later this year, so we can protect the progress that we've all made.

The government will publish further details on the booster programme in due course and the final policy will be informed by advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and the results of clinical trials studying the use of different combinations of approved COVID-19 vaccines.

Vaccines Minister Nadhim Zahawi said:

We are doing everything we can to make sure the most vulnerable are protected from COVID-19 now and in the future.

Our brilliant Vaccines Taskforce has secured an extra 60 million doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines to support our booster programme, which will be developed in line with the advice of our experts.

In the meantime, we are making great progress with our vaccination rollout and I urge everybody to get their vaccines as soon as they are eligible.

Overall, the UK has secured access to 517 million doses of eight of the most promising COVID-19 vaccines. These are:

- Pfizer/BioNTech for 100 million doses – including the additional 60 million doses
- Oxford/AstraZeneca for 100 million doses
- Moderna for 17 million doses
- Janssen for 30 million doses

- Novavax for 60 million doses
- Valneva for 100 million doses
- GlaxoSmithKline and Sanofi Pasteur for 60 million doses
- CureVac for 50 million doses

Health services across the UK have now administered a total of 47,540,984 million vaccines between 8 December and 27 April, including 33,959,908 million people with their first dose (64.5% of all adults) and 13,581,076 million with their second (25.8% of all adults).

All vaccines being used in the UK have met the independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's (MHRA) strict standards of safety, effectiveness and quality.

Rolling reviews are underway by the MHRA to assess the Janssen and Novavax vaccines. Clinical trials are ongoing for the Valneva, GSK and Sanofi and CureVac jabs.

The government has already hit its target of offering everybody in cohorts 1 to 9 – those aged 50 and over, the clinically vulnerable and health and social care workers – a first dose of the vaccine by 15 April and remains on track to offer a jab to all adults by the end of July.

Data from the ONS and Oxford University shows that COVID-19 infections fell significantly by 65% after the first dose of the Oxford/AstraZeneca or Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines, rising further after the second dose.

Data from Public Health England's real-world study shows the vaccines are already having a significant impact in the UK, reducing hospitalisations and deaths, saving more than 10,000 lives between December and March.

A recent survey published by ONS showed that 92% of those who had been vaccinated with a first dose did not experience any difficulties when going to get their vaccine – such as difficulty travelling to the vaccination site, concerns over catching the virus while there or having a long wait for their appointment.

Vaccines are available from thousands of NHS vaccine centres, GP practices and pharmacies. Around 98% of people live within 10 miles of a vaccination centre in England and vaccinations are taking place at sites including mosques, community centres and football stadiums.

Ben Osborn, Country Manager at Pfizer UK, said:

By more than doubling our supply commitment to the UK, we are delighted to support the ongoing rollout of the UK immunisation programme and help the government in its efforts to address the pandemic.

Along with our partner BioNTech, we are working relentlessly to

support vaccination campaigns worldwide and, based on current projections, believe we can deliver more than 2.5 billion doses of our vaccine globally by the end of 2021.

## Background

- The latest UK-wide vaccination statistics are published [here](#)
- NHS England publishes vaccine statistics for England [here](#)
- PHE's real-world data on the efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines is available [here](#). Their latest study on household transmission can be found [here](#)
- The ONS survey on 'Barriers to COVID-19 vaccination' can be found [here](#)
- Further information on the University of Oxford's Com-Cov study is available [here](#)

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# [Richard Stanford appointed as Forestry Commission Chief Executive](#)

## News story

Forestry Commission Chair Sir William Worsley has confirmed Richard Stanford as the new Chief Executive of Forestry Commission.



Forestry Commission Chair Sir William Worsley has confirmed Richard Stanford as the new Chief Executive of the Forestry Commission.

Richard will start the role in August, replacing current Chief Executive Ian Gambles who will leave his post in May.

Commenting on his appointment, Richard Stanford said:

I am delighted to be appointed to the role of Chief Executive of the Forestry Commission, which combines my love of the countryside with the challenge of helping to deliver a strategy which will

bring a tangible benefit for the nation and the environment.

I look forward to learning from the nation's experts across the Forestry Commission about sustainable forestry, and how together we can realise an ambitious vision for trees and woodlands in and around our towns, cities and rural areas.

Being a part of an organisation at the forefront of the Government's agenda for carbon and climate change, to improve the environment and to build the green economy is a real motivating factor. There is no doubt there are exciting times ahead for the Forestry Commission, which I much look forward to.

Sir William Worsley, Chair of the Forestry Commission, said:

Richard's appointment is excellent news for the Forestry Commission and the wider forestry sector.

I am confident he will bring the experience and ambition required to lead our organisation as we embark on one of the most important periods in our long history.

Richard is passionate about the countryside and improving the environment and joins the Forestry Commission after a long and distinguished military career. He has held a series of leadership roles within the military, including Senior British Loans Services Officer in Oman, advising the Sultan on strategic defence and security, and General Officer Commanding Regional Command.

### **Richard Stanford biography**

- Richard began his military career in 1987 in the Welsh Guards and saw active service during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan
- He was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire in October 1993 and was later appointed a Companion of the Order of the Bath in the 2021 New Year Honours.
- Richard's most recent leadership positions include Senior British Loan Services Officer and General Officer Commanding Regional Command.
- He has had a longstanding passion for the environment and the countryside and looks forward to applying his skills, ambition and expertise to leading the Forestry Commission.

### **The Forestry Commission**

- Established a century ago, the Forestry Commission (FC) is the non-ministerial government department responsible for protecting, expanding and promoting the sustainable management of woodlands.
- The Forestry Commission works with two agencies: Forestry England, which manages the Public Forest Estate, and Forest Research, the principal

organisation for forestry and tree related research.

- Forestry is a devolved matter, with a range of agencies leading the sector in the devolved administrations. The Forestry Commission leads the sector in England and looks after the English Public Forest Estate through Forestry England. Forestry Research continues to operate across the whole of Great Britain.
- Further details about the Forestry Commission structure can [be found on gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

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