

An update on the coronavirus vaccine, 2 December 2020

Mr Speaker, with permission I'd like to make a statement about the coronavirus vaccine.

Today marks a new chapter in our fight against this virus. Ever since this pandemic hit our shores, almost a year ago, we have known that a vaccine would be critical to set us free.

So all through this arduous year – and it has been an arduous year while we've been working night and day to fight the virus and keep it under control – we have been striving too, to develop the vaccines that can give us hope and let us eventually release the curbs on our freedoms that have bound us for so long.

Thanks to the incredible work of the Vaccines Taskforce, the Business Secretary and Kate Bingham, we have already amassed a huge portfolio of different vaccine candidates.

We've backed 7 vaccines, and ordered 357 million doses on behalf of the whole of the UK, one of the biggest portfolios per capita in the world.

We have said from the start that a vaccine must be safe and effective, before we would even consider deploying.

Any vaccine must go through a rigorous process of clinical trials involving thousands of people, and extensive independent scrutiny from the MHRA, one of the world's most respected medical regulators.

Today, I am delighted to inform the House that the MHRA has issued the clinical authorisation of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. This is a monumental step forward. It's no longer if there's a vaccine, it's when. In our battle against the virus, help is on its way.

Today is a triumph for all those who believe in science, a triumph for ingenuity and a triumph for humanity. I want to thank everyone who has played their part in this achievement. The team at Pfizer and BioNTech, the volunteers who stepped up and took part in clinical trials and to the MHRA themselves who have made sure that this is a vaccine that we can all have faith in.

Thanks to their efforts, I can confirm that the UK is the first country in the world to have a clinically approved coronavirus vaccine for supply.

And now, our task is to make use of the fruits of this scientific endeavour, to save lives.

Deployment

Mr Speaker, we have spent months preparing for this day, so that as soon as we got the green light we would be ready to go.

We were the first country in the world to pre-order supplies of this successful vaccine and we have 40 million doses pre-ordered for delivery over the coming months, enough for 20 million people, because 2 jabs are required each.

Following authorisation, the next stage is to test each batch of the vaccine for safety.

I can confirm that batch testing has been completed this morning for the first deployment of 800,000 doses of the vaccine. These doses are for the whole UK.

This morning I chaired a meeting of health ministers from the devolved administrations to ensure the roll-out effort is co-ordinated nationwide.

This will be one of the biggest civilian logistical efforts that we have faced as a nation. It will be difficult. There will be challenges and complications. But I know the NHS is equal to the task.

Rolling out a vaccine free at the point of delivery, according to clinical need, not ability to pay, is in the finest tradition of our National Health Service.

And I am delighted to confirm that the NHS will be able to start vaccinating from early next week.

The whole purpose of the vaccine is to protect people from covid so we can get our lives back to normal. So, we will prioritise the groups who are at greatest risk.

This morning, the [Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has published its advice](#), setting out the order of priority according to that clinical need.

This includes care home residents and their carers, the over-80s, and the frontline health and social care workers.

We will deliver according to clinical prioritisation and operational necessity because the need to hold the vaccine at minus-70 makes this vaccine particularly challenging to deploy.

While we will begin vaccination next week, the bulk of the vaccinations will be in the new year. But I would urge anyone called forward for vaccination by the NHS to respond quickly, to protect themselves, their loved ones and their community.

Mr Speaker, over the next few months we will see vaccines delivered in 3 different ways.

First, we will begin vaccination in hospital hubs.

Second, we will deploy through local community services, including GPs and in due course pharmacies too.

And, third, we will stand up vaccination centres in conference centres and sports venues, to vaccinate large numbers of people as more vaccines come on stream.

This is an important step. But we are not there yet.

And so we must all play our part, and keep following the new rules that this House approved overwhelmingly yesterday. And remember the basics, like hands, face, space and get a test, that we know from experience are so important in keeping this virus under control.

Care homes

Before I finish, Mr Speaker, can I also update the House on another bit of good news.

From today, I am absolutely thrilled to say that we can safely allow visits in care homes, subject to visitors testing negative for COVID-19.

Coronavirus has denied so many people the simple pleasure of seeing a loved one, which is so precious to so many, especially in our care homes.

This is only possible because of the success we've had in building one of the biggest testing capacities in Europe. And with local and national teams working together side by side, something we have often discussed across this house.

We have worked hard on testing, and we've worked hard on the vaccine. Our strategy of suppressing the virus until a vaccine can make us safe – that strategy is working.

And I'm delighted that we can now bring families and friends together ahead of Christmas thanks to this improvement.

Conclusion

Mr Speaker, this is a day to remember, in a year to forget. We can see the way out. But we're not there yet.

So let's keep our resolve, keep doing our bit, to keep people safe, until science can set us free.

Yeovil drug dealer jailed

Press release

Lewis Jay Davis has been jailed following intervention by the Solicitor General, Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP.



A drug dealer who was found in possession of a stun gun and class A drugs has been jailed following intervention by the Solicitor General, Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP.

Lewis Jay Davis, 25, was arrested in a pub car park on 10 July 2020. He was found in possession of 11 wraps of cocaine, a cannabis bud, a stun gun and more than £200 in cash.

When the police searched his home address they recovered more than £7,000 in cash, as well as bags of MDMA and two further stun guns.

Davis received a deferred sentence on 25 September 2020 at Bournemouth Crown Court. Following a referral to the Court of Appeal by the Solicitor General, on 2 December the sentence was found to be unduly lenient and has been increased to 3 years' imprisonment, minus 37 days Davis spent on qualifying curfew.

Speaking after the hearing, the Solicitor General said:

Davis dealt class A drugs and was found in possession of dangerous weapons. It is right that the Court of Appeal has given him a custodial sentence today.

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Breaking new ground with eco drive to bring the country's verges to life

The company has announced a step change in the way it improves roads, which will breathe new life and colour into the verges and land around the country's motorways and major roads – a policy which will cover hundreds of miles in the second road investment period.

The key is creating the type of soils on the verges and roadsides which encourage the growth of wildflowers. More fertile areas with lots of topsoil – rich in potassium, phosphorus and nitrogen – favour aggressive grasses, dock and nettle, which are all fast-growing plants that can out-compete delicate wildflowers for water, nutrients, space and light.

On all major schemes, contractors are now being instructed to follow a new Low Nutrient Grasslands policy aimed at keeping away the 'bullying' plant species which love high nutrient soil, and allowing wildflowers to thrive, creating vital habitat for insects and other wildlife.

Highways England Environmental Advisor Ben Hewlett said:

Our new policy means we'll create more biodiverse new grasslands as standard. And as 97% of all species rich grasslands have been lost in the last century, it is great to think that our construction design standards could create substantial areas of biodiverse grasslands, stretching throughout England.

This is another great example of how we are moving away from simply minimising the impact of our work on the environmental impacts towards actually improving the environment through our work.

The increase in wildflowers and wider biodiversity should also provide some impressive visual displays, and help to connect people with nature and improve the wellbeing of millions of people using our roads every day.

Wildflowers thrive on low nutrient soil and the new policy is focused around the management of topsoil – or rather removing it from new grassland areas to lower the nutrient level, creating the perfect conditions for the flowers.

Removing soil nutrients slows growth rates of vegetation, reducing mowing and management requirements, while improving biodiversity by allowing wildflowers to germinate and thrive without competition from more vigorous plants.

The new initiative will see all grassland areas on improvement schemes finished with subsoil or bare substrate such as chalk. These will then be allowed to regenerate naturally or be seeded with wildflowers and grasses appropriate to the substrate type to create open grasslands high in

biodiversity, which in turn support pollinators and other wildlife, while providing road users with a more aesthetic landscape.

By adopting this new policy, Highways England is hoping to:

- improve safety by reducing the number of maintenance visits;
- reduce the carbon footprint through fewer maintenance visits;
- maximise grassland biodiversity of new construction projects;
- reduce long-term maintenance costs by reducing vegetation growth;
- capitalise on potential cost savings by eliminating the need for topsoil import and haulage.

The new grasslands initiative is being rolled out on all major projects initially, and will be implemented by Highways England's supply chain within the Major Projects Project Control Framework on a scheme-by-scheme basis, and the aim is to apply the instruction to operational projects and wider standards in due course.

Over the last few years a number of biodiversity schemes have been undertaken by Highways England, including extensive habitat connectivity planting, species-rich grassland creation and management and a project to protect and promote the habitat of the narrow-headed ant, England's rarest, on the A38 in Devon.

A Highways England wildflower scheme, the size of eight football pitches and visible during spring and summer along the A38 between Ashburton and Ivybridge in Devon, has won a Pollinator Award in the Big Biodiversity Challenge run by CIRIA (Construction Industry Research and Information Association). The scheme was started in 2018 with seeds from over 20 variety of flowers – including cornflowers, oxeye daisies, yellow rattle and poppies – sown over five hectares of verge, adding to 10 hectares recently created along the A38 and A30 in Devon and Cornwall.

Highways England ecologist Leo Gubert at the company's grassland planting site on the A30

Highways England has also been working with Cumbria Wildlife Trust, to boost pollinator habitats alongside key A roads, including the A590 and A66, and the verges and embankments of the A303 Stonehenge scheme, recently given the green light by Government, will create a flower-rich, six-mile long butterfly highway and large areas of species-rich chalk grassland.

The latest information on Highways England's biodiversity work can be found in its [2018-19 biodiversity report](#) and further details are available in its [Strategic Business Plan](#).

Case study

A successful case study is Dorset Council's Weymouth Relief Road where wide chalk cuttings were left bare, with minimal top soil (max 15mm thick), and seeded with wildflowers that thrive in chalk. These cuttings are now

supporting over 140 plant species and 30 species of butterflies and in the 10 years since construction, the verges have required minimal maintenance, some none at all.

Dr Phil Sterling, Building Sites for Butterflies Programme Manager at the Butterfly Conservation charity, said:

Over the past 10 years the Weymouth scheme has proven the benefits of the low nutrient approach – abundant wildlife and drastically reduced verge maintenance costs.

It's encouraging that Highways England have seen the light and followed this lead, and we welcome this significant change of approach. Butterflies need linked habitats across landscapes to reverse their declines and Highways England are now on the pathway to achieve this on all their new schemes.

Clare Warburton, Natural England's Green Infrastructure Principal Advisor, said:

This is a step change in the way road verges are designed and managed, and could make a significant contribution to recovering nature on our verges.

Low nutrient verges can help to reduce the likelihood of invasive species like creeping thistle, and increase native species we love to see, like oxeye daisy and bird's-foot trefoil and even rarer flowers, such as orchids, as well as being great for bees and pollinators.

Dr Kate Petty, Plantlife's Road Verge Campaign Manager, said:

Our research shows that nearly half of our entire flora grows on our verges, making this an exceptionally important habitat for wildlife, which needs all the help it can get.

We warmly welcome this new approach – it's highlighted in our best practice guidance developed in partnership with Highways England and others – and this exciting move to reduce verge fertility will help shift the balance of power on new road verges, giving delicate plants like harebells, bird's-foot-trefoil and kidney vetch a vital chance to grow. And, of course, where the flowers bloom the insects follow; bird's-foot-trefoil is a food plant for nearly 150 species of invertebrates alone.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

Exciting opportunity to manage inshore fisheries and conservation in the Northumberland district

Each IFCA needs members who will take a balanced approach to caring for our seas, assessing the priority and importance of all users and stakeholders. The Northumberland IFCA is seeking proactive individuals with good communication skills and a demonstrable ability to disseminate IFCA regulations, policies and guidance through their network of contacts to serve as a member.

Andrew Wareing, Director of Digital and Analysis at MMO, responsible for IFCA selection, said:

These are exciting opportunities for people with experience and a passion for their inshore marine area to play a major part in shaping how their local area is managed. If you want to make a positive difference and help balance economic, social and environmental needs, we would be pleased to hear from you. MMO invite applications from all industry sectors, however we would particularly welcome applicants from the commercial and recreational fishing sectors.

The deadline for applications is 23:55 on 4 January 2021.

The role is on a voluntary basis although relevant expenses may be reimbursed. You can email ifcarecruitment@marinemanagement.org.uk for more information.

Background

There are 10 IFCAs around the English coastline with responsibility for sustainably managing sea fisheries and conservation within 6 nautical miles

from shore. They have the power to make byelaws to protect resources and the environment in their area as well as also enforcing national and European fisheries legislation.

IFCAs are either committees or joint committees of the local authorities that fall within an IFCA district. They are tasked with sustainably managing inshore sea fisheries and conserving their local marine environment. They are made up of representatives from local councils along with people from across the different sectors that use or are knowledgeable about the inshore marine area, such as commercial and recreational fishermen, environmental groups and marine researchers, who offer their time voluntarily.

The Marine Management Organisation, Environment Agency and Natural England also each has a statutory seat on the IFCA. Through their local management and funding structures, IFCAs help put local councils, communities and businesses, and individual citizens in the driving seat, allowing them to play a bigger part in the protection and enhancement of their inshore marine environment.

Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCA)

The MMO is responsible for the appointment of local people with relevant expertise to IFCA committees. Appointees make up roughly half of IFCA committees and are appointed on a voluntary basis. The members of the IFCA contribute their knowledge and experience to provide sustainable management of the inshore marine area of their IFCA district. They guide the IFCA to deliver its mandate under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and in line with Defra guidance.

We seek to achieve a balanced membership across various interest groups, including those with commercial, recreational and environmental interests. We are also keen to appoint people who represent the economic, social and environmental needs of their IFCA district and who, collectively, bring a variety of relevant interests such as fishing groups (commercial and non-commercial), conservation groups and other parties interested in the work of IFCAs.

Each appointment is made for a period of 3 to 5 years, with the possibility of reappointment up to a maximum of 10 years. It is conditional upon the member following [terms and conditions](#) for the appointment. Appointments are made in line with the [Governance Code on Public Appointments](#) and guidance issued by [Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs](#). Appointees must follow relevant IFCA codes of conduct as well as abiding by the terms and conditions of appointment. These are unpaid positions, however meeting allowances and expenses are available to members.

Candidate Pack

Terms & Conditions

Application form: Online Version

Application Form: Print version

More information on the work of the IFCA's is available from the [Association of IFCA's](#) website and from [Northumberland IFCA](#) website

[Exciting opportunity to manage inshore fisheries and conservation in the North Western district](#)

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