

Face masks again mandatory in England to combat omicron

November 30 2021



Commuters in Canary Wharf underground tube station wear face masks to curb the spread of COVID-19, now mandatory on public transport in Britain after the emergence of new Omicron variant, in London, Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021. Credit: Victoria Jones/PA via AP

England imposed new restrictions to combat the omicron variant on

Tuesday, with face masks again compulsory in shops and on public transport.

Beginning Tuesday morning, all travelers returning to the U.K. must also take a PCR test and self-isolate until they receive a negative result. Previously they had been able to take a lateral flow test and there was no requirement to isolate.

The reintroduction of mandatory [face masks](#) brings England closer in line with the rest of the U.K.—Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—which had not relaxed coronavirus restrictions as much as England had done over the summer.

About 14 cases of the omicron [variant](#) have so far been identified across the U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the new measures will "buy us time in the face" of the new coronavirus variant.

Johnson's government announced Monday it is expanding its booster vaccine program, with a booster dose to be offered to all those 18 and over three months after people had their second jab. Up until now, only people 40 or over and those deemed clinically vulnerable were eligible for a [booster shot](#).

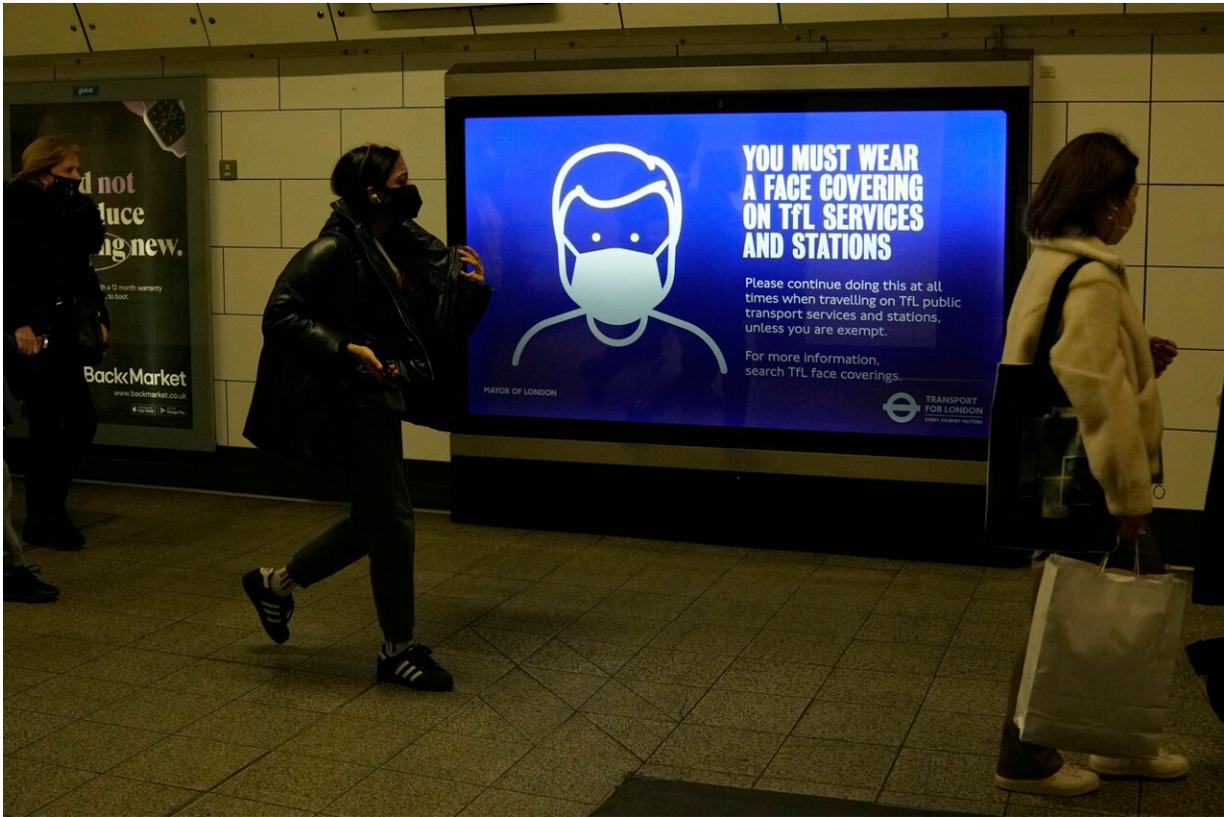
The change means around 13 million more people will be eligible. So far, the U.K. has given around 17.8 million booster shots.



Commuters in a London underground tube train wear face masks to curb the spread of COVID-19, now mandatory on public transport in Britain after the emergence of new Omicron variant, in London, Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021. Credit: Victoria Jones/PA via AP



A commuter in an underground tube station wears a face mask to curb the spread of COVID-19, now mandatory on public transport in Britain after the emergence of new Omicron variant, in London, Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021. Credit: Victoria Jones/PA via AP



Commuters walk past a TFL information display telling passengers that it is compulsory to wear a face mask on public transport to help combat the coronavirus in London, Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021. The emergence of the new COVID-19 omicron variant and the world's attempts to keep it at bay are reminders of what scientists have warned for months: the coronavirus will thrive as long as vast parts of the world lack vaccines. Credit: AP Photo/Alastair Grant



A commuter in an underground tube station wears a face mask to curb the spread of COVID-19, now mandatory on public transport in Britain after the emergence of new Omicron variant, in London, Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021. Credit: Victoria Jones/PA via AP



A woman wears a face mask to curb the spread of COVID-19, now mandatory in Britain in shops, shopping centers and on public transport, after the emergence of new Omicron variant, in Liverpool, England, Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021. Credit: Peter Byrne/PA via AP



A man wears a face mask to curb the spread of COVID-19, now mandatory in Britain in shops, shopping centers and on public transport, after the emergence of new Omicron variant, in Liverpool, England, Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021. Credit: Peter Byrne/PA via AP



People in an underground train wear face masks to curb the spread of COVID-19, now mandatory on public transport in Britain after the emergence of new Omicron variant, in London, Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021. Credit: Stefan Rousseau/PA via AP



A commuter walks past a mirror in a tech company store window wearing a face mask to help combat the coronavirus in London, Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021. The emergence of the new COVID-19 omicron variant and the world's desperate and likely futile attempts to keep it at bay are reminders of what scientists have warned for months: The coronavirus will thrive as long as vast parts of the world lack vaccines. Credit: AP Photo/Alastair Grant

Johnson is expected to encourage more people to get booster shots in a press conference later Tuesday.

Jenny Harries, who heads the U.K. Health Security Agency, said while there was still uncertainty in understanding the omicron variant, officials hope that the expanding [booster](#) shots will "to some extent counter the potential drop in vaccine effectiveness we might find with this variant."

She also urged people to be cautious and reduce socializing over the [holiday season](#) if possible.

When asked if he agreed with Harries' advice for the public to change their behavior, Johnson told reporters "it's always sensible to be careful" but his government had no plans to change the "overall guidance about how people should be living their lives."

The government's scientific advisers said in October that a "Plan B"—including reintroducing government advice to work from home—should be implemented in case of a surge in infections, but the government has so far said there's been nothing to suggest this is necessary.

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