

Londoners turn out for Covid boosters as UK revs up vaccine drive

December 4 2021

Lining a wet West London pavement on Friday, people waited patiently outside a red brick building as fears over the Omicron variant spurred another round of mass vaccinations across Britain.

Those eager to get jabbed in the Hammersmith neighbourhood were among the approximately 3.5 million the UK government is aiming to vaccinate every week before the end of January as it responds to the new COVID-19 strain.

The country has already identified several dozen cases of Omicron this week, and is banking on its so far highly successful jabs programme in the hope of ramping up immunity to the virus.

"It made me want to get the booster sooner rather than later, because I'm not from the UK (and) I want to travel for Christmas," said Serafina Cuomo, as she waited for her [third dose](#).

"I'm not particularly worried about getting sick, but I am worried about the effect it can have on schools, normal activities, travel," the Italian university lecturer added.

Further up the line, Lotfi Ladjemi, a finance industry worker, said he was taking "the first opportunity" available for his booster.

"No-one seems to understand whether the vaccine is effective against it, so it's better to just try and get one quickly," the 42-year-old told AFP.

"If it does turn out to be worse and the vaccine less effective, at least you've had a booster."

'Recharge it'

Ben Coleman, a local councillor from the Hammersmith and Fulham district authority which provides the premises, noted take-up for jabs had spiked since the variant emerged last month in southern Africa.

"The message is getting through, but we're gonna be doing a lot more to promote it," he said, adding 500 recipients turned out last weekend.

"A lot of people don't understand after they had two doses of the vaccine, that, it's like a battery, it runs down, and you need to recharge it."

Britain, which has been among the hardest hit by COVID-19 with more than 145,000 deaths, is racing to offer third doses to all adults aged over 18 through its state-run National Health Service.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has vowed vaccination centres will be "popping up like Christmas trees" and hundreds of [military personnel](#) will be drafted in to help deliver the shots.

Coleman said his local council was confident about supplies but less sure about having the staff—voluntary, professional or military—to administer them.

"We have the vaccine, it's the people to put them in people's arms that is the issue," he said.

'Horrible'

Inside the council's non-descript building dedicated to the jabs effort, recipients waited on seats under bright white lights for their turn to be inoculated.

After the injection, people are asked to wait 15 minutes before leaving the premises in case of any side effects.

"We had the booster now—both of us," said Tasos Tsielepis, 76, sat beside his wife Celine.

"It's scary, isn't it?" she added of Omicron.

The couple received their first two doses in Cyprus, and had been spurred into getting their third by its sudden emergence.

Tasos Tsielepis revealed he had contracted the virus early in the pandemic, and was hospitalised for a week.

"It was horrible," he recalled. "It leaves (its) marks... tired, you feel different for a long time.

"Nobody's confident because we don't know after Omicron what's gonna come next," Tsielepis added.

Meanwhile, computer engineer Roberto Ricci was leaving the vaccination hub with a sense of public spiritedness.

"It's essential to protect others and to stay healthy," he told AFP.

"We have a civic duty to protect others... it's also for family, for everyone around, it's important."

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