

# WEEKLY BRIEFING

4 June 2021



## COVID-19 UPDATE

The number of deaths in the UK within 28 days of a positive test is down 14.8% on last week while cases have started to slightly increase as restrictions have lifted. North West England saw the largest rise, with 87.4 cases per 100,000 people with South West England having the lowest rate of 9.4, up very slightly week on week from 9.1.

More than half of people in the UK have received both doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, latest figures show. The milestone comes a day after the government announced that 75% of adults had received their first dose. A total of 26.4 million second doses have now been delivered since the vaccination rollout began almost six months ago. This is the equivalent of 50.2% of all people aged 18 and over in the UK.

In England, 22.4 million people have been fully vaccinated, the equivalent of 50.7% of the adult population. In this, England is slightly ahead of the other three nations of the UK with 48.2%, 47.1% and 45.9% in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales respectively.

Boris Johnson indicated his government remains on course to lift lockdown restrictions this month, after the UK recorded no new COVID-19 deaths on 2 June for the first time since the pandemic began. The Prime minister said, "I can see nothing in the data at the moment that means we cannot go ahead with the fourth and final stage of unlocking the economy in England on 21 June". Ministers will analyse data on hospitalisations and deaths over the next two weeks, with a special focus on the impact of the so-called Delta virus variant first identified in India. Cases have been rising again in recent weeks, and the government wants to see that the link between infections and serious illness has been broken by the vaccination drive.

In Ireland, 36% of the adult population have now had their first COVID-19 vaccine as Health and Safety Executive (HSE) says Ireland's COVID-19 situation is a "long way from the dark days of January". Hospitality re-opened on 2 June as part of the latest phase in the planned reopening of Ireland's society and economy over the summer. Services such as hotel leisure facilities, bars and restaurants are restricted to residents only. Tourism minister Catherine Martin said it was "a further important step" in Ireland's recovery from the pandemic. "There is now cause for cautious optimism as the rollout of the vaccination programme gathers pace," she said. 7 June will see the return of outdoor dining for pubs and restaurants and non-essential travel will be allowed to resume in the Republic of Ireland from 19 July.

## ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

### **UK begins process to join Asia-Pacific trade bloc**

The 11-member Trans-Pacific Partnership trade bloc has agreed to open accession talks with the UK. The British government, which asked to join the TPP in February, said membership was a huge opportunity in a post-Brexit world. A working group is now expected to be set up to discuss tariffs and rules governing trade and investment. The UK is not expected to join the TPP, which includes Australia, Mexico and Japan, until next year at the earliest. International trade secretary Liz Truss said in a statement that the decision to begin the accession process was "excellent news". "It will help shift our economic centre of gravity away from Europe towards faster-growing parts of the world, and deepen our access to massive consumer markets in the Asia Pacific. We would get all the benefits of joining a high-standards free-trade area, but without having to cede control of our borders, money or laws." She said the government would present plans to Parliament "in the coming weeks" before starting negotiations.

## TRAVEL AND TOURISM UPDATE

### **Portugal removed from UK government's green list**

Transport secretary Grant Shapps has confirmed that Portugal will be removed from England's green list from Tuesday (8 June) as the government opts for a "safety first" approach. Shapps said it was a "difficult decision to make" and Portugal was being moved to the amber list due to a rise in the country's COVID-19 positivity rate in the past few weeks and also the emergence of a "Nepal mutation" of the so-called Indian or Delta variant. "The positivity rate has nearly doubled since the last review in Portugal and the other thing is there's a Nepal mutation which has

been detected and we just don't know the potential for that to be a vaccine-defeating mutation," he told *BBC News*. Portugal, including Madeira and the Azores, will be moved to the amber list from 4am on Tuesday (8 June). Meanwhile seven countries, Sri Lanka, Costa Rica, Egypt, Trinidad & Tobago, Bahrain, Afghanistan and Sudan, have also been added to the red list, which requires a 10-day quarantine in a government-organised hotel for arrivals in England.

### **One in two UK residents "would use vaccination passport"**

One in two UK residents would be willing to adopt vaccination 'passports' for international travel, according to research by Surrey University's School of Hospitality and Tourism Management. However, half the population remain undecided about the use of vaccination certificates or would be unwilling to use them. The university researchers concluded: "It is clear issues pertaining to privacy and exclusion will need to be addressed." The government has made both digital and paper COVID-19-vaccination certificates available via the NHS App as well as a helpline for entry to countries which require certification.

### **Heathrow Airport achieves sustainable fuel "milestone"**

Heathrow has become the first major UK airport to start integrating sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) into its operations. The move by the UK's hub airport sees the sustainable fuel blended into its main fuel supply from Thursday (3 June) and will be used by airlines over the next few days. Although this blended fuel is only initially going to be equivalent to powering between five and 10 short-haul flights, Heathrow said the initiative would "serve as proof of concept" which will allow "much greater use" of sustainable fuel in the future. The project is using sustainable fuel from Neste which is produced from waste and residue raw materials, such as used cooking oil and animal and fish fat waste. In its neat form, this fuel reduces emissions by up to 80% compared with traditional jet fuel. Heathrow chief executive John Holland-Kaye said: "As we get ready to welcome the world to the G7, we can demonstrate how this technology can significantly cut carbon from aviation, whilst protecting its benefits. The UK government now has an opportunity to create a new British growth industry by backing sustainable aviation fuel production and also be leaders in the race to a net zero 2050."

### **IATA encourages G7 leaders to discuss international travel at next week's summit**

International Air Transport Association (IATA) has called on world leaders meeting at next week's G7 conference to "use data" to reopen international travel and remove measures such as "universal" quarantine for all travellers. The leaders of the world's most developed countries, including U.S. president Joe Biden, are set to meet next week in Cornwall when UK prime minister Boris Johnson will play host. IATA

director general Willie Walsh said policies on restarting global travel should be “driven” by data as the best way to reduce the ongoing risks from the COVID-19 pandemic and remove the need for quarantine regimes. “We call on the G7 governments to agree on the use of data to safely plan and co-ordinate the return of the freedom to travel which is so important to people, livelihoods and businesses,” said Walsh.

### **Customers almost three times as likely to book green list destinations**

New research suggests consumers are almost three times as likely to book a green destination as an amber one. Two in five UK adults are considering an overseas holiday in the next 12 months and more than half of these (51%) are likely to book a green destination compared with 18% who would consider amber destinations, a survey by market research firm BVA BDRC suggests. The research, conducted in the week of 17 May when limited outbound holiday travel resumed, suggests lack of confidence that trips will go ahead is a major factor.

## **AIRLINE UPDATE**

**British Airways** - British Airways (BA) has begun trials of the IATA Travel Pass mobile app on flights from London to Switzerland. Passengers on the airline’s Zurich and Geneva flights can download the mobile app that carries COVID-19 test results and vaccination details. The IATA Travel Pass is built on “verifiable credential technology”, a new standard for digital identity. Verifiable credentials allow individuals to hold documents in a secure smartphone ‘digital wallet’ app and control the sharing of the information. BA said: “The verifiable credential model is completely decentralised, meaning there is no data intermediaries and sensitive data is not stored on a centralised database.” The airline is already using VeriFLY, another app that works with testing suppliers to automatically upload results and enable online check-in once documents are verified. VeriFLY is being tested on routes to the U.S., France, Ireland, Barbados, Bahamas and Canada, as well as all inbound international flights. Sean Doyle, BA chairman and chief executive, said “We are committed to exploring ways to ensure that the customer journey is as frictionless as possible and sharing our learnings to help the travel industry take off again.”

**Jet2** - Jet2.com and Jet2holidays has pushed its plans to restart its flight and holiday programme to July after the government’s decision to remove Portugal from the UK’s green list cast fresh doubt on summer leisure travel. The airline and operator had been hoping to restart on 24 June, but with no viable or recognisable

destinations featuring on the green list, it has brought its plans to resume operations in line with the government's planned reviews of its traffic light regime. Owing to its red list status, both brands have decided to extend their pause on flights and holidays to Turkey to 22 July. Its Jersey programme, though, will restart on 24 June as planned.

**Norwegian** - Norwegian Air has indicated improved demand despite May traffic continuing to be affected by international travel restrictions. Passenger numbers have shown a "noticeable increase" in line with vaccination roll outs, changes to entry restrictions, and quarantine regulations. May carryings grew by 23,000 year-on-year to 96,909 passengers as the budget airline flew just ten aircraft mainly on domestic routes in Norway. The May load factor improved by 16 percentage points to 54.8%.

**Qantas** - Flights from the UK could be among the first to be allowed back to Australia, the boss of Qantas has predicted. Alan Joyce, Qantas Group chief executive, told Australia's *Nine Today* show: "A few months ago, I thought maybe Singapore, Taiwan and Japan would be first cabs off the list but with the great progress that's been made in the U.S. and the UK, you may see those markets opening up before the rest because the vaccine rollout has been so successful in both countries." He added the airline was "still planning to be ready [to fly long-haul international] at the end of this calendar year".

**Wizz Air** - Wizz Air has said several "encouraging trends" have given the budget carrier a sustained recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic this year. Boss Jozsef Varadi said he was "cautiously optimistic" about the business's recovery from the pandemic, despite it coming later than the carrier would have liked owing to COVID-19 travel restrictions in Europe remaining in place "longer than anticipated". Varadi said Wizz's 2021/22 full-year (12 months to 31 March 2022) would continue to be a "transitional year", adding: "Whereas the recovery pattern continues to be difficult to forecast, the trends are encouraging and we are ready as ever."

## TOUR OPERATOR UPDATE

**Exodus** - Exodus Travels has added a further six small-group tours to its UK collection, which it launched at the start of the year. The adventure specialist said its decision to expand the range followed a surge in demand from travellers looking to explore the world closer to home. New trips take in the Lake District, Bath, Bristol, north Wales and the Scottish Highlands, with various cycling and walking options.

**More Life VIP** - A luxury travel brand from the co-founder of Party Hard Travel has launched. More Life VIP is aimed at the 18-34s and features Dubai, Mykonos and Ibiza, with Malta and Marbella due to be added this summer. It is the latest venture from Nathan Cable, who set up Party Hard in 2004. More Life VIP's target audience is generation Z travellers (18-24s) and millennials (25-34s). A survey of 300 adults within this age group by More Life VIP in April led the operator to offer its initial three destinations, with Bali and the Maldives also on the demographic's wishlist. The operator's general manager Aine McKenna said: "Through our exclusive deals with our partner hotels, we can offer More Life VIP customers exclusive rates and preferential offers such as upgrades and little surprises throughout their trip with us."

**Trailfinders** - Trailfinders has urged the government to ease the testing burden on travellers, and allow those vaccinated against COVID-19 to travel more freely. The firm has produced a five-point plan designed to cut the cost of testing, reduce the need for tests and address issues with current systems and travel rules before a concerted uptick in travel demand. Its first demand is for the government to scrap VAT on Covid tests. "This is a health test the government is imposing after all," said the company. "This is new revenue, which is dwarfed by what the government will collect from Air Passenger Duty if they unlock travel." Additionally, Trailfinders said the government should heed the World Health Organization's recommendation that testing should be free.

**Triangle Travel** - Independent travel agency Triangle Travel is celebrating two decades in business after opening its first branch in 2001. Managing director Rob Kenton thanked loyal customers and his dedicated team in helping the agency, which runs five stores across Berkshire and Oxfordshire, reach the impressive milestone. He said: "We have worked hard as a family for the past 20 years to achieve this goal and get [to] where we are, it's a massive achievement for the team." In its first year the business turned over around £750,000, but this year it recorded £11 million in turnover.

## SOCIAL AND DIGITAL UPDATE

### Twitter tests new labels for misinformation

Twitter is currently testing out new labels in its push to limit the spread of false and misleading information. The social media app has implemented a variable labelling system that will alert users about the latest updates and information around topical subjects within tweets, while also providing links to authoritative resources. Twitter's new labelling system would include three different types of in-stream alerts on flagged tweets, in many cases triggered by specific keywords. These include 'get .

the latest' which will apply to fast-evolving news topics; 'stay informed' which will apply to both evolving and more sustained news stories like COVID-19; and 'misleading', which will clearly flag tweets including questionable claims as well as provide links to official sources.

### **Instagram expands its test of Reels ads to more regions**

Instagram has announced plans to test Reels ads in more regions including the U.S., UK, France and Canada after they successfully launched in India, Brazil, Germany and Australia in April. This move is part of the continued push to create a more sustainable Reels ecosystem, which will ensure that creators get paid for their efforts on the platform and provide more value for Instagram as it takes on the popularity of short form video content on TikTok.

## **MICE UPDATE**

### **Zero COVID-19 transmission from Liverpool pilot events confirmed**

Liverpool Public Health has confirmed that none of the 15 people who tested positive for COVID-19 after attending one of the government pilot events contracted the virus at the events. The city recently hosted nine events with a total of 13,258 attendees as part of the national Events Research Programme. The Change Business for Good event saw 400 business leaders and event professionals gather at ACC Liverpool in April. All attendees were required to take a lateral flow test ahead of the event. Wearing masks and social distancing was entirely optional. Attendees were then asked to submit a second test five days after the event. The contact tracing team was able to follow up with everyone who tested positive after the events, and results showed that there was no evidence of substantial spread of the virus around the pilot events.

## **LIGHTER NOTE**

Cheeky seal astonishes paddle-boarder when it pops out of the water and hitches a lift. See it [here](#).