

UK ramps up vaccine rollout, targets every adult by autumn

January 10 2021, by Sylvia Hui



In this Friday Jan. 8, 2021 file photo, a member of staff prepares to administer the Pfizer-BioNtech COVID-19 vaccine to a member of the public near Manchester, England. Britain races to vaccinate more than 15 million people by mid-February, and in an effort to ensure vaccines get to the right places at the right times, along with the syringes, alcohol swabs and protective equipment needed to administer them, the government has called in the army. (AP Photo/Jon Super, File)

Britain's health secretary said Sunday that every adult in the country will be offered a COVID-19 vaccine by the autumn as the U.K. ramps up its mass vaccination program amid a huge surge of infections and hospital admissions.

More than 600,000 people age 80 and over will begin receiving invitations this week to get the [coronavirus](#) shot at new large-scale vaccine centers around England. Health Secretary Matt Hancock said that officials were "on track" to reach its target of inoculating about 15 million people in the most [vulnerable groups](#) by the middle of February.

The vaccination drive comes as the U.K. sees a steep increase in infections and record numbers of COVID-19 patients being hospitalized, with many experts warning that the situation is more dire than it was when the country went into its first lockdown last spring. The Office of National Statistics estimated that 1 in 50 people in England had the virus in the most recent week.

Daily reported deaths hit a record high Friday, at 1,325, and in total around 81,000 people have died after testing positive for COVID-19. That's the highest in Europe and comes just behind the U.S., Brazil, India and Mexico.

Hancock said that more than 200,000 people are being vaccinated in England every day, and that by autumn, the entire adult population should have been offered a jab.



In this Tuesday, Dec. 8, 2020 file photo, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson watches as nurse Rebecca Cathersides administers the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to Lyn Wheeler at Guy's Hospital in London. Britain races to vaccinate more than 15 million people by mid-February, and in an effort to ensure vaccines get to the right places at the right times, along with the syringes, alcohol swabs and protective equipment needed to administer them, the government has called in the army. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein, Pool, File)

"We've got over 350 million doses on order—they're not all here yet. We're rolling them out as fast as they get delivered," he told the BBC. "But we are going to have enough to be able to offer a vaccine to everyone over the age of 18 by the autumn."

That's distant hope for doctors, nurses and emergency workers experiencing unprecedented pressure right now. Tracy Nicholls, the chief executive of the College of Paramedics, said members have reported ambulances left lining up outside hospitals waiting for up to nine hours, unable to hand patients over to emergency rooms.

"This year particularly has seen incredible pressure because of the clinical presentation of the patients our members are seeing. They are sicker," she told Sky News on Sunday. "We are seeing the ambulance handover delays at a scale we haven't seen before."

The seven new large-scale vaccination centers join around 1,000 other sites across the country, including hospitals, [general practitioners'](#) clinics and some drugstores.



In this Tuesday, Dec. 8, 2020 file photo, a man enters the Royal Victoria Hospital, one of several hospitals around Britain that are handling the initial phase of a COVID-19 immunization program, in West Belfast, Northern Ireland. Britain races to vaccinate more than 15 million people by mid-February, and in an effort to ensure vaccines get to the right places at the right times, along with the syringes, alcohol swabs and protective equipment needed to administer them, the government has called in the army. (AP Photo/Peter Morrison, File)

Officials are hoping a speedy mass vaccination rollout will help get Britain back to normal life soon. The country entered a third national lockdown in the beginning of January, which closed all nonessential shops, schools, colleges and universities for at least six weeks.

On Friday, Britain authorized the [vaccine](#) made by Moderna, making it the third to be licensed for use in the country. The U.K. has so far inoculated about 1.5 million people with the Pfizer-BioNTech and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines.

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Citation: UK ramps up vaccine rollout, targets every adult by autumn (2021, January 10)
retrieved 25 April 2024 from
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-01-uk-ramps-vaccine-rollout-adult.html>

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