

UK health officials prepare for omicron surge at hospitals

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Prime Minister Boris Johnson visits a Covid vaccination centre at the Rainbow Pharmacy in the Open University Campus, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, Wednesday Dec. 29, 2021. Credit: Geoff Pugh/pool photo via AP

England's National Health Service is building temporary structures at

hospitals around the country to prepare for a possible surge of COVID-19 patients as the highly transmissible omicron variant fuels a new wave of infections.

The U.K. reported a record 183,037 confirmed new coronavirus infections on Wednesday, 32% more than the previous day. While early data suggests [omicron](#) is less likely to cause serious illness than earlier variants, public health officials think the sheer number of infections could lead to a jump in hospitalizations and deaths.

In response, the NHS will begin setting up "surge hubs" this week at eight hospitals around England, each with the capacity to treat about 100 patients. Staff are preparing plans to create as many as 4,000 "super surge" beds should they be needed, the NHS said Thursday.

"We do not yet know exactly how many of those who catch the virus will need hospital treatment, but given the number of infections we cannot wait to find out before we act, and so work is beginning from today to ensure these facilities are in place," NHS England medical director Stephen Powis said in a statement.

The number of people in England hospitalized with COVID-19 increased to 10,462 on Wednesday from 7,366 on Dec. 24, government figures show. Wednesday's number was the highest since March 1. The figure is still well below the peak of 34,336 recorded on Jan. 18.



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Ghadeer Mahar grimaces as she is given a vaccination at a COVID-19 booster vaccination centre at Hampden Park vaccination centre in Glasgow, Scotland, Wednesday Dec. 29, 2021. Credit: Andrew Milligan/PA via AP



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British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has resisted implementing new restrictions on business and social interactions during the [holiday season](#), instead emphasizing an expanded vaccine booster program to control the spread of omicron.

Mass vaccination centers at sports stadiums and museums have reopened after research showed that two doses of the vaccine weren't enough to protect against omicron.

Across the U.K., almost 58% of people ages 12 and over has received booster shots, including 325,087 who received a third dose on Tuesday, according to the latest government data.

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