

COVID vaccine weekly: Reopening will test the strength of England's immunity

23 July 2021, by Rob Reddick



Drawing comparisons with the flu vaccine could be a good way to drive COVID-19 vaccine uptake. Credit: [Michele Ursi/Shutterstock](#)

England has now lifted nearly all of its coronavirus restrictions. Cases are [high and rising](#), but the country's vaccine coverage is among the best the world, meaning that the power of vaccines to control the virus will now be firmly put to the test. How will this battle play out?

Possibly not very well, argues Zania Stamataki, senior lecturer in viral immunology at the University of Birmingham. Vaccines are effective at reducing transmission and disease, but they don't completely prevent either among the vaccinated. Removing other [control measures](#) will definitely see infections, hospitalisations and deaths increase.

We also don't yet know the duration of [vaccine](#)-induced protection—and there's some new [research](#) that suggests that antibody levels may drop off over time, which could allow for greater transmission and illness in the future. On top of this, removing restrictions and letting infections spiral raises the risk of new variants emerging that

might be able to spread more easily or evade immunity.

The [delta variant](#) is a sign of what can happen when the virus is given the opportunity to mutate. As well as being more transmissible, there's growing evidence that delta has evolved some ability to escape the effects of vaccines too—as Zania explains separately here. New research shows that in people who've only had a single vaccine dose, delta is less sensitive to the effects of antibodies.

And the fact that we're already seeing relatively high numbers of infections among the double vaccinated is a warning that we've still got plenty of new cases ahead of us. This isn't a sign that the vaccines aren't working, argues Jamie Hartmann-Boyce of the Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine at the University of Oxford, but a confirmation of what we already know: that they aren't 100% effective. With lots of virus circulating and the majority of UK adults double jabbed, a sizeable number of cases among those fully vaccinated is to be expected.

Pleasingly though, there's some early evidence that symptoms are less severe in those who've had both doses. Vaccinated COVID-19 patients report the same types of symptoms as unvaccinated ones, but have fewer of them. Their symptoms also last for a shorter amount of time.

Finally, the rising number of cases among the vaccinated shouldn't distract from the fact that there's still a [notable portion](#) of British adults—12%—who haven't had a single vaccine dose. One way of convincing this group to come forward and take one could be to underline how much more effective COVID-19 vaccine are than jabs for many other diseases, suggest Colin Davis and Ryan McKay.

In a newly published piece of research, they show how contrasting the effectiveness of COVID-19

vaccines with those for seasonal flu, which on average are far less protective, makes people regard coronavirus vaccines much more favorably. And importantly, this happens without perceptions of flu vaccines taking a hit.

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