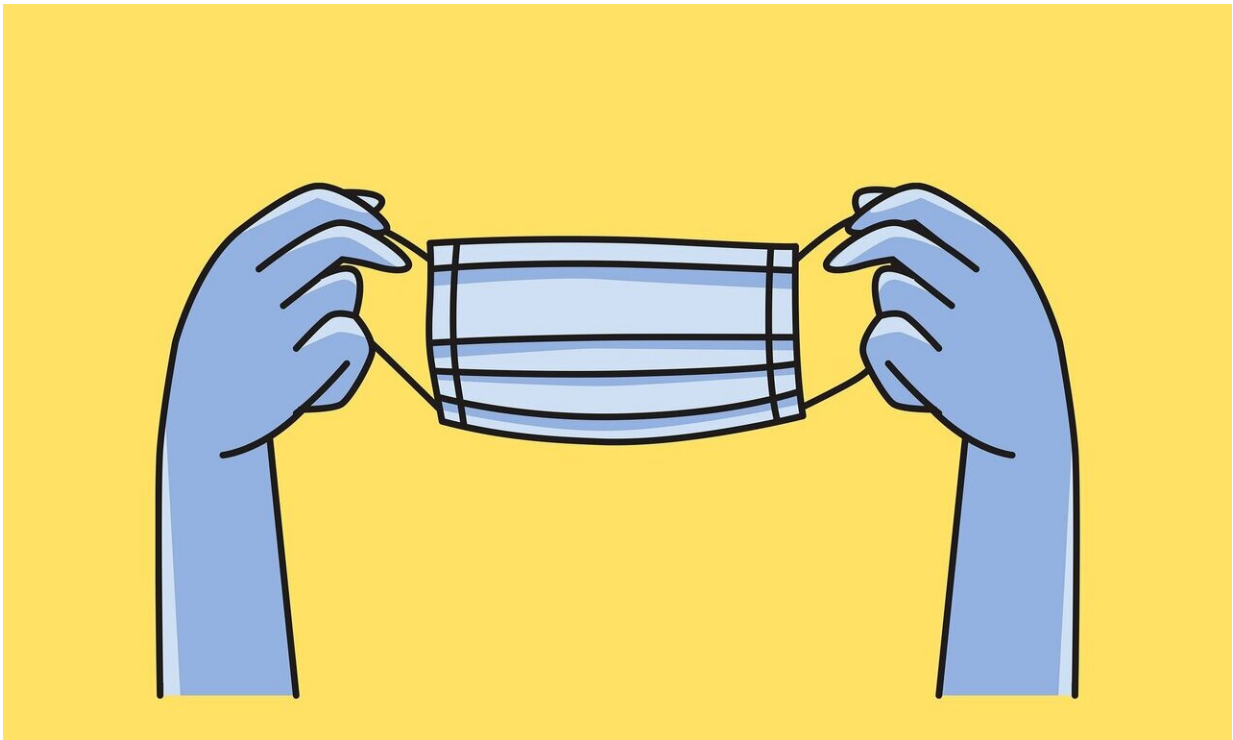


UK expands virus vaccination campaign to over-70s

January 18 2021



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Britain on Monday extended its coronavirus vaccination campaign to people over the age of 70, as new, tougher restrictions for all arrivals to the country came into force.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said some four million people across the

country had been vaccinated—half of them aged over 80, and another 50 percent care home workers and residents.

The speed of the rollout—Britain's biggest vaccination drive in history—was "encouraging", he told Sky News.

Britain is under another lockdown to curb the spread of the virus, particularly from a new strain that has sent case numbers and deaths spiralling, and piled pressure on overstretched health services.

Despite saying he hoped "things will be very different by the spring", Johnson warned the lifting of restrictions would take time.

"I'm afraid I've got to warn people, it will be gradual. You can't just open up in a great 'Open Sesame', in a great bang, because I'm afraid the situation is still pretty precarious," he added.

Britain has set itself an ambitious goal of vaccinating 15 million of the most vulnerable people by mid-February, and the entire adult population by the autumn.

"We can see a clear line of sight to vaccinating everyone by September," Health Secretary Matt Hancock told a press conference.

"Anything before that would be a bonus," he added, amid optimism the target could be reached in the summer.

Programme expansion

As the rollout gathers momentum, jabs are now being more widely offered in areas where most over-80s had received their first of two doses of the jab, according to vaccines minister Nadhim Zahawi.

The medical director for the state-run National Health Service (NHS) in England, Stephen Powis, said the expansion would target an additional five million people.

"We are now able to expand the vaccination programme beyond those top two priority groups—that's the care home residents, care home staff, the hospital staff and the over-80s—down to the over-70s," he said.

Britain has been rocked by the discovery of a new, more transmissible variant of coronavirus.

More than 89,000 people have now died and nearly 3.4 million infected in the country since the pandemic began.

In the face of criticism over its slow reaction to the fast-changing crisis, Johnson's government has pinned its efforts on mass vaccination for a return to normality.

Since vaccinations began on December 8, more than 3.8 million people have received a first dose.

140 jabs a minute

Johnson called the expansion of the vaccine programme, and the opening of 10 new mass vaccination centres—in addition to more than 250 hospitals and some 1,000 GP surgeries—a "significant milestone".

"We are now delivering the vaccine at a rate of 140 jabs a minute and I want to thank everyone involved in this national effort," he said.

In an attempt to speed up the rollout, health chiefs have delayed second doses for up to 12 weeks.

New restrictions meanwhile came into force at 0400 GMT on Monday, requiring international travellers arriving in Britain to provide proof of a negative coronavirus test taken no more than 72 hours before departure.

All international arrivals will also be required to quarantine for 10 days under the new rules, which replace a system of exemptions for less affected countries known as "travel corridors".

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