

# Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 15 February 2021

Today the national vaccination programme continues to power past the target we set six weeks ago with more than 15 million people vaccinated across the UK.

And once again I pay tribute to the astonishing efforts of everyone involved – the GPs, the nurses, the volunteers, the army and the pharmacists like Hardik Desai – who rallied local volunteers to vaccinate 3,000 people in his village hall in Ticehurst in Sussex, while keeping his pharmacy open – and of course I thank all of you who have come forward to be vaccinated.

This is an unprecedented national achievement but it's no moment to relax and in fact it's the moment to accelerate because the threat from this virus remains very real.

Yes, it's true, we have vaccinated more than 90 per cent of those aged over 70 but don't forget that 60 per cent of hospital patients with Covid are under 70.

And although the vaccination programme is going well, we still don't have enough data about the exact effectiveness of the vaccines in reducing the spread of infection.

We have some interesting straws in the wind. We have grounds for confidence. But the vaccinations have only been running for a matter of weeks – and while we are learning the whole time – we don't today have all the hard facts that we need.

And the level of infection remains very high, with more people still in hospital today than at the peak last April and admissions running at 1,600 a day.

So we have to keep our foot to the floor. And I can tell you today that the next million letters are landing on people's mats right now, offering appointments to the over-65s and we are also contacting all those aged between 16 and 64 with underlying health conditions, as well as adult carers.

And if we can keep this pace up – and if we can keep supply steady – and I hope and believe we can – then we hope to offer a vaccination to everyone in the first nine priority groups – including everyone over 50 – by the end of April.

And at the same time we will be giving second doses to millions of the most vulnerable within twelve weeks of the first.

So this moment is a huge step forward but it's only a first step.

And while it shows what the country can do we must be both optimistic but also patient.

And next week I will be setting out a roadmap saying as much as we possibly can about the route to normality even though some things are very uncertain.

Because we want this lockdown to be the last. And we want progress to be cautious but also irreversible.

So please continue to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives.

Thank you.

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## [The most vulnerable and health and care workers offered COVID-19 jab as government hits target to protect those most at risk](#)

- The most vulnerable and those who care for them have been offered a COVID-19 vaccine as government target met on Sunday
- People in this group account for 88% of COVID-19 deaths
- Over a quarter of UK adult population have been vaccinated with first dose

As of Sunday 14 February, all care home residents and staff, health and social care workers, people aged 70 and over, and the clinically extremely vulnerable have been offered a vaccine. These groups account for 88% of deaths from COVID-19, meaning potentially tens of thousands of lives will be saved.

The health service across the UK has been working tirelessly to vaccinate those most at risk as quickly as possible after the government secured effective vaccines early and they passed stringent safety tests at the end of last year.

Since then the UK vaccination programme has accelerated with nearly 1,000 vaccines being administered a minute at one point and a record 598,389 first doses delivered in one day on 31 January.

More than 15.3 million people in the UK – more than a quarter of all adults – have now been vaccinated with their first dose.

The NHS is working hard to encourage the remaining people who have been offered a vaccine to come forward.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

I'm so proud of the team – we've hit this fantastic milestone in our battle against COVID-19. In less than 10 weeks we've jabbed over 15 million people across the UK.

That's one in every 4 adults now starting to receive protection from this dreadful disease.

This accomplishment is thanks to the incredible efforts of frontline NHS workers, vaccine volunteers, the armed forces and all those working in local and central government. The vaccine rollout shows what our country can achieve working together.

There is so much more to do and I urge anyone eligible to step forward and take up their appointment. The vaccine is our route to freedom – we will beat this virus jab by jab.

As the milestone has been hit, from today NHS England has started offering vaccines to people in the next 2 priority groups as recommended by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) – those aged 65 and over and people with underlying health conditions which mean they are clinically vulnerable to COVID-19

The government aims to offer a vaccine to all priority cohorts 1 to 9 by May and all adults by September.

As large numbers of people from at risk groups are vaccinated, we will be able to gather the evidence to prove the impact on infection rates, hospitalisation and reduced deaths. If successful, this should in time lead to a reassessment of current restrictions.

Until then it is essential that everyone continues to stay at home if possible whether they have had the vaccine or not. It's as important as ever to stay at home to protect the NHS and save lives.

Vaccine Minister Nadhim Zahawi said:

The NHS has pulled out all the stops to vaccinate the most vulnerable people in every corner of the UK, saving lives and reducing pressure on the NHS.

I want to thank everybody involved in this mammoth operation which is the largest vaccination programme in our history.

The NHS will now focus on vaccinating people who have not yet come forward and people in cohorts 5 and 6. Everybody will get their second dose within 12 weeks and we're confident we can offer vaccines to all those in cohorts 1 to 9 by May.

The government is following the advice of independent experts at the JCVI on which groups of people to prioritise for COVID-19 vaccines. The JCVI advised the priority should be to prevent deaths and protect health and care staff.

The vaccination programme continues to rapidly expand, with thousands of vaccination centres across the country providing people with easy access to a vaccine, regardless of where they live.

NHS Chief Executive Sir Simon Stevens said:

The speed and precision of this programme – focusing first on protecting people at highest risk – is testimony to the skill and dedication of NHS GPs, nurses, pharmacists, and many thousands of others who have all come together to make such a shared success of this well designed and brilliantly organised NHS vaccination campaign.

Delivering this major national milestone in just 10 weeks would be extraordinary at any time, but doing it in the teeth of the winter COVID surge – which has seen our hospitals looking after more than 100,000 severely ill coronavirus patients in just the last month alone – is a remarkable achievement.

The guidance from the government and the NHS to local vaccination services remains that they should still offer the vaccine to each of the priority groups in the order set out by the JCVI.

A total number of 15,300,151 people have received the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine in the UK. 539,630 people have received their second jab.

The [full list of priority groups](#) is as follows:

1. residents in a care home for older adults and their carers
2. all those 80 years of age and over and frontline health and social care workers
3. all those 75 years of age and over
4. all those 70 years of age and over and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals
5. all those 65 years of age and over
6. all individuals aged 16 years to 64 years with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality
7. all those 60 years of age and over
8. all those 55 years of age and over
9. all those 50 years of age and over

Through the government's Vaccines Taskforce, the UK has secured access to 407 million doses of 7 of the most promising vaccine candidates, including:

- BioNTech/Pfizer for 40 million doses
- Oxford/AstraZeneca for 100 million doses

- Moderna for 17 million doses
- GlaxoSmithKline and Sanofi Pasteur for 60 million doses
- Novavax for 60 million doses
- Janssen for 30 million doses
- Valneva for 100 million doses

To date, the government has invested over £300 million into manufacturing a successful vaccine to enable a rapid roll out.

The UK government is committed to supporting equitable access to vaccines worldwide. The UK is the largest donor to the COVAX facility, the global mechanism to help developing countries access a coronavirus vaccine, and has committed £548 million in UK aid to help distribute 1.3 billion doses of coronavirus vaccines to 92 developing countries this year.

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## [Tribute to Dame Fiona Caldicott from the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care](#)

Press release

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Matt Hancock pays tribute to Dame Fiona Caldicott, the National Data Guardian for Health and Social Care.



It is with great sadness that the government has learned of the death of Dame Fiona Caldicott, National Data Guardian for Health and Social Care.

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Matt Hancock said:

I would like to pay tribute to Dame Fiona Caldicott whose death has been announced by her family. Dame Fiona spent her entire career serving the NHS and medicine, working as a clinician in the early

part of her career and latterly as the National Data Guardian for Health and Social Care.

In this role she was a phenomenal advocate for the public and was instrumental in making sure that the NHS treats the public's health data with the respect it deserves. The fact that every NHS organisation in the country now has its own Caldicott Guardian to protect the confidentiality of people's data is testament to all that Dame Fiona achieved.

I send my deepest condolences to Dame Fiona's family, friends and colleagues.

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## [UK backs Canadian initiative against arbitrary detention](#)

Press release

The UK joins over 55 like-minded allies in committing to enhance international cooperation to end the practice of arbitrary arrests, detentions or sentencing.



The United Kingdom is doing more to safeguard the rights of British people abroad, by joining a new Canadian-led initiative to condemn and deter the practice of arbitrary detention.

Today's declaration, welcomed by Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, increases the diplomatic pressure on those who choose to detain foreign and dual nationals with no legal basis. The UK joined over 55 like-minded allies in committing to enhance international cooperation to end the practice of arbitrary arrests, detentions or sentencing, often used to exercise leverage

over foreign governments.

This declaration enhances international cooperation and sends a collective show of strength to those countries who carry out this unacceptable practice. It also reaffirms the essential rights provided under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, including the provision to allow consular access to detained nationals.

The UK government already works publicly and privately to condemn the use of arbitrary detention, to support those who have been detained without access to a fair trial and to ensure accountability for those perpetrating this abhorrent act.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

The practice of arbitrarily detaining individuals as leverage over another government is indefensible and the UK will not tolerate it.

Depriving someone of their liberty with no legal basis violates fundamental human rights. The UK is proud to stand on solidarity with over 55 other countries to bring this unacceptable practice to an end.

This Declaration shouldn't be seen as a single action. The UK and the Foreign Secretary will continue to throw our full weight in support of those detained arbitrarily.

The G7 Foreign and Development Ministerial meeting later this year will see the Foreign Secretary and G7 partners generate further mechanisms to uphold international law, tackle human rights abuses and stand up for our shared values.

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## [COP26 President Alok Sharma visits Egypt and Nigeria on climate change mission](#)

- Alok Sharma visits Africa for second time in a month since taking on COP Presidency full time to drive forward climate priorities on the continent
- Visit to Egypt and Nigeria saw Sharma encourage leaders to set out net zero targets and ambitious plans to decarbonise their economies by 2030

- He met with activists and entrepreneurs in both countries and discussed exciting innovations to drive climate action

COP26 President Designate, Alok Sharma, has concluded a four-day visit to Egypt and Nigeria as he continues to drive progress on Africa's priorities for the climate crisis, including greater action for adaptation to the effects of climate damage and increased financing.

Egypt and Nigeria are two of Africa's largest economies and emitters of Greenhouse Gases (GHGs). Egypt also leads regional efforts to transition to clean energy and is an important voice in the climate negotiations for the Middle East and Africa.

In both countries, Mr Sharma emphasised the importance of submitting more ambitious and measurable short term climate action plans through NDCs (Nationally Determined Contribution) and long term strategies to reach net zero emissions by 2050, to align line with the Paris Agreement goal to limit global temperature rises to well below two degrees and pursue best efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C.

In Cairo, Sharma discussed the UK and Egypt's joint work on adaptation and resilience and opportunities to build back greener from the pandemic with Prime Minister, Mustafa Madbouly, and other government Ministers, including the Deputy Foreign Minister, Minister of Environment, Minister of Electricity and Renewable Energy and Minister of Finance.

He met Vice-President Osinbajo in Abuja, and spoke about the importance of Nigeria's leadership in climate action and noting the country's potential to mobilise its young population and transition to renewable energy.

Mr Sharma also met with the Ministers of the Environment and Finance, and the Chief of Staff to the President to discuss the progress that Nigeria is making on both mitigation and adaptation. Mr Sharma welcomed the removal of the petroleum subsidy and encouraged more renewable energy to be added to the grid which will provide greater access to electricity for Nigerians.

Following his visit, COP26 President-Designate Alok Sharma said:

I have been strongly encouraged by my visits to both Egypt and Nigeria as I continue to work with countries across the globe in the lead up to COP26.

It is only by working together that we will be able to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement and it's vital to engage with countries that are not only vulnerable to the effects of climate change, but also have a role to play in mitigating it.

I thank the leadership in both countries for their openness and enthusiasm so far and look forward to meeting again ahead of the COP26 summit in Glasgow later this year.



Egypt's engagement on COP26 is critical, both as a prominent regional voice in the climate negotiations, but also as an innovator and provider of adaptation solutions.

It is home to one of Africa's largest solar farms, "Benban", which is supported by UK funding. The country expects to exceed its current target of 20 percent renewable energy by 2022, and is aiming for up to 50 percent by 2035. It has also taken a lead on shifting away from future coal, having shelved plans for the Hamrawein plant, Egypt's last coal fired plant, in favour of renewable alternatives. Alok Sharma encouraged Egypt to showcase this leadership by joining the Powering Past Coal Alliance (PPCA).

Nigeria is a major player on the continent, both in terms of its population size and its economic influence. Forty three per cent of its population is below the age of 15 and 60 percent of the population now lives in urban environments. It is Africa's second largest emitter of GHGs and has one of the highest deforestation rates in the world. While heavily reliant on oil and gas, the country has the potential to generate its own renewable energy and their May 2020 Economic Sustainability Plan has committed to extend the Solar Homes Systems to some five million households. From a climate change perspective, it faces both significant challenges but also has huge opportunities.

Nigeria's Minister for the Environment, Mohammad Mahmood Abubakar, said:

Good to meet Alok Sharma, the COP26 President-Designate on his visit to Nigeria and discuss a range of issues on Nigeria's climate change agenda. We welcome the UK's leadership on this critical global agenda and look forward to its hosting of COP26 this November that firmly recognises the particular needs and circumstances of Nigeria's and Africa's climate change challenges.

We look forward to the continued support of the UK as we rise to meet those challenges in ways that protect the environment whilst also supporting economic growth and long term stability and prosperity.

A spokesperson from the Office of the Egyptian Prime Minister said:

Prime Minister Madbouly praised the cooperation between Egypt and the UK in the field of adaptation to the effects of climate change, and the joint leadership of the two countries on the Adaptation Action Coalition launched last month.

In both countries, Sharma met with grassroot activists and civil society organisations to discuss the importance of an 'all of society approach' to tackling climate issues. In its COP Presidency the UK is engaging with people from all sectors working on the climate agenda, including youth activists, entrepreneurs and those focusing on women's empowerment and inclusion.

Shady Khalil, Co-Founder of Greenish said:

COP26 President Alok Sharma's meeting with civil society representatives in Egypt shows a clear will for a true representation of youth led organizations in Egypt, making COP26 more accessible and inclusive for more narratives from different communities around Egypt, MENA and the Global South.

With our work in Greenish, we are training and empowering thousands of youth to foresee and address climate change challenges in Egypt. We hope through the meeting we can create a platform to voice out their concerns, ideas and stories.

Rita Idehai, Social entrepreneur and Climate Change Activist said:

The impact of imploding Climate crisis in Nigeria is multidimensional. We need all hands, the government, the young, the old, civil societies and the private sector to address these challenges. Building back better is our collective responsibility.

From Egypt and Nigeria, Sharma will now travel on to India and Nepal where he will meet with leaders from government, business and civil society to hear how climate change is impacting communities and to discuss solutions.

## **Notes to editors**

- The UK will host the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow on 1 – 12 November 2021.
- The COP26 summit will bring parties together to accelerate action towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- The UK is committed to working with all countries and joining forces with civil society, companies and people on the frontline of climate change to inspire climate action ahead of COP26.