

# UK hits record COVID-19 levels; nearly 5 million infected

April 3 2022, by Sylvia Hui

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Family members of those who died of COVID walk past the National Covid Memorial wall in London, Tuesday, March 29, 2022. Latest figures from Britain's statistics agency show the prevalence of COVID-19 in the U.K. has reached record levels, with about 1 in 13 people estimated to be infected with the virus in the past week. Some 4.9 million people were estimated to have the virus in the week ending March 26, up from 4.3 million recorded in the previous week, the Office for National Statistics said Friday, April 1, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Alastair Grant, File

The prevalence of COVID-19 in the U.K. has reached record levels, with about 1 in 13 people estimated to be infected with the virus in the past week, according to the latest figures from Britain's official statistics agency.

Some 4.9 million people were estimated to have the coronavirus in the week ending March 26, up from 4.3 million recorded in the previous week, the Office for National Statistics said Friday. The latest surge is driven by the more transmissible omicron variant BA.2, which is the dominant variant across the U.K.

Hospitalizations and [death rates](#) are again rising, although the number of people dying with COVID-19 is still relatively low compared with earlier this year. Nonetheless, the latest estimates suggest that the steep climb in new infections since late February, when British Prime Minister Boris Johnson scrapped all remaining coronavirus restrictions in England, has continued well into March.

The figures came on the same day the government ended free rapid COVID-19 tests for most people in England, under Johnson's "living with COVID" plan. People who do not have [health conditions](#) that make them more vulnerable to the [virus](#) now need to pay for tests to find out if they are infected.

"The government's 'living with COVID' strategy of removing any mitigations, isolation, free testing and a considerable slice of our surveillance amounts to nothing more than ignoring this virus going forwards," said Stephen Griffin, associate professor at the University of Leeds' [medical school](#).



Family members write a message to two sisters who died of COVID on the National Covid Memorial wall in London, Tuesday, March 29, 2022. Latest figures from Britain's statistics agency show the prevalence of COVID-19 in the U.K. has reached record levels, with about 1 in 13 people estimated to be infected with the virus in the past week. Some 4.9 million people were estimated to have the virus in the week ending March 26, up from 4.3 million recorded in the previous week, the Office for National Statistics said Friday, April 1, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Alastair Grant, File

"Such unchecked prevalence endangers the protection afforded by our vaccines," he said. "Our vaccines are excellent, but they are not silver bullets and ought not to be left to bear the brunt of COVID in isolation."

More than 67% of people 12 years old and above in the U.K. have been

vaccinated and had their booster or a third dose of the coronavirus vaccine. Beginning Saturday, parents can also book a low-dose [vaccine](#) for children between 5 to 12 years old in England.

James Naismith, a biology professor at the University of Oxford, said he believed that except for those who are completely shielded or not susceptible to the virus, most people in the country would likely be infected with the BA.2 variant by the summer.

"This is literally living with the virus by being infected with it," he said.

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