

Government sets out next steps for living with COVID

- Free COVID-19 tests will continue to be available to help protect specific groups including eligible patients and NHS and care staff once the universal testing offer ends on 1 April and next steps for adult social care set out
- Plans in place to enable rapid testing response should a new health threat emerge, such as a new variant of concern emerge
- Vaccines and treatments mean we can transition to managing COVID-19 like other respiratory illnesses, with updated guidance published on 1 April

People at risk of serious illness from COVID-19, and eligible for treatments, will continue to get free tests to use if they develop symptoms, along with NHS and adult social care staff and those in other high-risk settings, Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid announced today (Tuesday 29 March).

Free testing for the general public ends on 1 April as part of the Living with Covid plan which last month set out the government's strategy to live with and manage the virus.

Although COVID-19 infections and hospitalisations have risen in recent weeks, over 55% of those in hospital that have tested positive are not there with COVID-19 as their primary diagnosis.

Free universal testing has come at a significant cost to the taxpayer, with the testing, tracing and isolation budget costing over £15.7 billion in 2021-22. This was necessary due to the severe risk posed by COVID-19 when the population did not have a high level of protection.

Thanks to the success of the vaccination programme and access to antivirals, alongside natural immunity and increased scientific and public understanding about how to manage risk, the population now has much stronger protection against COVID-19 than at any other point in the pandemic.

This is enabling the country to begin to manage the virus like other respiratory infections.

From 1 April, updated guidance will advise people with symptoms of a respiratory infection, including COVID-19, and a high temperature or who feel unwell, to try stay at home and avoid contact with other people, until they feel well enough to resume normal activities and they no longer have a high temperature. Until 1 April individuals should continue to follow the current guidance.

From 1 April, anyone with a positive COVID-19 test result will be advised to try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people for five days, which is when they are most infectious.

Advice will be provided for individuals who need to leave their home when

they have symptoms or have tested positive, including avoiding close contact with people with a weakened immune system, wearing a face-covering and avoiding crowded places.

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Sajid Javid said:

Thanks to our plan to tackle Covid we are leading the way in learning to live with the virus. We have made enormous progress but will keep the ability to respond to future threats including potential variants.

Vaccines remain our best defence and we are now offering spring boosters to the elderly, care home residents and the most vulnerable – please come forward to protect yourself, your family, and your community.

Under the plans set out today free symptomatic testing will be provided for:

- Patients in hospital, where a PCR test is required for their care and to provide access to treatments and to support ongoing clinical surveillance for new variants;
- People who are eligible for community COVID-19 treatments because they are at higher risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19. People in this group will be contacted directly and sent lateral flow tests to keep at home for use if they have symptoms as well as being told how to reorder tests; and
- People living or working in some high-risk settings. For example, staff in adult social care services such as homecare organisations and care homes, and residents in care homes and extra care and supported living services, NHS workers and those working and living in hospices, and prisons and places of detention (including immigration removal centres), where infection needs to be identified quickly to minimise outbreaks. People will also be tested before being discharged from hospital into care homes, hospices, homelessness settings and domestic abuse refuges.

Asymptomatic lateral flow testing will continue from April in some high-risk settings where infection can spread rapidly while prevalence is high. This includes patient-facing staff in the NHS and NHS-commissioned Independent Healthcare Providers, staff in hospices and adult social care services, such as homecare organisations and care homes, a small number of care home visitors who provide personal care, staff in some prisons and places of detention and in high risk domestic abuse refuges and homelessness settings. In addition, testing will be provided for residential SEND, care home staff and residents during an outbreak and for care home residents upon admission. This also includes some staff in prisons and immigration removal centres.

Children and young people who are unwell and have a high temperature should stay at home and avoid contact with other people, where they can. They can go back to school, college or childcare when they no longer have a high temperature, and they are well enough to attend.

The internationally recognised Community Infection Survey delivered through the Office for National Statistics will continue to provide a detailed national surveillance capability in the coming year so the government can respond appropriately to emerging developments such as a new variant of concern or changing levels of population infection. Infections in health and care settings will also be monitored through bespoke studies including the Vivaldi study in residential care homes, the SIREN study in the NHS, and RCGP surveillance in primary care.

The government has retained the ability to enable a rapid testing response should it be needed, such as the emergence of a new variant of concern.

This includes a stockpile of lateral flow tests and the ability to ramp up testing laboratories and delivery channels.

The government's Therapeutics Taskforce and Antiviral Taskforce will also be merged into a single unit which will continue to focus on securing access to the most promising treatments for COVID-19.

Dame Jenny Harries, Chief Executive of the UK Health Security Agency, said:

As we learn to live with Covid, we are focusing our testing provision on those at higher risk of serious outcomes from the virus, while encouraging people to keep following simple steps to help keep themselves and others safe.

The pandemic is not over and how the virus will develop over time remains uncertain. Covid still poses a real risk to many of us, particularly with case rates and hospitalisations on the rise. That is why it is sensible to wear a mask in enclosed spaces, keep indoor spaces ventilated and stay away from others if you have any symptoms of a respiratory illness, including Covid.

Vaccination remains the best way to protect us all from severe disease and hospitalisation due to Covid infection. If you have not yet come forward for your primary or booster I would urge you to do so straight away – the NHS vaccine programme is there to help you and the sooner you are vaccinated the sooner you and your family and friends will be protected.

Most visitors to adult social care settings, and visitors to the NHS, prisons or places of detention will no longer be required to take a test. More guidance on what people should do when visiting adult social care settings will be published by 1 April.

A number of changes and new guidance is also being confirmed today for adult social care including:

- From 1 April, those working in adult social care services will also continue to receive free personal protective equipment (PPE). Priority vaccinations and boosters for residents and staff will also continue

- Updated hospital discharge guidance will be published setting out how all involved in health and social care will work together to ensure smooth discharges from hospital and people receive the right care at the right time in the right place
- Designated settings will be removed. These were initially set up to provide a period of isolation to COVID-19 positive patients before they move into care homes and before routine point of care testing for COVID-19 was available. Restrictions on staff movement will also be removed
- Streamlined guidance on infection and prevention control measures will be published to set out long-standing principles on good practice, and support consistency across the adult social care sector. This will include details on future measures for COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses to ensure providers have the latest information on best practice which will include information on admissions, visiting and PPE
- Updated guidance for adult social care providers and staff to set out the current testing regime across adult social care
- Outbreak management periods in care homes, which can include visiting restrictions, have been reduced from 14 to 10 days
- People aged 75 and over, residents in care homes for elderly adults and those who are immunosuppressed are now eligible to receive a Spring booster jab to top up their immunity to COVID-19. Around five million people will be eligible for a Spring booster around six months after their previous dose, and the NHS has contacted over 600,000 people inviting them to book an appointment. Anyone who has not yet had a COVID-19 jab continues to be encouraged to take up the 'evergreen' offer.

The cost of these changes will be met within existing funding arrangements. As part of this, free parking for NHS staff introduced during the pandemic will also come to an end on 31 March. We are delivering on our the manifesto commitment to provide free hospital car parking to thousands more NHS patients and visitors – with over 94% of NHS trusts implementing free car parking for those who need it most, including NHS staff working night shifts.

Through the Health and Social Care Levy, funding will rise by a record £36 billion over the next three years. This is on top of the previous historic long-term settlement for the NHS, which will see NHS funding increase by £33.9 billion by 2023-24, which has been enshrined in law.

The success of the government's Living with Covid plan, will enable the country to continue to move out of the pandemic while also protecting those at higher risk of serious outcomes from the virus through our testing regime.

- Further information on [NHS car parking regulations](#)
- In July 2020 the government temporarily introduced free hospital car parking for all NHS staff for the duration of the pandemic, investing around £130 million over the past two years to bring about the changes
- Guidance will be updated on 1 April. New guidance will outline the steps people can take to reduce the chances of catching COVID-19 and passing it on to others. These actions will also help to reduce the spread of other respiratory infections, such as flu

- Principles that employers can follow will also be published on 1 April to help them decide how to reduce risks in their workplace
- Alongside hospital patients, patients in primary care who need a test for differential clinical diagnosis will also receive a free test
- As part of the Living with Covid strategy, from 1 April it will no longer be advised for domestic venues and events to use the NHS COVID pass
- The NHS COVID-19 app for contact tracing will remain active and if needed could be used as tool for dealing with any future threats from COVID-19
- UKHSA has worked with devolved governments to take forward the testing programme through the early phases of the pandemic and is committed to continuing joint working with each nation in 2022-23
- Further information on those whose [immune system means they are at a higher risk](#)
- Further information on the [Living with Covid strategy](#)
- Further information on the Therapeutics and Antivirals Taskforce will be outlined in due course

[PM call with the leaders of the United States, France, Germany and Italy: 29 March 2022](#)

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke with President Biden, President Macron, Chancellor Scholz and Prime Minister Draghi.



The Prime Minister spoke to the leaders of the United States, France, Germany and Italy this afternoon about the situation in Ukraine.

The leaders agreed on the ongoing need to support and sustain the people of Ukraine in their fight against Russian barbarism. The Prime Minister

highlighted the appalling attacks being carried out in cities such as Mariupol, which have already suffered weeks of bombardment.

The Prime Minister underscored that we must judge Putin's regime by their actions not their words. Putin is twisting the knife in the open wound of Ukraine in an attempt to force the country and its allies to capitulate. The Prime Minister stressed to his fellow leaders that we should be unrelenting in our response.

The leaders discussed the need to work together to reshape the international energy architecture and reduce dependence on Russian hydrocarbons. They agreed there could be no relaxation of western resolve until the horror inflicted on Ukraine has ended.

The leaders agreed to stay in close contact.

Published 29 March 2022

UK Statement on Definition and Delimitation at COPUOS

Thank you for giving me the floor Chair.

As the UK delegation has highlighted, the Space Industry Act became law in 2018 and the regulations underpinning the Act, came into force in July 2021. These pieces of legislation make provision to regulate all spaceflight activities carried out from the UK.

The term 'spaceflight activities' includes both sub-orbital and space launch activities. In developing the legislation to regulate these activities, the UK thought carefully about the definitions contained within our legislation and policy – looking to industry, legal frameworks and policies within other Member States, the UN treaties and agreed international guidelines. We also considered the wide range of suborbital and launch to orbit activities being proposed by industry to ensure our legislation captures these. The development of our legislation was a cross-Government project.

Chair,

Our approach to regulating launch to orbit and sub-orbital launches from the UK is to look at the purpose and function of the mission. It is the UK view, that defining where space begins is not necessary to be able to regulate these activities and is not required when considering future space traffic management approaches.

Under the UK Space Industry Act the term 'Sub-orbital' encompasses the launch

or the procurement of the launch, operation and return of a craft capable of operating above the stratosphere or a balloon capable of reaching the stratosphere carrying crew or passengers. The Act uses these terms to determine the activities to be regulated by the Act, it does not define where space begins.

The term 'Space activities' encompass the launch or procurement of the launch, operation and return of a space object or aircraft carrying a space object or any activity in outer space. A 'Space object' refers to an object that will go into Earth orbit or beyond or the launch vehicle responsible for putting the object into orbit.

Chair,

In practice, we anticipate licensing four types of spaceflight activities from the UK in the near future. Firstly, sub-orbital activities – either traditional rockets or the horizontal launch of a sub-orbital spacecraft – often called a sub-orbital spaceplane. These flights will provide access to a microgravity environment for science experiments and space tourism.

Secondly, putting a satellite into orbit using a vertically launched rocket or using an air launched rocket attached to a traditional manned aircraft – known as a carrier aircraft. Our regulations could also regulate launch of satellites into orbit from high altitude balloons.

Thirdly, we will continue to licence the operation of a satellite in orbit.

Finally, we can issue a return operator licence to authorise the landing of a spacecraft in the UK which has been launched from overseas.

In addition, the legislation regulates activities associated with spaceflight, including the operation of spaceports and range control services.

Regardless of how a launch is defined, the UK has taken an approach to place safety at the heart of the regulation of our spaceflight activities. Applicants for a launch operator, return operator or a spaceport licence must include a safety case with their application. The safety case must demonstrate that the applicant has systematically identified the major accident hazards associated with planned activities.

The safety case is a live document, licence holders must keep the safety case under review and update the regulator on any material changes.

Our legislation was created in the knowledge that whilst we may deem an activity as sub-orbital, we appreciate that some in the international community may take a different view. With this in mind, operators engaging in both sub-orbital and launch to orbit activities will be required to indemnify the UK Government for any claims brought against it and all operator licences issued under UK legislation contain a limit of operators' third-party liability. Operators are required to take-out third-party liability insurance to an amount determined by the regulator. This could cover any successful claims brought by other States under the UN Liability Convention against the

UK as launching State.

In line with our obligations under the UN treaties, we inform the UN Secretary General of all UK space objects launched into Earth orbit or beyond and will continue to do so, and to maintain our own National Registry of space objects. When launches begin from the UK, whether they are suborbital or launch to orbit, these will also be kept on a UK registry of launches, available to the public, to ensure transparency across all of our activities.

We hope that by sharing the UK approach to launch to orbit and sub-orbital activities, that this has been beneficial to other Member States. We are happy to discuss our approach in more detail with Member States that would be interested.

Thank you Chair.

[Refurbished pumping station makes Doncaster more resilient to climate change](#)

The £14 million scheme is an investment in one of South Yorkshire's most important flood defence assets and makes the Bentley area more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

The pumping station is used almost daily, not just during flood incidents. Its impact would be noticed within a few days if it stopped working, even in dry weather.

Bentley experienced devastating flooding in 2007 when the pumping station flooded, making it inaccessible for Environment Agency incident response teams. This led to the decision to refurbish and upgrade it, to make it more resilient.

The government funded refurbishment of the pumping station increased overall pumping capacity by 20 per cent and reduced operational carbon emissions by over 20 per cent.

Refurbishing the existing pumping station, instead of constructing a new one, has saved the taxpayer £8 million and made 60 per cent carbon savings. This is part of the Environment Agency's work to use new innovative techniques, technology and lower-carbon materials to reduce its carbon footprint and help reach net zero targets.

The site is now significantly more flood resilient because all the vital equipment is now positioned out of the way of potential flooding, and access

routes to the site have been raised above flood level.

The scheme was part of the Environment Agency's previous six-year programme of capital flood defence schemes, which has successfully protected more than 314,000 homes since 2015.

Last year, a record £5.2 billion government investment to create around 2,000 new flood and coastal defences and better protect hundreds of thousands of properties across England was announced.

Bentley Ings Pumping Station is officially opened by Chair of the Environment Agency, Emma Howard Boyd

The project was officially opened by the chair of the Environment Agency, Emma Howard Boyd.

Emma Howard Boyd, chair of the Environment Agency, said:

At 80 years old, Bentley Ings Pumping Station is a great example of combining history with cutting edge engineering to prepare for rising climate shocks.

The teams working on this scheme have reduced carbon emissions in construction and operations by 60 percent, made savings of £8 million and increased pumping capacity by 20 percent.

Subsidence caused by 20th century coal mining means this station is used nearly every day even in dry weather so I hope this work will give people in Bentley and Doncaster a greater sense of security in the years to come.

The Coal Authority supported the project with a contribution of £1.5 million to the project.

Andy Morrith, acting head of Environment Strategy & Sustainability at the Coal Authority, said:

As part of our work to make a better future for people and the environment in mining areas, we work with key partners like the Environment Agency on schemes to mitigate and prevent flooding and pollution. This important upgrade will help manage the likely effects of climate change, giving communities greater protection in the future while helping to provide peace of mind and protecting the environment.

The refurbishment work was impacted by flooding in November 2019, so an additional £4 million was made available to repair storm damage to the pumping storm damage to the pumping station and provide further upgrades.

Environmental enhancements have also been made as part of the scheme through the planting over 1 km hedgerows, 60 trees and 2 hectares of diverse grass meadow.

Despite the challenges of the Covid -19 pandemic, further floods, and supply chain delays due to Brexit, the project has been delivered on time and to budget.

With the increasing impact of climate change, it is impossible to completely stop the risk of flooding. The Environment Agency is working with other organisations to help mitigate current and future flood risks.

Residents can sign up for free flood warnings by visiting www.gov.uk/flood or contacting Floodline on 0345 988 1188.

[UK backs Africa's ambitious continental free trade initiative](#)

- UK launches programme of up to £35m to support negotiations and implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).
- The AfCFTA is expected to lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty, create jobs, and provide new commercial opportunities for businesses across Africa and the UK.
- It comes as Wamkele Mene, Secretary General of the AfCFTA Secretariat, visits London to discuss how the UK can continue its work as a strategic partner to the trading bloc.

International Trade Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan has announced a new UK programme to support the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) trading bloc.

Through the AfCFTA Support Programme, the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) will provide up to £35m to provide trade facilitation and trade policy support to the AfCFTA Secretariat and Member States through TradeMark East Africa (TMEA), Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and other regional partners.

Announcement of the programme comes as AfCFTA Secretariat Secretary General Wamkele Mene visits London to discuss how the UK can continue its work as a strategic partner to the AfCFTA.

As the world's largest free trade area, the AfCFTA has the potential to boost Africa's economic growth by driving industrialisation, generating jobs and delivering prosperity across the continent.

For UK businesses, the trade bloc will remove market access barriers by

creating a single continental market, making it easier and more cost-effective for UK businesses to export goods and services across the 54 AfCFTA member states.

International Trade Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said:

As an independent free trading nation, the UK strongly supports the AfCFTA – the largest free trade area in the world.

We're keen to see continued momentum on outstanding negotiations, and on practical implementation of the agreement on the ground.

This new aid programme shows that trade is a force for good, and will lead to increased trade, investment, and prosperity for both Africa and the UK.

Minister for Africa Vicky Ford said:

Closer integration between African economies boosts growth across the continent creates opportunities and helps lift people out of poverty.

The UK is a committed partner in this mission. This UK funding will promote long-term partnerships between African countries and support a more prosperous, greener continent.

I am delighted to be supporting the AfCFTA Secretariat and its Member States to deliver freer and fairer trade systems in Africa.

Secretary General of the AfCFTA Secretariat Wamkele Mene said:

We are pleased to receive this support from the Government of the UK, as it ushers us into a partnership for strengthening cooperation related to customs and trade facilitation and trade policy across the African continent.

In the last five years or so, we have seen the re-engineering of our Regional Economic Communities, to take into consideration the aspirations that are embedded in the AfCFTA instruments. We have also witnessed during this period the enthusiasm and the energy of our private sector to rise to the occasion and begin to exploit what is provided for in the Agreement.

Our ambition now is to see commercially meaningful trading in 'Made in the AfCFTA' products taking place, across the length and breadth of our continent, to create jobs and economic opportunities for Africans, especially women and the youth. We want to make trade easier for the Africans, in particular our women and young Africans who trade across our borders.

This new AfCFTA support programme is, therefore, timely to facilitate the implementation of the AfCFTA, through supporting national implementation committees and regional economic communities.

The programme builds on existing work from the FCDO and DIT Trade for Development unit to strengthen partnerships and resilience in Africa.

Under the UK's G7 presidency last year, the new British Investment International (BII) group pledged to work with other G7 Development Finance Institutions (DFIs) to invest at least \$80 billion in the African private sector by 2027.

Support for projects in Africa from UK Export Finance is also at its highest in decades, backing a range of infrastructure projects in countries from Côte d'Ivoire to Uganda, with more than £2.3 billion of financial support in the past year.

The AfCFTA Support Programme also complements the UK's broader partnership with the African Union as a multilateral institution to promote global values.

Alongside the Secretary of State for International Trade and Minister for Africa, Secretary General Mene will meet with members of the UK's business and investor community while in London.