

# WEEKLY REPORT

24 September 2021

## COVID-19 UPDATE

The number of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 has increased by 9.4% in the last seven days. The number of patients being admitted to hospital has however, fallen in the last seven days by 15.5%. The vaccination scheme has also continued to be rolled out with 89.6% of the population in the UK over 16 having had one dose and a further 82.1% being fully vaccinated.

In England, COVID-19 cases have dropped 22% from the last week. England's chief medical officer Chris Whitty said on 22 September that COVID-19 transmission was currently highest in 12 to 15 year-olds. Children in the UK aged 12 to 15 are set to be offered a COVID-19 jab, following advice from the UK's chief medical officers. They have recommended the children should be offered one dose of the Pfizer vaccine. Whitty said the vaccine advice focussed purely on the benefit to children.

First minister, Nicola Sturgeon, says new COVID-19 cases fell by 31% in the week to 18 September. She says this is "a very encouraging trend" but warns against complacency and says the position remains "fragile". Scotland has also given a first dose of vaccine to a higher percentage of its total population than any other UK nation, just over 76%.

Wales has seen a spike in rates of COVID-19 in the under-16s which is driving the latest overall rise in cases, figures from Public Health Wales (PHW) suggest. Case rates among the under-25s have risen in all but two of Wales' 22 local authority areas over the last week, the figures also show. When the case rates are broken down further, the PHW figures show the case rate in the 17 to 24 age group is now falling across Wales, but has rocketed in the last week for the under-16s. Specific COVID-19 figures linked to schools are not expected to be published this academic year but other recent figures, including a record number of positive lateral flow tests, boosted by school testing, suggest these are behind the high numbers.

Ireland will begin to offer COVID-19 boosters from next week. Vulnerable people and those at greatest risk of coronavirus will start to receive their appointments most likely by the end of next week, Health and Safety Executive Paul Reid has said. Identifying those who are eligible for a third shot is "complex", he said. Those set to receive a booster include people who are highly immunocompromised, organ recipients, renal patients, certain cancer patients, and people on particular medications. Mr Reid said those eligible for boosters will be contacted, and those who are not contacted are likely not in the high-risk category. Ireland has also advised that Children under 13 who are close contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases in primary schools or childcare settings will no longer be required to self-isolate from 27 September if they are symptom-free. The move means thousands of children who have been forced to isolate at home will be able to return to class.

## ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

### **Staff to gain right to request flexible working from first day**

The government is proposing to give all employees the right to request flexible working when they start new jobs, the BBC understands. A consultation is to be launched on the proposals this week. The plan would allow all UK employees to request a flexible working arrangement from their first day with a new employer. At the moment, workers have to wait until they have been in their role for six months. The proposals would also see bosses have to respond to requests for flexible working more quickly than the current maximum of three months. It would also force firms to explain why any requests were refused. It is understood that the consultation document will be published on 30 September by the Department for Business.

## TRADE UPDATE

### **U.S. border announcement leads to an uptick in sales**

U.S. specialist agents and operators have described the American government's decision to reopen its borders as a "real vote of confidence" in the industry, as many report early upticks in client demand. The trade is in "frantic planning mode" to ramp up capacity and sales ahead of the resumption of holidays to the U.S. in November. Lee Haslett, global sales vice-president at Virgin Atlantic, told a Travel Weekly webcast that the announcement from the White House was a "welcome surprise", adding: "We are in frantic planning mode now. Olly Brendon, founder and chief executive of AttractionTickets.com, said: "I am expecting there to be a consistent surge of demand. "We just need to get people back and get the organisation focused on sales rather than the drudgery of refunds and cancellations."

### **Grant Shapps suggests new testing rules to start before half-term**

The transport secretary has expressed a desire to end “instant changes” to travel requirements and suggested that new testing measures would be in place for half-term. Industry leaders and trade associations have called for the Government to implement changes, including relaxed testing requirements, in time for the October break. Speaking in the House of Commons on Monday, Grant Shapps said the Department of Health and Social Care (DoH) would give more details on testing requirements, adding: “I am sure that they [DoH] will have had half-term in mind.” Travellers in transit who remain in airports or railway stations will only be required to adopt measures associated with the country that they departed from, Shapps added. He said: “We are now in the world where we know that vaccinations make a very big and sustained difference and I hope we move away from a world in which instant changes are required.”

### **Global call issued for decade of climate action in tourism**

A group of leading travel and tourism organisations has issued an urgent call for companies and associations in the sector to “commit to a decade of climate action in tourism”. Signatories of the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism are committing to act now and accelerate climate action to cut global tourism emissions by at least a half over the next decade and reach net zero emissions as soon as possible before 2050.

### **EasyJet calls for co-ordinated action over zero-emission flying**

The vision of zero-emission flying can only be brought closer through co-ordinated action focused on key areas, according to easyJet. Chief executive Johan Lundgren called for the aviation industry and governments to work closely together to deliver the technology needed to transform the industry over the coming decade and beyond. Governments need to support the development of hydrogen supply and infrastructure at airports alongside investment into renewable energy to support the creation of green hydrogen for aviation. They will not only need to provide financial incentives to support the development and scaling up of zero-emission technology but also use funds raised through aviation taxes into the required research and development.

## **AIRLINE UPDATE**

**Aer Lingus** - Aer Lingus has confirmed the start of non-stop Manchester-U.S. flights this winter with an introductory £199 one-way fare. The new route from Manchester to New York JFK begins on 1 December, with Orlando from 11 December. Rates are for bookings until 29 September for travel from 1 November 2021 until 31 March 2022. The fare is also valid on U.S. services from Dublin, with connections from seven UK airports, including Heathrow, Gatwick and Birmingham.

**Blue Islands** - Channel Islands airline Blue Islands is to serve Jersey from Dublin and Norwich next summer. Up to six flights a week to Dublin are scheduled from March 27 until October 28, together with two flights a week to Norwich on Tuesdays and Saturdays from May 24 until September 24. Multiple daily flights to Southampton are also due to rise as the carrier extends regional connectivity.

**EasyJet** - EasyJet is expanding its seasonal network by adding five more aircraft across bases including Malaga, Palma, and Faro for next summer. The budget carrier will have five aircraft based in Malaga where it is the second largest airline, and seven in Palma, bringing the Spanish fleet to 16 aircraft, including four in Barcelona. An additional aircraft will be deployed into Portugal at the Faro base.

**Virgin Atlantic** - Bookings to the U.S. rose by more than 600% compared to the same time last week following the announcement of the removal of the transatlantic travel ban for fully vaccinated travellers from the UK, Virgin Atlantic reported.

## TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES & OTA UPDATE

**Cox & Kings** - Cox & Kings has launched its first U.S. itineraries. The operator's programme features three new group tours, as well as several tailor-made self-drive itineraries. Parent brand Abercrombie & Kent has also refreshed its U.S. offering with the U.S. returning to the travel map for the first time since March 2020.

**Gold Medal** - Gold Medal stands ready to throw its weight and resources behind a fresh U.S. sales drive and has pledged to do everything in its power to help agents convert renewed interest into bookings. The trade-only operator on Wednesday (22 September) claimed U.S. enquiries and bookings doubled overnight following the announcement on Monday (20 September).

**Jet2** - Jet2.com passengers appear to have been targeted by fraudsters using fake social media accounts. The airline said it had heard reports of some customers receiving messages from social media accounts, such as jet2helps.com, which are not affiliated to Jet2. "We have been made aware of several customers receiving messages advising to contact jet2helps.com (and/or similar) to discuss bookings and queries," said the airline in a tweet. "These accounts are not affiliated to us, so please do not give personal information to them."

## SOCIAL UPDATE

### Facebook tests new 'Community Awards' to encourage engagement in groups

In a bid to boost engagement in groups, Facebook is testing a new feature called 'Community Awards'. This will enable group administrators to give awards to outstanding group comments. 'Community Awards' aligns with similar engagement markers such as 'Top Fan' and 'Group Expert' to recognise key contributors. The idea is that by rewarding more engaging and beneficial interactions, you will encourage individual users to interact more often, while highlighting to other group members what types of comments you want to see. This could help to improve overall interaction as Facebook works to make its app a more positive, welcoming environment.

## MICE UPDATE

### Government's events reinsurance scheme has commenced

A day later than expected, the Government announced that the long-awaited Live Events Reinsurance Scheme launched on 22 September. The £800m scheme offers cost indemnification if an event has to be cancelled, postponed, relocated or abandoned due to new UK Civil Authority restrictions in response to Covid-19. It will run to 30 September 2022 with a review in spring next year. The Government said it had partnered with Lloyd's Market Association to deliver the scheme as part of the Plan for Jobs. The scheme will see the Government act as a reinsurer – stepping in with a guarantee to make sure insurers can offer the products events companies need.

## LIGHTER NOTE

Slow down, I'm still a bit wobbly! Baby elephant still learning to walk properly topples over as it tries to keep up with the herd. Watch it [here](#).