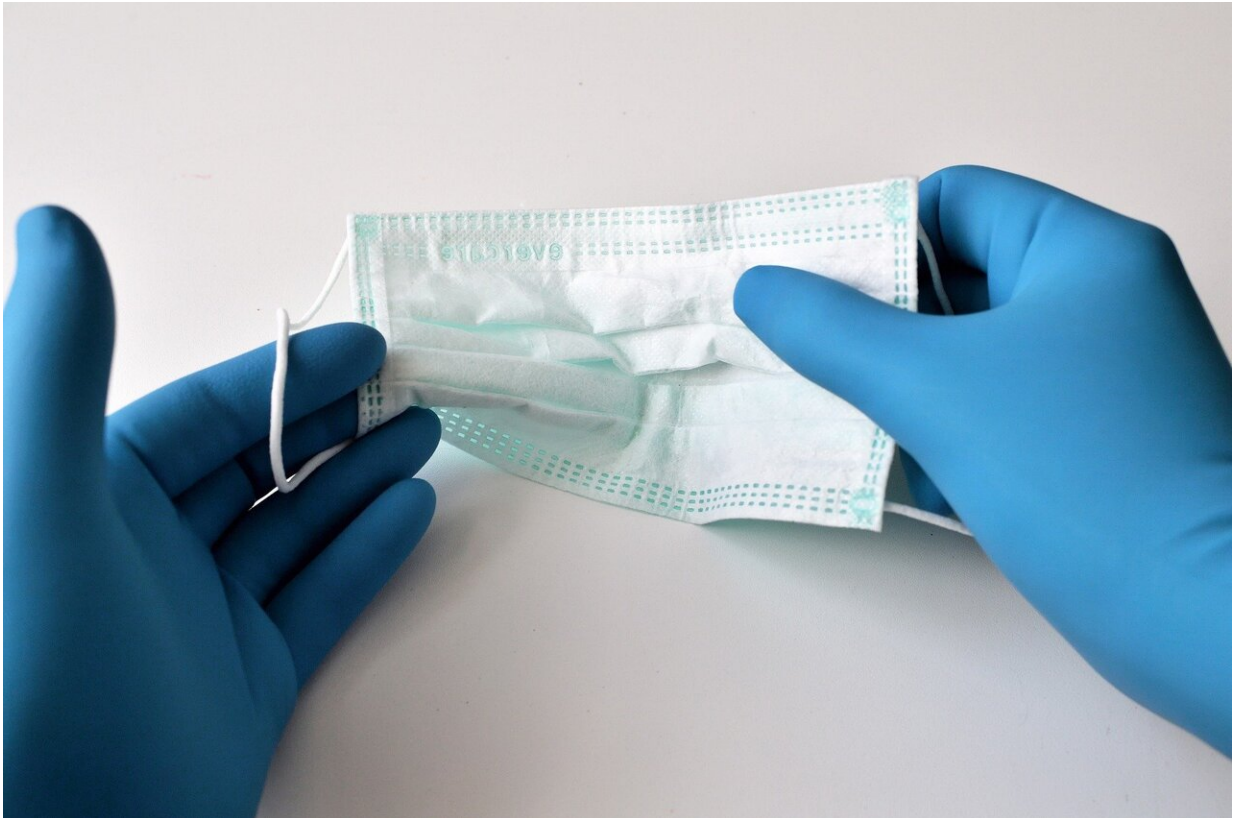


UK virus cases hit new record

December 23 2021



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The UK on Thursday set another daily COVID-19 daily infections record, fuelled by the Omicron variant.

Some 119,789 cases were recorded in the last 24 hours, a day after figures exceeded 100,000 for the first time at 106,122.

The UK is among the worst hit countries in Europe with a virus death toll of 147,720.

The Office for National Statistics estimated that nearly 1.4 million people in UK households had COVID in the week ending December 16, the highest figure yet of the pandemic that began in early 2020.

Hospital admissions are also growing, albeit more slowly than during previous waves, particularly in London.

There was nevertheless some "encouraging news," Health Minister Sajid Javid said, since "early reports suggest the risk of hospitalisation is lower than (with) Delta".

Two preliminary studies from Britain have indicated this.

"They're not very clear though on by how much that risk is reduced," Javid cautioned, warning that if case numbers are very high, there "could still be significant hospitalisations".

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has opted not to introduce tougher restrictions in England ahead of Christmas, focusing instead on a campaign to increase vaccine protection through a booster programme.

More than 30 million people in the UK have received booster jabs as Johnson has set the ambitious goal of offering one to everyone over 18 by the end of the year.

Other UK regions have tightened anti-virus measures, however, and Scotland announced Thursday that it would close nightclubs from next week including on New Year's Eve, due the case surge.

The Scottish government said clubs would have to close from 5 am on

Monday "to tackle the transmission of Omicron, which continues to spread rapidly".

Edinburgh had already cancelled its usual spectacular firework display for New Year's Eve, known in Scotland as Hogmanay.

Scotland's Deputy First Minister John Swinney said the closure of nightclubs would come along with [financial support](#) to help them "weather what we hope will be a short period until they are able to operate normally again".

He added that nightclubs could remain open if they only provided table service and had social distancing measures.

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has warned Scotland could face a "tsunami of infections" and announced measures including a limit of 500 people at outdoor events from December 26, hitting sports fixtures.

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