

Uptake of COVID-19 vaccine doses soars in week before Christmas

- Public reminded the offer of a vaccine will always be available and urged to come forward to protect themselves and their loved ones
- Largest increase among people aged under 30 in England
- All eligible reminded to Get Boosted Now to protect against Omicron

Thousands more first and second doses were administered last week compared with the week before, as the public are today reminded that the offer of a vaccine is still available and encouraged to come forward to protect themselves against Omicron.

221,564 first doses were administered in the week of 15 to 21 December in England, a 46% increase from the previous week and 279,112 second doses were administered, a 39% jump.

In England, there was an 85% increase in first doses in people aged 18 and 24 and a 71% increase in first doses among people aged 25 to 30. The 7 days up to 21 December saw more over 60s have a first dose than any 7-day period since early June.

While 2 doses of a COVID-19 vaccine provides strong protection against the Delta variant, data from the UK Health Security Agency shows vaccine effectiveness against symptomatic infection is substantially reduced against Omicron with just 2 doses over time – but a third dose provides between 60% and 70% protection against symptomatic infection from Omicron 2 to 4 weeks after the booster is given.

The government and NHS England has rapidly expanded the booster programme and launched an advertising blitz encouraging people to Get Boosted Now. More than 30 million people have already had their top-up jab and all eligible adults will be offered a boosted vaccine by the end of the year. It is vital to get a first and second jab, in order to be eligible for a booster to get the vital protection against Omicron.

Many venues and events in England now require people to have 2 COVID-19 vaccines or proof of a negative test as a condition of entry. People can access their NHS COVID Pass digitally or receive a paper copy once they have been doubled jabbed.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

It has never been more vital to get your jabs and the NHS will always be there for those coming forward to protect themselves and their family. It has been excellent to see a recent surge in first and second jabs.

Those initial jabs lay the foundation for the booster jab to

protect against Omicron – 2 doses is not enough and you need to build protection jab by jab and once eligible Get Boosted Now.

Millions of people have rolled up their sleeves, so let's build on that momentum and ensure we have the protection we need this winter.

Appointments continue to be available over the festive period. A total of 750 armed forces personnel have been drafted in to support the deployment of booster vaccines across the UK and extra vaccine centres and pop-up sites have opened to make it as easy as possible for people to get vaccinated.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities this week announced it will be giving £22.5 million to councils to encourage people to come forward and get vaccinated, whether it is their first, second or third dose. The Community Vaccines Champion scheme will target 60 local authorities with the lowest vaccine uptake.

It will be used to run events in communities across the country to make sure everyone has access to the most accurate and up-to-date health advice, and fund pop-up vaccination centres in places of worship.

Vaccines Minister Maggie Throup said:

Following the emergence of the new Omicron variant, the booster programme has been turbocharged with more vaccine sites popping up making it easier than ever for people to get their jab, whether that's the first, second or booster.

It is heart-warming to see the numbers of people rolling up their sleeves to get their initial doses of a lifesaving COVID-19 vaccine.

But 2 doses are not enough against Omicron. I urge everyone eligible to take advantage of our accelerated programme and get their booster booked in as soon as possible, to top up your protection for the New Year.

□More pop-up sites will be coming online with local areas looking at the most convenient sites for their communities – from trucks and buses in parks to cathedrals, football stadiums and leisure centres.

There are now around 3,000 sites across the country, which includes double the number of hospitals offering jabs to the public – going from 30 to 71 in 2 weeks.

Dr Nikki Kanani, deputy lead for the NHS Covid vaccination programme, said:

It is so encouraging to see that alongside the incredible booster

uptake we've seen in the last couple of weeks, and throughout Christmas, every day people are continuing to come forward for their first and second doses – allowing them to also get their booster as soon as possible.

With lots of appointments available to book online and pop-up clinics and walk-ins right across the country, it is never too late to get your first COVID-19 vaccine and the offer from the NHS is evergreen.

Rough sleepers are being helped to get their COVID-19 vaccines and move into safe accommodation over the winter thanks to a £28 million government funding boost, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced earlier this week (20 December 2021).

The Protect and Vaccinate scheme will help to increase vaccine uptake among people who are homeless and sleeping rough, supporting those who are hesitant about getting their vital booster jabs and funding emergency accommodation to get people off the streets.

This means delivering mobile vaccinations where people are sleeping on the streets, supporting outreach work in shelters to educate people about the dangers of the virus, and giving money to councils to provide safe and secure accommodation while their level of vaccination is increased.