COVID-19 recovery

15th January 2021

**Title**: UK Covid-19 vaccines delivery plan

Department of Health and Social Care | 11th January 2021

In this policy paper, and accompanying press release, the Government sets out the UK ‘s COVID-19 vaccines delivery plan for vaccinating tens of millions of people by spring.

* At least 2 million vaccinations per week with over 2,700 vaccine sites across the UK
* Over 200,000 offers of non-clinical support from the public and leading UK businesses to help with the logistics of the programme

Tens of millions of people will be immunised by the spring at more than 2,700 vaccination sites across the UK, the government yesterday announced as part of comprehensive plans to rapidly scale up the COVID-19 vaccination programme. The expansion of the programme will also mean all adults will be offered a vaccine by the autumn.

The UK COVID-19 vaccines delivery plan explains how the government will work with the NHS, devolved administrations, local councils and the armed forces, and how it is planning, to deploy them to deliver the largest vaccination programme in British history.

Full document: [UK COVID-19 vaccines delivery plan](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/951284/UK_COVID-19_vaccines_delivery_plan.pdf)

Press release: [Government publishes plan for the largest vaccination programme in British history](https://www.wired-gov.net/wg/news.nsf/articles/Government+publishes+plan+for+the+largest+vaccination+programme+in+British+history+12012021081000?open)

**Title:** Number of people seeking help for mental health problems dropped in first lockdown

National Institute for Health Research | 11th January 2021

The number of people seeking help for mental illness or self-harm during April 2020, while the UK was in full lockdown, dropped by more than a third, according to NIHR-funded research.

Forecasts suggest that millions of people in England will require new or additional mental health support as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this research showed marked reductions in people seeking help for mental health problems during the early stages of the pandemic.

The researchers used data from 14 million people across the four nations of the UK to analyse the first time people sought medical help for their mental health, either at their general practice or at a hospital A&E department. In April 2020, the first full month of the UK wide lockdown, the number of incidents of depression recorded in general practice records in England dropped by 43%, and anxiety disorders dropped by 47.8%. In addition, the number of people presenting with self-harm was 37.6% lower than expected in April. The reduction was greatest for women and people aged under 45.

By September 2020, reported rates of depression, anxiety disorder and self-harm were either close to, or had reached, expected levels.

The research which is published in The Lancet Public Health also uncovered significant drops in treatment, such as prescribing of antidepressants. This was greatest for people of working age and those registered at general practices in more deprived areas, where the reduction in diagnoses coded was greatest.

Full detail: [Number of people seeking help for mental health problems dropped in first lockdown](https://www.nihr.ac.uk/news/number-of-people-seeking-help-for-mental-health-problems-dropped-in-first-lockdown/26552)

Full research paper: [Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on primary care-recorded mental illness and self-harm episodes in the UK: a population-based cohort study](https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2468-2667%2820%2930288-7)

**TITLE:** LOCKDOWN RAISED ANXIETY IN PEOPLE WITH ANOREXIA AND THEIR CARERS, BUT ONLINE RESOURCES HELPED

National Institute for Health Research | 8th January 2021

This NIHR Alert highlights a recent paper which explores how COVID-19 has affected the lives of adult patients with anorexia nervosa and their carers. The research uses semi-structured interviews with adult patients and carers, which researchers analysed to identify a number of themes.

 Themes identified from patients:

* reduced access to eating disorder (ED) services
* disruption to routine and activities in the community
* heightened psychological distress and ED symptoms;
* increased attempts at self‐management in recovery.

Themes identified from carers:

* concern over provision of professional support for patients;
* increased practical demands placed on carers in lockdown;
* managing new challenges around patient wellbeing;
* new opportunities.

The lockdowns and restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted eating disorder services. People with anorexia nervosa experienced a loss of routine, heightened anxieties, and increased symptoms. Carers felt more concern and greater responsibility for their loved ones. Despite these difficulties, some patients and carers benefitted from digital self-management resources.

Full detail: [Lockdown raised anxiety in people with anorexia and their carers, but online resources helped](https://evidence.nihr.ac.uk/alert/lockdown-raised-anxiety-in-anorexia-online-resources-helped/)

**Title**: The COVID-19 Vaccine Communication Handbook

via University of Bristol | 7th January 2021

A team of scientific experts has joined forces from across the world to help fight the spread of misinformation about the COVID-19 vaccines, which hold the key to beating the deadly pandemic and releasing countries from debilitating lockdown restrictions.

Together they have created an online guide to arm people with practical tips combined with the very latest information and evidence to talk reliably about the vaccines, constructively challenge associated myths, and allay fears.

With the race on to vaccinate as many people as possible soonest in the wake of a more virulent virus strain, they’re appealing to everyone, from doctors to politicians, teachers to journalists and parents to older generations, to understand the facts, follow the guidance, and spread the word.

Full document: [The COVID-19 Vaccine Communication Handbook. A practical guide for improving vaccine communication and ­fighting misinformation](https://hackmd.io/@scibehC19vax/home)

Press release: [Global experts urge everyone to talk about COVID-19 vaccines responsibly](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/news/2021/january/covid-19-vaccine-communication-handbook.html)

**Title**: GPs can limit routine work to focus on vaccination, says NHS England

BMJ | 2021; 372: n67 | 8th January 2021

General practices can suspend some non-essential work to allow them to focus on delivering covid-19 vaccinations, NHS England has said.

In a letter to general practitioners and local commissioners sent on 7 January, NHS England set out measures designed to reduce practices’ workloads while protecting their income to help them deliver covid-19 vaccinations. The letter urged local commissioners to “take a supportive and pragmatic approach to minimise local contract enforcement across routine care, with attention and support focused on the core areas.” But it stressed that GPs should ensure that “general practice remains fully and safely open for patients, including maintenance of appointments.”

Most locally commissioned enhanced services should be suspended, except when these are specifically in support of vaccination or other covid-19 related support such as reducing hospital admissions, the letter said.

Full detail: [GPs can limit routine work to focus on vaccination, says NHS England](https://www.bmj.com/content/372/bmj.n67)

Related letter: [Freeing up practices to support COVID vaccination](https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/03/C1026_Freeing-up-GP-practices-letter_070121.pdf)

**Title**: Data on vaccination rollout and its effects are vital to gauge progress, say scientists

BMJ | 2021; 372: n76 | 11th January 2021

Scientists have called for more data on the rollout of covid-19 vaccinations in the UK to be released to show how it is working together with details of a long term strategy for ending the pandemic.

Members of Independent Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Independent SAGE) have voiced concerns about an absence of a coherent policy to control the spread of covid-19 amid reliance on emergency lockdowns and promises that “vaccines are coming.”

Full detail: [Data on vaccination rollout and its effects are vital to gauge progress, say scientists](https://www.bmj.com/content/372/bmj.n76)

**Title**: Past COVID-19 infection provides some immunity but people may still carry and transmit virus

Public Health England | 14th January 2021

People infected with COVID-19 in the past are likely to be protected against reinfection for several months, a Public Health England (PHE) study has found, although experts cautioned those with immunity may still be able carry the virus in their nose and throat and therefore have a risk of transmitting to others.

PHE has been regularly testing tens of thousands of health care workers across the UK since June for new COVID-19 infections as well as the presence of antibodies, which suggest people have been infected before.

PHE scientists working on the study have concluded naturally acquired immunity as a result of past infections provide 83% protection against reinfection, compared to people who have not had the disease before. This appears to last at least for 5 months from first becoming sick.

While the [SIREN study](https://www.hra.nhs.uk/planning-and-improving-research/application-summaries/research-summaries/siren-sars-cov2-immunity-and-reinfection-evaluation-covid-19-uph/) will continue to assess whether protection may last for longer, this means people who contracted the disease in the first wave may now be vulnerable to catching it again. The study will continue to follow participants for 12 months to explore how long any immunity may last, the effectiveness of vaccines and to what extent people with immunity are able to carry and transmit the virus.

Full detail: [Past COVID-19 infection provides some immunity but people may still carry and transmit virus](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/past-covid-19-infection-provides-some-immunity-but-people-may-still-carry-and-transmit-virus)

Related:

* [Previous infection can give immunity for at least five months - but reinfection is still possible](https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-previous-infection-could-give-immunity-for-months-but-reinfection-is-still-possible-12187171) | Sky News
* [UK study suggests that the risk of re-infection with COVID-19 is low](https://hospitalhealthcare.com/covid-19/uk-study-suggests-that-the-risk-of-re-infection-with-covid-19-is-extremely-low/) | Hospital Healthcare Europe

**TITLE:** CHILD MENTAL HEALTH IN ENGLAND BEFORE AND DURING THE COVID-19LOCKDOWN

The Lancet Psychiatry | 11th January 2021

Although evidence has emerged of the effect of COVID-19 on adult mental health, few studies around the world cover children. Given the importance of probability sampling and similar prepandemic baseline measures, the follow-up of [England's Mental Health of Children and Young People (MHCYP) survey](https://files.digital.nhs.uk/CB/C41981/mhcyp_2020_rep.pdf) provides a rare resource on what the pandemic has meant for children.

The study showed that the increase in probable mental health problems reported in adults also affected 5–16 year olds in England, with the incidence rising from 10·8% in 2017 to 16·0% in July 2020 across age, gender, and ethnic groups. As in 2017, during the pandemic young women had the highest prevalence of probable mental health problems (27·2%), indicating they should remain a group of particular policy concern.

More than a quarter of children (aged 5–16 years) and young people (aged 17–22) reported disrupted sleep and one in ten (5·4% of children and 13·8% of young people) often or always felt lonely. Both problems were more common in those with probable mental health problems, of whom 18·0% felt fearful of leaving the house because of COVID-19.

This comment piece considers the clinical and policy implications of the initial study results.

Full detail: [Child mental health in England before and during the COVID-19 lockdown](https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2215-0366%2820%2930570-8)

**Title**: 6-month consequences of COVID-19 in patients discharged from hospital

The Lancet | 8th January 2021

The long-term health consequences of COVID-19 remain largely unclear. The aim of this study was to describe the long-term health consequences of patients with COVID-19 who have been discharged from hospital and investigate the associated risk factors, in particular disease severity.

At 6 months after acute infection, COVID-19 survivors were mainly troubled with fatigue or muscle weakness, sleep difficulties, and anxiety or depression. Patients who were more severely ill during their hospital stay had more severe impaired pulmonary diffusion capacities and abnormal chest imaging manifestations, and are the main target population for intervention of long-term recovery.

Full article: [6-month consequences of COVID-19 in patients discharged from hospital](https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736%2820%2932656-8)

**TITLE**: INVESTIGATION INTO THE HOUSING OF ROUGH SLEEPERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

National Audit Office | 14th January 2021

On Thursday 26 March 2020, during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government launched its ‘Everyone In’ campaign. Everyone In required local authorities to take urgent action to house rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping in order to protect public health and stop wider transmission of COVID-19.

This investigation is part of a programme of work the NAO are undertaking to support Parliament’s scrutiny of the government’s response to COVID-19. The report sets out the steps taken by the Department in rehousing rough sleepers in England during the pandemic, focusing particularly on the steps taken at the outset of the pandemic; the information held by the Department on those at risk of rough sleeping; and subsequent steps that the Department has taken to provide long-term accommodation to those at risk of rough sleeping.

The report primarily covers the period between March and November 2020. It is a ‘facts only’ account of the Department’s actions and is not a value-for-money evaluation. While it sets out the spending by local authorities on rough sleeping, the NAO will cover the financial response of local authorities to COVID-19 as a whole in a value-for-money report due for publication later in 2021.

Full report: [Investigation into the housing of rough sleepers during the COVID-19 pandemic](https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Investigation-into-the-housing-of-rough-sleepers-during-the-COVID-19-pandemic.pdf)

**Title:** The UK response to covid-19: use of scientific advice

House of Commons Science and Technology Committee | 8th January 2021

The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee has published its analysis of the way the Government has received, and applied, scientific evidence and advice during the first period of the coronavirus pandemic up to autumn 2020.

The report distils the evidence from scientists and policy makers given at a number of oral evidence sessions contemporaneous with rapidly evolving policy decisions, and from written submissions from leading experts. The report considers the nature and function of official scientific advisory structures; the transparency of scientific advice; and the use of data in informing the UK's covid-19 response.

The report makes recommendations for the Government to take forward as it navigates the current and later stages of the coronavirus pandemic and future emergencies.

Full report: [The UK response to Covid-19: use of scientific advice](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmsctech/136/136.pdf)

Press release: [How has the Government received scientific advice, and how has the advice been used? Cross-party group of MPs publish analysis](https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/135/science-and-technology-committee-commons/news/138245/covid19-how-has-the-government-received-scientific-advice-and-how-has-the-advice-been-used-crossparty-group-of-mps-publish-analysis/)

**Title:** A safe schools policy for re-opening education as soon as possible and mitigating the harms of closure

Independent SAGE | 8th January 2021

This paper proposes a ‘safe schools policy’ aimed at mitigating the harms of school closure, ensuring the continuation of education during closure and enabling the return to schools as soon as possible by increasing the COVID security of the school environment.

Independent SAGE recognise that the decision, on January 4th, to close primary and secondary schools was necessary because of previous failures to implement COVID security measures, the consequent spread of infection in schools and the contribution of schools to rapidly increasing infection levels in the wider community. Given the critical position that had been reached, it was necessary to limit all forms of social contact, including within educational settings, in order to bring the pandemic back under control, to stop the NHS being overwhelmed and to save lives.

Independent SAGE also recognises the substantial harms caused by school closures in terms of both the immediate mental health of school students and their long-term future prospects. Moreover, these harms are far greater amongst the more deprived and precarious sections of the population notably because of the lack of resources necessary for remote study.

Full document: [A safe schools policy for re-opening education as soon as possible and mitigating the harms of closure](https://www.independentsage.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Schools-Jan-2021-final.pdf)

See also: [Use lateral flow tests in schools to find cases, urges Independent SAGE](https://www.bmj.com/content/372/bmj.n75) | BMJ

**Title**: Lockdown compliance improving but low take up of Covid tests ‘worrying’

University College London | 13th January 2021

Three quarters (75%) of adults aged 60+ who reported experiencing symptoms at least once said they had never requested a test, with just 18% of the same age group saying they requested a test every time they experienced symptoms. Younger adults have been most consistent in requesting tests when they experience symptoms of Covid-19, with 42% requesting a test every time, but 45% of this age group still said they’d never request a test despite experiencing symptoms.

Compliance with lockdown rules has been increasing since last September, especially as stricter measures have been brought in, with particular improvements since the start of December when news of the new variant became widespread. ‘Majority’ compliance with the rules is being reported by 96% of people; an improvement since the start of the autumn across all demographic groups. ‘Complete’ compliance is lower, but still being reported by the majority of people (56% for the week ending 10th January) and is now at comparable levels to back in May 2020.

Over a third of respondents (38%) say they are not isolating for the recommended number of days (ten or more) when they develop symptoms of Covid-19, with 13% saying they are not isolating at all. Younger adults and those from higher income households are much less likely to not isolate at all (3% of those aged 18-29 and 9% of those in higher income households are not isolating at all).

Full detail: [Lockdown compliance improving but low take up of Covid tests ‘worrying’](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2021/jan/lockdown-compliance-improving-low-take-covid-tests-worrying)

**TITLE:** STEPPING UP: THE RESPONSE OF STOP SMOKING SERVICES IN ENGLAND TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Action on Smoking and Health | 7th January 2021

This report, written in partnership with Cancer Research UK, examines the performance of stop smoking services in England during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. It finds that the Covid-19 pandemic forced local authorities to reconfigure their stop smoking services at an unprecedented speed.

Many found that smokers welcomed remote methods of engagement such as telephone consultations. The impact of the pandemic on the NHS meant that NHS providers of stop smoking support could no longer offer the same level support. Many specialist stop smoking services and lifestyle services were able to pick up the demand that could not be met in primary care.

Full report: [Stepping up: The response of stop smoking services in England to the COVID-19 pandemic](https://ash.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ASH-CRUK-Stepping-Up-FINAL.pdf)

**Title**: Mitigation Policies and COVID-19–Associated Mortality — 37 European Countries, January 23–June 30, 2020

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention | 15th January 2021

Mitigation policies, including closure of nonessential businesses, restrictions on gatherings and movement, and stay-at-home orders, have been critical to controlling the COVID-19 pandemic in many countries, but they come with high social and economic costs.

European countries that implemented more stringent mitigation policies earlier in their outbreak response tended to report fewer COVID-19 deaths through the end of June 2020. These countries might have saved several thousand lives relative to countries that implemented similar policies, but later.

Earlier implementation of stringent mitigation policies, even by just a few weeks, appears to be important to prevent widespread COVID-19 transmission and reduce the number of deaths.

Full detail: [Mitigation Policies and COVID-19–Associated Mortality — 37 European Countries, January 23–June 30, 2020](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7002e4.htm?s_cid=mm7002e4_w)

**Title:** Employment Uncertainty and Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic Initial Social Distancing Implementation: a Cross-national Study

Global Social Welfare: Research, Policy & Practice | 7th January 2021

Social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in changes in the work environment and employment uncertainty. This paper reports on a cross-national comparison of four countries (Norway, UK, USA and Australia) and examines the differences in mental health between those individuals employed and those not employed during the social distancing implementation.

Compared with their counterparts, participants who were employed reported lower levels of mental health distress, higher levels of psychosocial well-being, better overall quality of life, and lower levels of overall loneliness, social loneliness, and emotional loneliness.

Full article: [Employment uncertainty and mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic initial social distancing implementation: A cross-national study](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40609-020-00201-4)

We

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