COVID-19 recovery

17th December 2021

**Title:** Daily rapid testing for COVID-19 contacts launches this week

Department of Health and Social Care | 12th December 2021

From Tuesday 14 December, people who are fully vaccinated and identified as a contact of someone with COVID-19 – whether Omicron or not – should take an NHS rapid lateral flow test every day for 7 days to help slow the spread of COVID-19.

* Those who test positive or develop symptoms will need to self-isolate
* Unvaccinated adults must continue to self-isolate for 10 days if they are a contact of someone with COVID-19
* It follows a significant rise in Omicron cases in the UK with the new variant expected to become the dominant strain by mid-December

Full detail: [Daily rapid testing for COVID-19 contacts launches this week](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/daily-rapid-testing-for-covid-19-contacts-launches-this-week?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_source=4696fbf9-a24c-4cfe-93c7-5202f6faec7f&utm_content=daily)

**Title:** UK coronavirus (COVID-19) alert level increased from Level 3 to Level 4

Department of Health and Social Care | 12th December 2021

Following advice from the UK Health Security Agency and in the light of the rapid increase in Omicron cases, the UK Chief Medical Officers and NHS England National Medical Director have recommended to ministers that the UK COVID-19 alert level should increase from Level 3 to Level 4.

Full detail: [UK coronavirus (COVID-19) alert level increased from Level 3 to Level 4](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-coronavirus-covid-19-alert-level-increased-from-level-3-to-level-4)

**Title:** Do vaccines work against omicron—and other questions answered

 BMJ | 2021; 375: n3062 | 10th December 2021

The SARS-CoV-2 omicron variant, first detected in South Africa on 24 November, has now been found in 57 countries. This article looks at what we know about it so far, including how well treatments and vaccines work, asking the following:

* What mutations does omicron have?
* Is it more transmissible than the delta variant?
* Does it lead to more severe disease?
* Does omicron escape the vaccines?
* Could there be an updated vaccine?
* What about antiviral and antibody treatments?
* Can PCR testing detect omicron?
* What are countries doing in response?

Full detail: [Do vaccines work against omicron—and other questions answered](https://www.bmj.com/content/375/bmj.n3062)

**Title:** Vaccines shown to induce lower levels of neutralising antibodies against Omicron coronavirus variant

University of Oxford | 13th December 2021

Researchers from the University of Oxford have analysed the impact of the Omicron COVID-19 variant of concern on one of the immune responses generated by vaccination.

Using blood samples from individuals who had previously received two doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca or Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines as part of the Com-COV study, and a live virus isolate, they demonstrate substantial decrease in neutralising titres – a measure of the level of neutralising antibodies generated in responses to vaccination against, or infection from, COVID-19.

The results indicate that the Omicron variant has the potential to drive a further wave of infections, including among those already vaccinated, although the researchers highlight that there is currently no evidence of increased potential to cause severe disease, hospitalisations or deaths in vaccinated populations.

These results align with [recently published data from UK Health Security Agency](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1040076/Technical_Briefing_31.pdf), showing reduced effectiveness of two doses of these vaccines against symptomatic disease due to the Omicron variant compared to Delta. Importantly, this effectiveness was improved by a third dose of vaccine.

Full detail: [Vaccines shown to induce lower levels of neutralising antibodies against Omicron coronavirus variant](https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2021-12-13-vaccines-shown-induce-lower-levels-neutralising-antibodies-against-omicron)

Research paper: [Reduced neutralisation of SARS-COV-2 Omicron-B.1.1.529 variant by post-immunisation serum](https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.12.10.21267534v1) [note: *This article is a preprint and has not been certified by peer review. It reports new medical research that has yet to be evaluated and so should not be used to guide clinical practice*].

**Title:** Mental health services for children and young people risk backward slide

Health and Social Care Committee | 9th December 2021

The Health and Social Care Committee calls for urgent action to prevent mental health services slipping backwards as a result of additional demand created by the pandemic and the scale of unmet need prior to it.

MPs found that despite progress in numbers of young people receiving treatment, it was unacceptable that more than half with a diagnosable condition pre-pandemic do not receive the mental health support they need.

The Report notes that half of mental health conditions become established before the age of 14, while data from NHS Digital showed that in 2020 potentially one in six young people had a diagnosable mental health disorder up from one in nine three years earlier, placing a huge additional strain on already stretched children and young people's mental health services.

The Report also found that too many children and young people were placed in inpatient units far from home, without adequate understanding of their rights, and subject to restrictive interventions.

Full report: [Children and young people’s mental health](https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/8153/documents/83622/default/)

Press release: [Mental health services for children and young people risk backward slide](https://committees.parliament.uk/work/1001/children-and-young-peoples-mental-health/news/159548/mental-health-services-for-children-and-young-people-risk-backward-slide/)

**Title:** Child of the North: Building a fairer future after Covid-19

Northern Health Science Alliance | 8th December 2021

A new report paints a stark picture of inequality for children growing up in the North of England post-pandemic compared to those in the rest of the country. *Child of the North: Building a fairer future after Covid-19* looks at a wide range of factors, from child poverty to children in care, to build up a picture of The Child of the North. It sets out 18 clear recommendations that can be put in place to tackle the widening gap between the North and the rest of England.

* Government advised to take immediate measures to tackle child poverty in the North in new collaborative report on growing inequalities in post-pandemic England
* Children in the North found to have poorer outcomes in health, education, careers and economics
* Government need to address uneven geographical distribution of support for children or the aims of ‘levelling up’ will not be achieved

Full report: [Child of the North: Building a fairer future after Covid-19](https://www.thenhsa.co.uk/app/uploads/2021/12/Child-of-the-North-Report-FINAL.pdf)

Press release: [Widening inequalities for children in the North of England cost billions, increase poverty and harm children’s lives](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/widening-inequalities-children-north-england-cost-billions-increase-poverty-and-harm-childrens-lives)

**Title:** Southampton trial needle-free vaccine for COVID-19 variants and future coronaviruses

National Institute for Health Research | 14th December 2021

Southampton has launched a trial for a pioneering vaccine technology that could be used as a booster targeting COVID-19 virus variants and relatives that threaten future coronavirus pandemics.

This is the first next generation coronavirus vaccine and uses the University of Cambridge DIOSvax technology. It will be given without a needle, just using a jet of air to push it into the skin. This offers a possible future alternative to people who fear needle-based jabs.

If successful it could be scaled up and manufactured as a powder to boost global vaccination efforts, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

Full detail: [Southampton trial needle-free vaccine for COVID-19 variants and future coronaviruses](https://local.nihr.ac.uk/news/southampton-trial-needle-free-vaccine-for-covid-19-variants-and-future-coronaviruses/29546)

See also:

* [Southampton trial needle-free vaccine for COVID-19 variants and future coronaviruses](https://www.southampton.ac.uk/news/2021/11/cambridge-covid-vaccine.page) | University of Southampton
* [Needle-free vaccine targets COVID-19 variants and future coronaviruses](https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/DIOSCoVax_safetytrial) | University of Cambridge
* [Trial begins of needle-free Covid vaccine targeting new variants](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-59642182) | BBC News

**Title:** Booster bookings surge as NHS accelerates COVID-19 vaccine campaign

NHS England | 14th December 2021

More than 650,000 booster bookings were made yesterday (Monday) as the NHS kickstarted the expansion of its world-leading COVID-19 vaccination programme. Yesterday was the second highest day for booster bookings as the online service opened to all eligible people aged 30 and above.

A total of 704,148 vaccine appointments were made, including 655,170 for boosters. This surge in bookings comes as the NHS is accelerating the booster programme in a drive to offer all adults a top-up jab by the end of December.

Full detail: [Booster bookings surge as NHS accelerates COVID-19 vaccine campaign](https://www.england.nhs.uk/2021/12/booster-bookings-surge-as-nhs-accelerates-covid-19-vaccine-campaign/)

See also:

* [NHS booster bookings open to every eligible adult](https://www.england.nhs.uk/2021/12/nhs-booster-bookings-open-to-every-eligible-adult/)
* [NHS delivers record daily number of boosters as vaccine drive surges forward](https://www.england.nhs.uk/2021/12/nhs-delivers-record-daily-number-of-boosters-as-vaccine-drive-surges-forward/)
* [NHS sets out next steps to accelerate COVID-19 booster rollout](https://www.england.nhs.uk/2021/12/nhs-sets-out-next-steps-to-accelerate-covid-19-booster-rollout/)

**Title:** Prime Minister and Head of the NHS call for volunteers to support National Booster Effort

Department of Health & Social Care | NHS England | 14th December 2021

The Prime Minister has announced a new ambition for every eligible adult to have the chance to get their jab by the end of the year. The new target means the NHS will be ramping up its vaccine operations, and it needs as many people as possible to play their part by volunteering their time to help.

In the next week hundreds more sites, mobile units and pop ups will be springing up across the country. These will be in a range of locations that will make it as easy as possible for people to get boosted – such as at football stadia, shopping centres and racecourses. This means volunteers are needed to perform tasks such as registering patients, managing queues and giving jabs.

Full detail[: Prime Minister and Head of the NHS call for volunteers to support National Booster Effort](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-ministeer-and-head-of-the-nhs-call-for-volunteers-to-support-national-booster-effort)

See also: [Call for volunteers as 500k book boosters in a day](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-59646877?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=KARANGA) | BBC News

**Title:** Government and faith leaders join forces to support booster drive

Department of Health & Social Care | 17th December 2021

The government and faith leaders have united in the national effort to get the country boosted in the wake of a surge in Omicron cases.

The drive is being supported by religious leaders, including members of the Prime Minister’s Places of Worship Taskforce, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Sheikh Nuru Mohammed, and the General Secretary of the Hindu Council.

Full detail: [Government and faith leaders join forces to support booster drive](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-and-faith-leaders-join-forces-to-support-booster-drive)

**Title:** G7 statement on the Omicron variant

Department of Health and Social Care | 16th December 2021

G7 health ministers held their final meeting of the UK’s G7 Presidency, focusing particularly on the very worrying developments on Omicron.

In light of these extensive challenges, G7 ministers reiterated the commitment to taking forward the pledges in recent G7 and G20 declarations to tackle the ongoing pandemic and build defences for the future. Following information exchange between ministers they agreed that working together was crucial in responding to the rapidly growing Omicron wave. Ministers highlighted the importance of equitable access to diagnostics, genome sequencing, vaccines and therapeutics. They also agreed on the increasing importance of booster campaigns and regular testing alongside continued non-pharmaceutical measures. Ministers reiterated their continuous support for COVAX, their commitment to the global effort on vaccine rollout and their support for accelerated development of vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics in pandemics.

G7 health ministers also welcomed the close co-operation throughout the UK’s G7 Presidency on clinical trials, global health security, antimicrobial resistance (AMR), and digital health.

Full detail: [G7 statement on the Omicron variant](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/g7-statement-on-the-omicron-variant)

**Title:** Pregnant women urged to come forward for COVID-19 vaccination

UK Health Security Agency | 16th December 2021

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) is calling on all pregnant women to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

There is growing evidence showing that women who are pregnant are at increased risk of serious consequences from coronavirus (COVID-19) and as a result, they should be considered a clinical risk group within the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

Given that the majority of pregnant women who have been admitted to hospital with severe COVID-19 are unvaccinated, the key priority is to increase the number of pregnant women completing their primary course (2 vaccine doses 8 weeks apart).

Recent data published by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) adds to the existing international evidence, which has not identified any safety concerns of vaccinating women during pregnancy.

Full detail: [Pregnant women urged to come forward for COVID-19 vaccination](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pregnant-women-urged-to-come-forward-for-covid-19-vaccination)

**Title:** Defence steps up support to vaccine programme

Department of Health and Social Care | 13th December 2021

750 Armed Forces personnel have been made available to support the NHS, the Department of Health and Social Care and Scottish Government to accelerate the vaccine booster programme.

Over 100 personnel are currently supporting the vaccine rollout in Scotland. 600 Armed Forces personnel have been made available to NHS England to administer vaccines, working in small teams across the country. In addition, around 50 personnel will provide planning support to NHS England. 41 planners will deploy to NHS trusts across England and 10 logistics experts will be based at NHS England’s headquarters in London.

Full detail: [Defence steps up support to vaccine programme](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defence-steps-up-support-to-vaccine-programme)

**Title:** The effect of mandatory COVID-19 certificates on vaccine uptake: synthetic-control modelling of six countries

The Lancet Public Health | 13th December 2021

Mandatory COVID-19 certification (showing vaccination, recent negative test, or proof of recovery) has been introduced in some countries. This study aimed to investigate the effect of certification on vaccine uptake.

COVID-19 certification led to increased vaccinations 20 days before implementation in anticipation, with a lasting effect up to 40 days after. Countries with pre-intervention uptake that was below average had a more pronounced increase in daily vaccinations compared with those where uptake was already average or higher. Increase in uptake was highest for people younger than 30 years after the introduction of certification.

Mandatory COVID-19 certification could increase vaccine uptake, but interpretation and transferability of findings need to be considered in the context of pre-existing levels of vaccine uptake and hesitancy, eligibility changes, and the pandemic trajectory.

Full paper: [The effect of mandatory COVID-19 certificates on vaccine uptake: synthetic-control modelling of six countries](https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2468-2667%2821%2900273-5)

**Title:** Need for social restrictions will gradually shrink over time, says England’s CMO

BMJ |2021; 375: n3107 | 17th December 2021

The development of polyvalent vaccines and new antivirals should lessen the need for social restrictions from around the middle of 2023, England’s chief medical officer has told MPs.

Giving evidence to the House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee on 16 December, Chris Whitty said that although the UK may need intermittent social restrictions against covid-19 over the next 18 months, future medical advances should provide the “heavy lifting” against new variants.

However, Whitty said that for now some social restrictions may be necessary to tackle variants such as omicron that show some partial escape from vaccines and could overwhelm the NHS if left unchecked.

Full detail: [Need for social restrictions will gradually shrink over time, says England’s CMO](https://www.bmj.com/content/375/bmj.n3107)

**Title:** Omicron: a failure to act with a global focus will continue the proliferation of new variants of covid-19

BMJ | 2021; 375: n3095 | 16th December 2021

The emergence of the omicron variant of covid-19 serves as a stark reminder that while we have made progress in tackling covid-19 over the past two years, there is still much work to be done. This BMJ Opinion piece argues that while we must continue to implement public health measures to protect our domestic population, if we fail to act with a global focus we will continue to see the proliferation of new variants of the virus.

The article suggests that governments across the world must come together to ensure international vaccine equity and protect the health of our global community. We also need to address domestic inequalities in vaccine uptake, and the government must re-double efforts to ensure that those not already vaccinated get their jabs.

Full detail: [Omicron: a failure to act with a global focus will continue the proliferation of new variants of covid-19](https://www.bmj.com/content/375/bmj.n3095)

**Title:** Omicron and the need for boosters

BMJ | 2021; 375: n3079 | 14th December 2021

Over 365 million booster or third vaccine doses have been administered globally. This BMJ analysis asks what protection they offer against the latest covid variant.

Full detail: [Omicron and the need for boosters](https://www.bmj.com/content/375/bmj.n3079)

**Title:** GPs are told to postpone routine care to focus on vaccine boosters in response to omicron

BMJ | 2021; 375: n3083 | 14th December 2021

The UK government has announced a further acceleration to the covid booster vaccine programme in response to the rapid spread of the omicron variant and has promised that every UK adult will be able to book a booster by the end of 2021.

To free up capacity in the health service general practices are being asked to postpone routine appointments and focus on delivering vaccinations, alongside urgent appointments for conditions such as cancer, over the next two weeks.

Full detail: [GPs are told to postpone routine care to focus on vaccine boosters in response to omicron](https://www.bmj.com/content/375/bmj.n3083)

See also: [Will GPs boost the booster rollout?](https://www.bmj.com/content/375/bmj.n3016) | BMJ

**Title:** Long covid symptoms among hospital inpatients show little improvement after a year, data suggest

BMJ | 2021; 375: n3092 | 15th December 2021

People admitted to hospital with covid-19 who reported “long covid” symptoms five months after discharge had made only limited improvement after a full year, preliminary data from the PHOSP-COVID study show.

Researchers said that their results showed that patients who experienced the most severe symptoms also had raised levels of substances associated with whole body inflammation and tissue damage and repair, suggesting autoimmune involvement.

The study, led by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Leicester Biomedical Research Centre, is following up 2230 adults admitted to hospital with covid-19. At five months after discharge only 2.5 in 10 people felt fully recovered. This was largely unchanged after 12 months, at less than 3 in 10 patients, in the 807 people assessed so far.

The most common long covid symptoms reported by patients were fatigue, muscle pain, physically slowing down, poor sleep, and breathlessness.

Full detail: [Long covid symptoms among hospital inpatients show little improvement after a year, data suggest](https://www.bmj.com/content/375/bmj.n3092)

Full research: [Clinical characteristics with inflammation profiling of Long-COVID and association with one-year recovery following hospitalisation in the UK: a prospective observational study](https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.12.13.21267471v1.full.pdf) | medRxiv [*This article is a preprint and has not been certified by peer review. It reports new medical research that has yet to be evaluated and so should not be used to guide clinical practice].*

**Title:** Modelling suggests rapid spread of Omicron in England but same severity as Delta

Imperial College London | 17th December 2021

Omicron largely evades immunity from past infection or two vaccine doses according to Imperial's latest report. The new report (Report 49) estimates that the risk of reinfection with the Omicron variant is 5.4 times greater than that of the Delta variant. This implies that the protection against reinfection by Omicron afforded by past infection may be as low as 19%.

The results suggest that the proportion of Omicron among all COVID cases was doubling every 2 days up to December 11th. The distribution of Omicron by age, region and ethnicity currently differs markedly from Delta, with 18–29-year-olds, residents in the London region, and those of African ethnicity having significantly higher rates of infection with Omicron relative to Delta. London is substantially ahead of other English regions in Omicron frequency.

The study finds no evidence of Omicron having lower severity than Delta, judged by either the proportion of people testing positive who report symptoms, or by the proportion of cases seeking hospital care after infection. However, hospitalisation data remains very limited at this time.

Further detail: [Modelling suggests rapid spread of Omicron in England but same severity as Delta](https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/232698/modelling-suggests-rapid-spread-omicron-england/)

Full report: [Report 49 - Growth, population distribution and immune escape of Omicron in England](https://www.imperial.ac.uk/mrc-global-infectious-disease-analysis/covid-19/report-49-Omicron/)

We

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