

Vaccines Manufacturing and Innovation Centre to open 12 months ahead of schedule

- Up to £93 million government investment to open the UK's first dedicated Vaccine Manufacturing and Innovation Centre 12 months early
- A further £38 million will establish a rapid deployment facility this summer
- The new Centre is a key component of the government's coronavirus programme in boosting the UK's capacity to develop and mass produce vaccines

The race to manufacture millions of doses of a coronavirus vaccine has been boosted with a multi-million-pound government investment, Business Secretary Alok Sharma has announced today.

The government will invest up to £93 million to accelerate construction of the new Vaccines Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (VMIC) which, when completed, will have capacity to produce enough vaccine doses to serve the entire UK population in as little as six months. The funding will ensure the centre opens in Summer 2021, a full 12 months ahead of schedule.

The new Centre, which is already under construction, is a key component of the government's coronavirus vaccine programme – ensuring that once a vaccine is available it can be produced quickly and in mass quantities.

To be located on the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus in Oxfordshire, the new Centre will be the UK's first not-for-profit organisation established to develop and advance the mass production of vaccines. This will boost the UK's long-term capacity against future viruses. The centre will also accelerate the production of vaccines for existing illnesses such as the flu virus.

While the Centre is being built, the government will establish a rapid deployment facility thanks to a further investment of £38 million to begin manufacturing at scale from Summer 2020. This facility will support efforts to ensure a vaccine is widely available to the public as soon as possible.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma said:

As the biggest contributor to the international coalition to find a vaccine, the UK is leading the global response. Once a breakthrough is made, we need to be ready to manufacture a vaccine by the millions.

The new Vaccine Manufacturing and Innovation Centre and temporary facility will build 'fill and finish' capacity, bringing the UK

vaccine programme together from discovery to distribution.

The Vaccines Manufacturing and Innovation Centre's Chief Executive Dr Matthew Duchars said:

Today's announcement by the Business Secretary is an important endorsement for the work the Vaccine Manufacturing and Innovation Centre will deliver in shoring up future domestic supply of vaccines in response to a pandemic.

This investment will rapidly accelerate the construction of the facility, enabling us to bring it online a year sooner. In addition, the capacity will be significantly increased, so that enough vaccines could be made for everyone in the UK within a matter of months of opening.

UK Research and Innovation Chief Executive Sir Mark Walport, said:

The Vaccines Manufacturing and Innovation Centre is an essential new weapon in the UK's arsenal against diseases and other biological threats, ensuring sufficient vaccines get to the public in the fastest possible time.

The UKRI-funded teams at the University of Oxford and Imperial College London have developed potential coronavirus vaccines at unprecedented speed. By working with partners including government, VMIC and the Vaccines Taskforce to fast-track the manufacturing capability, we are ensuring that momentum will continue all the way from lab to patient.

The UK is at the forefront of international efforts to research and develop a vaccine. The government has already pledged £250 million to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), the highest contribution of any country, and the UK is hosting the upcoming global pledging conference for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, on 4 June. This is part of the UK committing £388 million to the international drive to develop vaccines, tests and treatments.

The announcement follows the government appointing leading figure in the life sciences sector Kate Bingham as chair of the UK's Vaccine Taskforce – the group set up by the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser, Deputy Chief Medical Officer and Business Secretary to lead UK efforts to find and manufacture a COVID-19 vaccine.

Notes to Editors

1. Plans for the Vaccines Manufacturing and Innovation Centre have received a total public and private sector funding of £207 million, including today's new £131 million investment.

2. The Vaccines Taskforce is supported by an Expert Advisory Board, led by Chief Scientific Adviser Sir Patrick Vallance and Deputy Chief Medical Officer Jonathan Van Tam, to coordinate efforts to accelerate the development and manufacture of a COVID-19 vaccine.
-

[Prime Minister's article in the Mail on Sunday: 17 May 2020](#)

If 2020 has taught us anything, it is truly that the worst of times bring out the best in humanity.

Every day brings heart-breaking news as more lives are lost before their time to this vicious coronavirus. Every victim leaves behind family, friends and loved ones who mourn their loss. They remain constantly in my thoughts; each death a spur to redouble our efforts to defeat this virus.

We can only defeat it by acting together. In recent weeks we have seen phenomenal bravery, compassion and selflessness as people go above and beyond to protect the lives of others.

The staff in our care homes and NHS doing all they can to bring the sick back to health. Teachers helping critical workers go to work by looking after their children, while still teaching those at home. Police and prison officers keeping order on our streets and in our prisons. Those producing, processing, distributing and selling food. Engineers keeping the lights on and our broadband connected. Our armed forces rising to every logistical challenge with awesome professionalism. Civil servants working round the clock to implement every policy decision – all these people are putting others first.

They are the best of us, punctuating each day with a million acts of love and kindness. And their efforts have not been in vain for a simple reason – because the British people as a whole have risen so magnificently to the challenge we set: to stay at home.

I don't underestimate how difficult it has been for everyone to be cut off from friends and parents, children and grandchildren, brothers and sisters. Unable to visit places of worship or even just spend time with others. We thrive off social contact and having those we love around us – it's human nature. Yet those vital human connections have been cruelly denied to all of us by this insidious disease.

These enormous sacrifices have paid off. We have seen the number of positive cases plateau and fall, even as testing capacity has increased tenfold. The number of people admitted to hospital with Covid has steadily fallen. Despite predictions that critical care capacity would struggle to cope, the NHS was

emphatically not overwhelmed.

I made clear from the outset that we can only make changes to the lockdown when it is safe to do so, guided by science. We set five tests, of which three have been met and progress is being made on the remaining two. We are setting up a system of COVID-19 Alert levels, which will be overseen by a new UK Joint Biosecurity Centre designed to assess the spread of the virus and inform decisions over how we lift the lockdown.

It is the British public's fortitude, their perseverance, their good common sense and their desire to return to the freedoms they hold dear that has allowed us to inch forwards.

We have announced new rules on what people can and cannot do in England. You can now spend as much time as you like outdoors, for example sitting and enjoying the fresh air, picnicking, or sunbathing. You can meet one other person from a different household outdoors, provided you maintain social distancing. You can exercise outdoors as often as you wish and play sport.

Even with these changes, it's vital that people stay alert, keep their distance from others and carry on washing their hands regularly.

These changes are possible because the evidence shows that the risk of transmission is significantly lower outdoors. Being able to see a friend or family member at a safe distance, in a park or at the end of the road, provides significant benefits to our physical and mental wellbeing – but crucially, it does not risk reversing the gains we have so far won in the fight against the virus. I am confident that the balance of risk, taking everything into account, means we can safely make this change.

Now that we have driven the rate of infection down, and there are fewer infections, some people can also start returning to work. We have held extensive talks with employers, trade unions and the devolved administrations about how to make workplaces safe. The COVID-19 Secure guidelines we developed together mean we can encourage people who can't work from home to go to their place of work in a safe way.

The message is: work from home if you can but travel to work if you can't. And avoid public transport if you can, but use it if you can't.

No earlier than June, we hope to move to step two, opening schools to more children and re-opening some shops. And no earlier than July, we can move to step three, opening parts of the leisure and hospitality sectors. Over time we can gradually get closer to a kind of normality – but only if the evidence shows these adjustments are compatible with our five tests. And if at any stage we need to tighten the restrictions, we will not hesitate to act. Nothing is more important than saving lives.

I understand that people will feel frustrated with some of the new rules. We are trying to do something that has never had to be done before – moving the country out of a full lockdown, in a way which is safe and does not risk sacrificing all of your hard work. I recognise what we are now asking is more

complex than simply staying at home – but this is a complex problem and we need to trust in the good sense of the British people.

If we all stick at it, then we'll be able, gradually, to get rid of the complexities and the restrictions and make it easier and simpler for families to meet again. But we must move slowly, and at the right time.

I want to thank you personally for sticking with us and – most of all – for being so patient. And I want to reassure you that there is a route out of this.

In the darkness of March, I said that with hard work, we could turn the tide within three months. We have now passed through the peak.

I said that, if we could get an antibody test showing whether you have had the disease, it would be a huge step forward. This week Public Health England have approved an antibody test which is 100% accurate.

I said we would throw everything we could at finding a vaccine. There remains a very long way to go, and I must be frank that a vaccine might not come to fruition. But we are leading the global effort. Some of the most promising research into vaccines is happening right here in the UK – and this weekend we are announcing a £93 million investment to open the new Vaccine Manufacturing and Innovation Centre a full 12 months ahead of schedule.

We are also supporting research into drug treatments for the virus which can bring as many people who have caught the virus back to full health as possible.

Despite these efforts, we have to acknowledge we may need to live with this virus for some time to come. We need to find new ways to control the virus. We will do that through testing and tracing – testing individuals who have symptoms to see if they have the virus and tracing contacts who may have been infected.

The NHS app and an army of contact tracers will help us alert anyone who may have caught the virus. By asking them to self isolate, we will help them protect their friends, family and loved ones, while stopping the spread of the virus in the wider community.

By screening arrivals at ports and airports and introducing quarantine measures, we will be able to keep the number of infections at low levels, and we can give everyone else more freedom to lead their lives as normally as possible.

We have achieved a lot together so far. Let's not throw it all away now. In return for the small freedoms we are now allowing ourselves, we must stay alert. We must do so in the knowledge that our self-discipline will, eventually, lead to the return of our much-missed normality.

I know this will not be easy – the first baby steps never are. But I hope that, when we look back, the changes we have made this week will be seen as an important moment on the road to our nation's recovery.

British Embassy Warsaw staff wear pride-themed masks to mark IDAHOBIT

World news story

The International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia is observed on 17 May to raise awareness of LGBTI rights.



Ambassador Knott wearing a pride-themed mask

Every year, this Embassy flies the Pride flag on 17 May, to mark the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia.

The date marks the decision in 1990 to remove homosexuality from the International Classification of Diseases of the World Health Organisation, and aims to raise awareness of LGBTI rights work worldwide.

This year, due to COVID19, members of the Embassy teamstaff working from home decided to mark the day in a different way: by wearing pride-themed protective masks.

British Ambassador to Poland, Jonathan Knott, said:

While right now we all need to focus on fighting COVID-19, we must not forget to continue protecting the values in which we believe.

On International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia, we reaffirm our support for efforts to raise public awareness of issues affecting the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community, and pay tribute to the hard work of LGBTI people in Poland, the UK and around the world to ensure human rights and dignity for all.

We continue to be committed to protecting all people from violence

and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, and ensuring that every individual enjoys equal opportunities.

Published 17 May 2020

Government begins large scale study of coronavirus immunity

- Antibody testing will help to understand levels of immunity and the role of genetics
- Up to 20,000 people of all ages and walks of life to take part for at least 6 months

Up to 20,000 people are being asked to take part in a new government-funded study to further track the extent of the coronavirus spread across England, Scotland and Wales.

The research will measure blood antibodies to help determine what proportion of the population has already had the infection, the duration of immunity after being infected, and why the virus affects people differently.

Led by UK Biobank and supported by the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), the study, which was developed with the Wellcome Trust, also draws on the world-leading scientific expertise of the University of Oxford. It forms part of Pillar 4 of the [Government's COVID-19 testing strategy](#) to conduct UK-wide surveillance testing to learn more about the spread of the virus.

In total, 20,000 thousand people will take part. The study participants will be chosen from existing, consented UK Biobank volunteers, as well as their adult children and grandchildren. This is the first time UK Biobank has opened up a research study to the next generation of participants, which will help to ensure that all regions, ages and socio-economic groups are represented .

Each month, participants will be asked to provide a sample of blood using a finger-prick device, and to complete a short questionnaire about any relevant symptoms they may have experienced. The de-identified samples will be returned to UK Biobank for processing before being sent for validated antibody testing at the University of Oxford.

This information will help inform future Government strategy on the ongoing response to the virus, including lockdown and social distancing measures. The first results from initial participants are expected to be available in early June.

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

Our response to this pandemic is rightly guided by the science and based on the best available evidence – so I'm determined to do everything we can to learn more about coronavirus.

This UK Biobank study will build our understanding of the rate of COVID-19 infection in the general population and, importantly, it will add to our knowledge about the risk factors that mean the virus can affect individuals differently.

Alongside the ongoing ONS and Imperial College research, the results of this study will assist our virus modelling and inform future plans for managing the pandemic.

Established by the Wellcome Trust and the Medical Research Council, UK Biobank has been following the health of 500,000 UK participants over the last 10 years through detailed health records, genetic and lifestyle data. As a result, it is uniquely well-placed to investigate whether the immune response to coronavirus differs between people with different genetic backgrounds.

UK Biobank Principal Investigator, Sir Rory Collins said:

We believe most people have mild or no symptoms of infection with coronavirus, but a small proportion fall very ill. This study will help determine the proportion of people who have been infected and, crucially, how long they are immune from further infection.

Much better understanding of what proportion of the population has been infected, how long antibodies to coronavirus stay in the blood, and whether immunity wears off, are vital to managing this pandemic.

Abby Taylor, Head of Strategy and Performance at Wellcome, said:

This study will gather valuable data to further understand COVID-19 and will provide an excellent resource for the scientific community to understand the spread of infection and help guide national efforts to ease lockdown.

UK Biobank participants have already created a unique resource for health research and their active support to such a vital study cannot be underestimated. Understanding immunity to this virus is crucial in predicting future risk posed by coronavirus and supporting the development of new treatments and vaccines.

Naomi Allen, Chief Scientist of UK Biobank, said:

Colleagues at Oxford's Target Discovery Institute have developed, in record time, an accurate test for measuring antibody levels to coronavirus, which will help us to understand what proportion of the population have been infected and how long immunity is likely to last for. This study is therefore hugely important to help us manage the longer-term consequences of the pandemic".

Medical Research Council Executive Chair, Fiona Watt, said:

This study highlights, yet again, the benefits of our long term investment in UK Biobank. The partnership between the researchers and UK Biobank volunteers – extending across generations – is truly remarkable.

This is the third coronavirus surveillance testing survey to be announced. The UK Biobank research will complement data generated by the [ONS population study](#) (launched on 23 April). Both studies will take blood samples to provide data on how many people have antibodies to the virus.

The [Imperial College/Ipsos Mori testing programme](#) (launched on 29 April) is using swabs to understand the level of active infection in participants. It is also undertaking user acceptance testing of antibody tests designed for home use.

Public Health England is also analysing blood samples from people across a wide range of ages, locations and professions, to help detect past and current rates of infection as well as any changes in the virus.

Notes to editors:

1. UK Biobank aims to collect monthly blood samples and symptom data from participants, as well as from their children and grandchildren aged over 18, to measure antibodies and enable an assessment of the extent of previous coronavirus infection in different locations and age groups across England, Scotland and Wales.
2. The study will also enable an assessment of the proportion of asymptomatic cases in the UK. By coupling antibody data with existing genetic and lifestyle data and regular updates of health outcomes available for UK Biobank participants, it will help researchers to understand why different people respond differently to infection with the coronavirus.
3. Potential volunteers will be selected from a group who are already participants with UK Biobank and have expressly consented to be contacted about further research. They will also be asked to invite their adult children to volunteer.
4. A capillary blood collection kit will be sent to participants on a monthly basis, to take ~500 µL of blood (a tenth of a teaspoon) The de-identified blood samples will be sent to the University of Oxford for analysis for the presence of antibodies.
5. Participants will receive feedback on the progress of the study and the

overall findings, but they will not receive their individual results.

Education Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 16 May

Welcome to today's briefing from Downing Street. I am joined by Dr Jenny Harries, the deputy chief medical officer.

First, I want to update you on the latest data on the coronavirus response.

2,489,563 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including 136,486 tests carried out yesterday;

240,161 people have tested positive, that's an increase of 3,451 cases since yesterday;

10,484 people are currently in hospital with coronavirus, down 12% from 11,872 this time last week.

And sadly, of those tested positive for coronavirus, across all settings, 34,466 have now died. That's an increase of 468 fatalities since yesterday. This figure is in all settings not just hospitals.

Before we begin questions from the public and from the media I want to remind people of the details of the next phase of our fight against coronavirus.

First, in order to monitor our progress, we are establishing a new COVID Alert Level System, with five levels, each relating to the level of threat posed by the virus.

The alert level will be based primarily on the R value and the number of coronavirus cases.

And in turn that alert level will determine the level of social distancing measures in place.

The lower the level, the fewer the measures; the higher the level, the stricter the measures.

Throughout the period of lockdown which started on 23 March we have been at Level 4.

Thanks to the hard work and sacrifices of the British people in this lockdown, we have helped to bring the level of infection down and we are now in a position to begin moving to Level 3, in very careful steps.

We have set out the first of three steps we will take to carefully modify the

measures, gradually ease the lockdown, and begin to allow people to return to their way of life – but crucially avoiding what would be a second peak that overwhelms the NHS.

After each step we will closely monitor the impact of that step on the R and the number of infections, and we will only take the next step when we are satisfied that it is safe to do so.

Step 1, from this week, means those who cannot work from home should now speak to their employer about going back to work. You can now spend time outdoors and exercise as often as you like. You can meet one person outside of your household in an outdoor, public place provided you stay two metres apart.

Having taken the first step in carefully adjusting some of the measures and our advice to people on what to do, we have also updated what we are asking people to do, which is to Stay Alert, Control the Virus and Save Lives.

If everyone stays alert and follows the rules, we can control coronavirus by ensuring the R number does not go above one and reducing the number of infections. This is how we can continue to save lives, and livelihoods, as we begin as a nation to recover from coronavirus.

At this time of year GCSE and A level students would have been making final preparations for their exams, while others were enjoying their summer term.

If you are one of them, can I say how sorry I am that this has happened to you this year.

The sacrifices that you and all young people have made have been especially tough.

It is now almost eight weeks since we asked schools, nurseries and colleges to close to all but a small number of children.

Once again I would like to say an enormous thank you to all the school, college and childcare staff who have been going above and beyond the call of duty to care for smaller groups of children of critical workers, vulnerable children as well as making sure there are resources available at home for children to learn, interacting with them and making sure that children know you are there for them. You have been simply outstanding and we're so grateful for what you have done.

We have been quite clear all along, that we would only start inviting more children back into schools when our five key tests had been met. That position has not changed and it is what is guiding our actions.

But we do want to see all children back in school because we know how much children grow and benefit from being in school.

We can now start the planning for a very limited return to schools for some pupils potentially as early as next month.

Let me explain how this will work because I know that some people, including parents and teachers, are very anxious about this.

If the rates of infection are decreasing, it will give us a green light to get children back into childcare and more of them back into school from 1 June.

As part of a cautious phased return, those in Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 will be allowed back into school in smaller class sizes. We are also planning to get some secondary school students back – those in years 10 and 12 – to make sure they have the opportunity to come back to school on a limited basis and have some face to face time with teachers.

We are prioritising these children because they stand to lose more by staying away from school. The first years of school are pivotal for children to develop social and behavioural skills and to learn the basics that are going to have a huge bearing on how well they do in their life. Students in Years 10 and 12 need support in the run up to vital exams next year and it's vital that we do all we can to help them succeed and help them do well.

This is particularly important for vulnerable and disadvantaged young people.

There are some who would like to delay the wider opening of schools. But there is a consequence to this. The longer that schools are closed, the more children miss out. Teachers know this. Teachers know that there are children out there who have not spoken to or played with another child of their own age for the last two months.

They know there are children from difficult or very unhappy homes for whom school is their happiest place in their week. It's also the safest place for them to be and it's thanks to their teachers and the support that their teachers give to them that they are safe and happy.

The poorest children, the most disadvantaged children, the children who do not always have support they need at home, will be the ones who will fall furthest behind if we keep school gates closed. They are the ones who will miss out on the opportunities and chances in life that we want all children to benefit from what teachers and schools deliver for them.

So we're asking some children to come back from the 1 June. And we are asking schools to adopt a number of strict protective measures.

This includes reducing class sizes, and making sure pupils stay within these small groups, creating a protective and small bubble around them.

Schools will also be rigorous about hygiene, cleaning and hand washing. School staff can already be tested for the virus but from 1 June we will extend that to cover children and their families if any of them develop symptoms. Track-and-trace methods will then be used to prevent the virus from spreading.

Together, these measures will create an inherently safer system, where the risk of transmission is substantially reduced – for children, their teachers

and also their families.

My department has been issuing full and detailed guidance on how to implement these measures and prepare for wider opening. We have worked closely with the sector, listening to those who work in the classroom. We will continue to do so, to ensure schools have the support they need.

It goes without saying that we will be carefully monitoring the impact this first phase has and we will use this to guide us when we consider our next steps.

This phased return is in line with what other European countries are doing to get their own schools, colleges and nurseries back.

I know a lot of you may be worried about sending your children to school. Every one of us wants the very best for our children and I know how stressful this time has been for many families. I want to reassure you that this approach is based on the best scientific advice, with children at the very heart of everything we do.

Education is one of the most important gifts we can give any children.

So when we are advised that we can start to bring some children back to school we should do so, so that they don't miss out on the enormous opportunities to learn, to be with their friends and to benefit from everything that their teachers and schools can offer them. We owe it to the children in order to be able to do that.

I would like now to hand over to Jenny and then we will take some questions.