

WEEKLY REPORT

7 January 2022



COVID-19 UPDATE

The prime minister has announced that the government will stick to Plan B for another three weeks in hopes that the country can “ride out” the current Omicron wave without the need for further restrictions. Plan B includes measures such as working from home where possible, wearing a mask in most public places and the requirement of COVID-19 passports to enter some venues. The PM stated that though cases are rising, it is not translating into the same need for intensive care as it has in previous waves, with 875 patients hospitalised as a result of COVID-19 on January 5 2022.

On January 6 179,756 new cases and 231 deaths in 28 days of a positive test were reported in the UK, the UKHSA confirmed. The ONS has stated that there are “early signs” that cases are no longer rapidly increasing in the capital and could be beginning to plateau.

Lockdown measures

Since the last weekly report, those who test positive for COVID-19 now have the option to end isolation after seven days if you have no fever and record two negative lateral flow tests on days six and seven. Close contacts of positive cases who are fully vaccinated (including a booster jab) or under 18 years old are no longer required to self isolate, but instead required to take daily lateral flow tests. Those who are not vaccinated and are over 18 will still need to isolate after close contact with a positive case.

UK vaccination figures

51,874,548 (90% of those aged 12 and over) people had been given a first dose by the end of January 5 2022.

47,565,340 (83% of those aged 12 and over) people had been given a second dose by the end of January 5 2022.

34,834,288 (61% of those ages 12 and over) people had been given a booster or third dose by the end of 5 January 2022.

The prime minister also announced that 10million extra boosters have been given in the last three weeks, whilst chief medical advisor Professor Chris Whitty confirms that at every age band, vaccination is providing protection from serious illness.

Irish Update

Recent changes to restrictions that have come into effect in Ireland from 20 December include: pubs, restaurants and other indoor venues (including cinemas, theatres and hotel restaurants and bars) must close at 8pm; wedding attendance is limited to 100 guests with receptions ending at midnight; all indoor events are limited to 1000 people or 50% capacity (whichever is lower) and must be fully seated; and outdoor events are limited to 5000 people or 50% of the venue's capacity, whichever is lower.

Data up to January 6 shows that in total 7,504,586 vaccines have been administered in Ireland with 92.2% of the eligible population receiving at least one dose and 90% receiving full vaccination. COVID-19 infections in Ireland are reported by the government to be at their peak, reaching 20,031 new infections each day.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

Vodafone and EE delay reintroduction of roaming charges

Before leaving the EU, Vodafone and EE users from the UK could use their calls, texts and data allowance from their mobile plans when traveling in any EU country. Since the signing of the EU trade deal in December 2020, mobile operators have been permitted to reintroduce roaming charges. Many mobile operators plan to bring in post-Brexit roaming fees, though Vodafone and EE have delayed these. The mobile networks have said that this will allow more time for testing the best possible experience for their customers to ensure they are not hit with astronomical charges for using their phones abroad. Vodafone is now looking to introduce the changes at the end of January, whilst EE looks to delay until March this year. Until this time, customers can continue to roam without charges, delighting winter travellers.

France eases UK travel restrictions as cases rise

At the end of last year, December 29, the Eurotunnel shuttle sparked chaos for British travellers by stating that they "can no longer transit France by road to reach their country of residence in the EU" unless they hold French residency. This came amid a surge in the UK of Omicron cases and left some UK nationals experiencing difficulty in returning home. The French government has now eased these restrictions slightly after reporting a rapid rise in cases in France which now matches that of the UK. The precise changes and exemptions will be decided and announced in the coming days.

The 'Colston Four' acquitted of criminal damage

Four people who were charged with criminal damages for pulling down a controversial statue of the slave trader Edward Colston were found not guilty. The group appeared at Bristol Crown Court on January 5 after helping to pull down the statue in Bristol during a Black Lives Matter protest in June 2020 and subsequently dumping it in Bristol Harbour. The court heard that there had been campaigns to remove the statue dating back to the 1920s for the perceived glorification of a man who committed heinous crimes to Black men, women and children. The Colston statue's plinth remains empty and the statue itself lies in the M Shed museum in Bristol.

TRADE UPDATE

Pre-departure testing scrapped

The government has confirmed the removal of its pre-departure test requirements for fully vaccinated passengers travelling into England. PCR tests and self-isolation on arrival has also been scrapped, with the government reverting to its previous requirement of a lateral flow test to be taken within 48 hours of arrival and, if positive, a PCR test to check for variants. The changes to international travel rules will come into effect from 4am on Friday, January 7, when pre-departure tests for travel to England and quarantine for arrivals will be removed. From 4am Sunday, January 9, lateral flow tests will be accepted in place of PCR tests for arrivals. These lateral flow tests can be booked from Friday, January 7. Wales Scotland and Northern Ireland have all aligned with England's policies. Those who are not fully vaccinated must still self-isolate on arrival.

Ireland scraps test rule for vaccinated travellers

Ireland has removed the requirement for vaccinated passengers to show a negative COVID-19 test result before entering the country. The Irish government decided on January 5 to ease the travel rules for entry into Ireland from January 6.

ABTA reveals most popular destinations for 2022

Spain is the number one destination on people's travel wish list for 2022, according to research revealed by ABTA. Almost a third (29%) of respondents in a poll said they want to travel to Spanish resorts, which usually welcome more than 18 million Brits each year. Moving up to second place – and topping the list of long-haul destinations – is the U.S., which reopened its borders to UK tourists in November 2021. Almost one in five (18%) of respondents plan to travel there this year, with New York and Florida among the most popular destinations. The poll found the top 10 overseas destinations people plan to travel to in 2022 (and their change in ranking compared to last year) are:

Spain (29.3%) =
 US (18.1%) +1
 France (17.8%) -1
 Italy (16.4%) =
 Greece (10.1%) =
 Portugal (8.7%) =
 Germany (8.2%) =
 Australia (5.1%) +2
 Canada (4.5%) +2
 Turkey (4.0%) +2

Meanwhile, a poll carried out for budget carrier easyJet claims that Brits are planning more holidays than usual in 2022 to make up for lost travel experiences over the last two years.

Travel shares rise amid hopes for easing of restrictions

Share prices of airlines and other travel companies rose on Tuesday (January 4) amid hopes that restrictions could be eased and that the Omicron variant is not as severe as earlier strains of COVID-19. The Financial Times said travel and leisure stocks surged, "despite record numbers of cases in the U.S., UK, France and Italy", because the Omicron variant is causing fewer hospital admissions than earlier waves. Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown, told Sky: "Stocks reliant on international travel are powering ahead. With yet more indications that Omicron, though highly infectious, does not cause such serious illness, a wave of relief is pushing up companies which have been hit by worries about tighter restrictions."

Israel to reopen to Brits after red list scrapped

Israel is set to reopen to visitors from the UK on Sunday (January 9) after scrapping its red list of countries. Visitors from orange and green countries will be allowed to visit Israel starting from January 9, subject to final government approval. Inbound travellers are required to present a negative COVID-19 test in order to board the flight and take a PCR upon landing in Israel.

AIRLINE UPDATE

Bookings soar as tests scrapped

Airlines have reported a big leap in sales since changes to test rules. Virgin Atlantic said searches were up 150% week on week, peaking at 8pm on Wednesday, a few hours after Boris Johnson addressed the Commons. British Airways said visits to its 2022 holidays website increased by nearly 40%, with New York, Dubai and Barbados the most searched destinations.

EasyJet - Johan Lundgren, EasyJet's chief executive, told The Times that there were "lots of reasons for optimism", including high vaccination rates, COVID-19 protection measures and flexible booking and cancellation policies. He added that he had "high hopes for a bright 2022 after two years of pain in the aviation industry".

Ryanair - Budget carrier Ryanair carried 9.5 million passengers in December – up from just 1.9 million year-on-year but down on the 10.2 million carried in November 2021. The load factor was 81%, which was an improvement on the 73% figure of December 2020, but lower than the 86% load factor in November 2021. Ryanair's share price was among the airline stocks to rise on Tuesday as investors were more optimistic about the prospects for travel.

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES & OTA UPDATE

Advantage Travel - Kelly Cookes, leisure director at the Advantage Travel Partnership said members had already seen a noticeable rise in bookings and enquiries following Christmas. Cookes added that "across the board, we've currently got more bookings on the books to depart in 2022, than we had actually depart for the whole of 2021".

Blue Bay Travel - Blue Bay Travel chief and ABTA chair Alistair Rowland has hailed the return to a "sensible and proportional" travel testing regime, remarking the government's decision to scrap pre-departure testing and lower the Day Two testing standard from PCR to lateral flow would remove "a significant barrier" to travel – just in time to save peaks. "The scrapping of the pre-departure test on return to the UK is great news for the industry and will go a long way to boost consumer confidence to travel," said Rowland.

Jet2Holidays - Jet2holidays' chief executive Steve Heapy said sales bookings have "gone through the roof" after the government announced it will be relaxing COVID-19 travel restrictions. The operator and its sister airline Jet2.com saw an immediate increase in visits to its website after the major changes were announced by prime minister Boris Johnson on January 5. "Yesterday, we saw all seasons, all months recover significantly," he said on Thursday morning. "We saw even January was massively up – January, February, March, people want to get away. People now have more confidence in order to book a holiday." He said the hassle and expense of tests were a major hurdle, along with the fears of getting stranded in resort if they tested positive for COVID-19. "Some people have had their holiday changed two, three, four times and they are desperate to get away. Some people haven't been away for two or three years,". He added sales improved across the board, for departures from January 2022 until October 2023.

Kuoni - The boss of Kuoni has predicted travel will be 90% back to 2019 levels before the end of the spring following the easing of travel restrictions. Chief executive Derek Jones said the tour operator was already enjoying "increased call volumes and enquiries" about trips for 2022 as confidence increases among consumers. The operator reported a noticeable jump overnight in calls to its high-street shops and its call centre after the government made the announcement. Jones said the change in travel testing rules "should be the beginning of the end of COVID-19 as a blocker to international travel".

Not Just Travel - Steve Witt, co-founder of the travel firm, has said confidence and bookings for international travel is increasingly positive as the industry heads into 2022. Not Just Travel has reported a 50% year-on-year increase in bookings from the post-Christmas period - with positive news on Omicron increasing consumer confidence. Short breaks are proving a popular option, accounting for nearly half (43%) of all bookings made for travel in the next 12 weeks.

Travel Counsellors - Travel Counsellors' UK managing director Kirsten Hughes has commented that Travel Counsellors' advance bookings for 2022 were looking "extremely positive" despite the Omicron downturn, and that the changes to the testing regime would instil more confidence and "encourage people to book that long-awaited holiday or business trip".

SOCIAL UPDATE

Social video now sees as much consumption time as traditional TV

A new study by the Consumer Technology Association has found that consumers spend almost as much time streaming videos on social platforms as they do watching traditional TV. Traditional TV consumption takes up 18% of overall media consumer time, against 16% for user-generated content online, largely attributed to the rise in popularity of apps like TikTok. This data underlines the evolving shift away from traditional media towards more democratised social media platforms as the key form of content consumption.

Facebook adds new features to Creator Studio

Facebook has added a number of new elements to its Creator Studio. The main addition is the new Stories highlight clips for video uploads, which creates a 20-second preview segment from a full video, which users can post as a Facebook or Instagram Story. This feature enables users to drive views to the full clip with a "See More" CTA button. Another new feature is a timeline view for published page posts in the app. This addition provides transparency as to how posted content looks in user feeds, allowing Creator Studio to maintain an edge over third-party scheduling

platforms.

MICE UPDATE

IMEX Frankfurt moved to May in response to Omicron

IMEX Frankfurt will now take place between May 31- June 2 2022 at Messe Frankfurt. Organisers had originally planned to host the event between April 26 - 28 but decided to move the dates to allow a further five weeks to prepare. IMEX Group said that the increase in Omicron cases across Europe and around the world, together with current regulatory uncertainty, caused them to review their plans. They have taken the opportunity to accept new dates offered by Messe Frankfurt.

LIGHTER NOTE

'A real miracle': dog saves injured hiker stranded in Croatian mountains by keeping the man warm and safe until rescuers find him. See it [here](#).