

WEEKLY REPORT

4 February 2022



COVID-19 UPDATE

There has been a decrease of 2.6% in the number of people reporting a positive test result for COVID-19 in the past seven days. Hospitalisations and deaths have also fallen by 9.4% and 2.7% respectively compared to the previous seven days. In regard to the vaccination rollout, 91.1% of the UK population aged 12 and over have received their first dose of the vaccine, whilst 84.3% have received their second dose and 65.1% their booster dose.

Recognising the lower risk of Omicron compared to previous variants, health secretary Sajid Javid has stated that the previous policy making it mandatory for all NHS staff and social care workers to be fully vaccinated by April 1 is no longer applicable due to “dramatic changes” in the virus since the original policy. There are no plans in Scotland and Wales to make Covid jobs mandatory for NHS workers or care home staff, while there will be a public consultation on the issue in Northern Ireland. How this might impact wider messaging about the importance of vaccinations and therefore vaccination statistics is yet to be seen.

Few measures remain in England since the lifting of Plan B restrictions last Thursday, including the wearing of face coverings in health and care settings, including hospitals, GP surgeries and pharmacies. Self-isolation for 10 days will continue for those who develop COVID-19 symptoms or test positive (or five full days following two negative lateral flow test results). In Scotland, work from home guidance has been lifted whilst face coverings remain compulsory on public transport and in most indoor spaces, including shops and secondary schools. A gradual easing of COVID-19 restrictions is also under way in Wales but NHS Covid Passes are still required for entry to cinemas, theatres and concert halls as well as many events, whilst secondary school children continue to test for COVID-19 three times a week. In Northern Ireland, nightclubs have seen successful reopenings, although a domestic COVID-19 certificate is still required for entry.

It remains in place that from 04:00 GMT on February 11, fully vaccinated passengers over the age of 18 arriving in the UK will no longer be required to take a post-arrival lateral flow test, though a simplified version of the passenger locator form will need to be completed. Previous testing rules for unvaccinated arrivals remain, including proof of a negative test taken two days before travel and a post-arrival PCR test.

Ireland's chief medical officer states that there are no plans to stand down the panel of experts advising the government on COVID-19, despite the easing of restrictions. A phased return to offices began last week, while nursing homes no longer need to limit the duration or frequency of visits to residents from friends and family. Those with symptoms of COVID-19 are still required to self-isolate until they receive a negative test result and face coverings are recommended in crowded spaces and places of worship.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

Cost of living crisis

With inflation already at a 20-year high of 5.4%, the cost of living crisis is expected to worsen as UK energy regulator Ofgem announces that the average energy bill will rise by £693 annually after a 54% increase to the price cap. The Bank of England also warns of a further rise in inflation to 6%, impacting the price of food, petrol and gas. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, has unveiled measures to tackle the crisis including an up front discount of £200 on bills from October for all domestic electricity customers, though this is to be automatically repaid in equal £40 instalments over the next five years.

Findings from the Sue Gray report

Initial findings from the long-awaited 12-page report, investigating the government's socialising during lockdown through a series of alleged parties, was shared with the public at the beginning of the week. It found that some events "should not have been allowed to take place," whilst others "should not have been allowed to develop as they did". The report also states that there were "failures of leadership and judgement by different parts of No 10 and the Cabinet Office at different times". Behaviour by the government was said to be "difficult to justify" given the "far-reaching restrictions" enforced on the lives of the public at that time. The Metropolitan Police Service are now investigating eight of the alleged events after receiving "significant evidence" of a breach of covid rules by the government.

Boris Johnson rocked by wave of No 10 resignations

The prime minister has lost yet another aide as policy adviser, Elena Narozanski, leaves her role following the resignation of four other senior staff members earlier this week. A No 10 spokesperson confirmed that Mr. Johnson attempted to rally staff

in a Friday morning meeting announcing that “change is good” while his future as prime minister remains uncertain.

TRADE UPDATE

France bans unboosted visitors

France has banned travellers from entering if they were double-jabbed nine months ago or more. It means Britons wanting to go skiing or on city breaks for half-term will have to get a booster jab if they received their second dose any earlier than May 2021.

Spain’s Covid rules for children cast doubt over imminent half-term family holidays

The Times on Tuesday (1 February) reported that Spain will defy new EU guidelines and refuse to accept Covid-19 recovery certificates from UK arrivals, citing Spanish tourism officials. Anyone over the age of 12 must be fully vaccinated to enter the country – and this includes a booster jab if their second dose is more than 270 days old. However, the UK stipulates children aged 12 to 15 who catch Covid between their first and second doses must wait 12 weeks before having their second, making them ineligible to enter Spain in the meantime.

New Zealand confirms phased border reopening

New Zealand has announced a phased reopening of borders as the country starts to ease some of the world’s toughest Covid restrictions. Vaccinated citizens in Australia can go home from 27 February, while jabbed citizens elsewhere will be allowed in from 13 March. They must self-isolate for 10 days but the mandatory quarantine programme will be scrapped.

Iata adds pressure to remove US Covid testing curbs

The trade association, Airlines for America (A4A) and 28 US and international aviation and travel and tourism stakeholder groups urged action from Washington. The demand came the day after US Travel Association president and chief executive Roger Dow issued a plea to US officials to follow the UK’s lead on the issue. Iata added to the pressure for change, insisting that vaccinated travellers add “no additional risks” to the domestic US population. “Increased immunity levels, the pervasiveness of Covid-19 in all 50 US states, rising vaccination rates and new therapeutics, all point to removing the testing requirement for fully vaccinated travellers,” the association said. Iata director general Willie Walsh added: “The experience of Omicron has made it clear that travel restrictions have little to no impact in terms of preventing its spread. Moreover, as Omicron is already broadly present across the US, fully vaccinated travellers bring no extra risk to the local population. International travellers should face no additional screening

requirements than what is applied to domestic travel.”

MPs launch inquiry into recovery of aviation and travel

A cross-party group of MPs have launched an inquiry into the recovery of the aviation, travel and tourism sectors and their role in “supporting the UK economy post-pandemic”. The All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Future of Aviation is asking for input from these sectors as part of its first inquiry since the UK’s removal of major restrictions on international travel. It said: “This inquiry will investigate how the UK aviation, travel and tourism sectors has begun and will continue to recover from the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the role aviation, travel and tourism can take in supporting the UK economy post COVID-19, in particular the ambitions to level up different regions of the UK and deliver a Global Britain.”

Travel and tourism set to ‘almost recover’ to pre-pandemic levels in 2022

Travel and tourism’s contribution to the global economy could reach \$8.6 trillion this year as the sector starts to recover from the ravages of the pandemic. The forecast from the World Travel & Tourism Council would see the sector almost recover to the 2019 level of generating almost \$9.2 trillion. Its contribution to the global economy and jobs could reach almost pre-pandemic levels this year if the recovery in travel continues to pick up pace, latest WTTC research shows.

Heathrow recruitment drive takes off ahead of summer peak

Heathrow airport is seeking “thousands of new recruits” as a new recruitment drive is set to take off ahead of the summer peak travel season. Overall for 2022, the airport expects passenger numbers to reach just over half of 2019’s record-breaking total of 81 million. The London hub said vacancies are available across a “vast network of companies”, from service and hospitality teams to aviation and logistics roles. It offers apprenticeships and entry-level roles, as well as more technical positions in areas such as airfield operations, driving and engineering.

AIRLINE UPDATE

Which? survey reveals worst airline for Covid refunds

Ryanair has been voted the worst short-haul airline for handling refunds during the pandemic. The budget airline was given a refund rating of just 47% by consumer group Which?. Jet2 was voted the best airline, with 84% of happy consumers.

Norwegian Air - Norwegian Air saw a “significant increase” in January passenger carryings despite Omicron variant travel restrictions. The Scandinavian budget carrier flew almost 640,000 passengers last month, up from 74,224 in January 2021.

The airline, which dropped low cost transatlantic routes and restructured due to the pandemic, had an average of 45 aircraft in operation in the month. Norwegian Air said: "Traditionally January is a quieter period for passenger demand, however, figures were also affected by the rapid spread of the omicron virus and associated government-imposed measures and restrictions."

Play - Icelandic low-cost airline Play will link Stansted with New York Stewart International Airport, 60 miles north of Manhattan, this summer. Flights will operate via Reykjavik from 10 June, with a one hour and 35-minute layover in Iceland. "Though Stewart airport is further away from Manhattan than JFK and Newark, it takes passengers approximately an hour less to get there thanks to the time saved getting through airport customs, compared to the much lengthier processes at JFK and Newark," said Play chief executive Birgir Jonsson.

Ryanair - Ryanair carried seven million passengers in January – up from 1.3 million in January 2021, but a drop compared to December as restrictions to tackle the Omicron variant of Covid hit travel. The budget carrier operated more than 46,400 flights last month, with a 79% load factor, compared to 69% in January 2021, when lockdown restrictions were in force.

Wizz Air - Wizz Air started the new year with a boost in passenger carryings as it reflected further recovery from the pandemic. January numbers rose by 318% to almost 2.4 million with a load factor of 79.6%, over 573,692 passengers more than in January 2021. This gave the Hungarian budget carrier a rolling 12-month total of 23.5 million passengers, up from 14 million in January 2021.

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES & OTA UPDATE

Travel agents report sustained sales recovery

A week on from confirmation, all tests for fully vaccinated travellers arriving in the UK will be dropped from February 11. Firms said the easing of rules had been key to boosting and maintaining consumer confidence and sales. Premier Travel reported sales at a "high level constantly since mid-January". Sales on Monday this week exceeded the equivalent day in 2019 by 19%. Director Paul Waters said: "We believe these [volumes] will continue and if so this would put February ahead of where we were in 2019." The Advantage Travel Partnership said trading was back to 2019 levels. Leisure director Kelly Cookes said: "Revenue continues to climb on a weekly basis. Pay day has helped and the variety of destinations being booked is increasing each week." Barrhead Travel president Jacqueline Dobson reported "some of the best days we've seen since pre-pandemic with customers booking multiple trips in one go." Hays Travel's sales have reached January 2020 levels for the first time since the start of the pandemic. Dame Irene Hays, owner of the UK's

biggest independent travel agency chain said bookings last week had caught up to "100% of January 2020 levels."

CV Villas - CV Villas has reported a 52% increase in the number of trade bookings for January 2022 compared to the same period in 2019. The accommodation specialist has also seen a 61% increase in the number of bookings for its collection of multi-generational properties compared to 2019 and reported a 'significant boom' in families wanting to book larger properties. Italy and Greece have been the most popular destinations for summer bookings. Due to increased demand for Europeans, CV Villas added two new villas to its portfolio last month: Villa Torrione in Siena, Italy and Villa Antheia on the Greek island of Corfu.

Flight Centre - Flight Centre UK's 2022 report says the "travel agent is king" and bookings through agencies are expected to rise this year because of the complexities of travel in the Covid era. More than half (54%) of Brits would choose to book through a travel agent, rather than independently, according to the report. "Though the benefits of booking through a travel agent have long been recognised, the uncertainty of travel in this Covid-age has further cemented the value of an agent's expertise," the report said. Reconnecting with friends and family and sustainable travel were other notable trends in the report. Liz Mathews, managing director of Flight Centre UK, said: "This year is one of revenge travel. Travellers are itching to stick it to Covid-19 and will take great pleasure in boarding a plane and crossing borders in 2022. And they want vengeance. Vengeance for all the cancelled holidays, missed weekends away, and the get-togethers they never got to plan."

Stuba - Accommodation specialist Stuba recorded the highest sales day of its 30-year history last week, on January 25. It also reported that summer sales are trading 13% ahead of the level they were at in February 2020. Stuba said there was a "marked improvement" in sales during the last 10 days of January after the easing of travel restrictions was announced. Overall last month, sales rose by 19% compared to the same time in January 2020. Matt Stuart, chief commercial officer, said: "Finally, it looks like confidence to travel has returned."

Trafalgar - Trafalgar has launched a range of 'Women's Only' escorted tours, with 13 itineraries across the UK, Europe and the Middle East. The trips are led by an all-female team of travel directors and wellbeing directors. Clients can also meet "inspiring" businesswomen and artisans during the holidays. Donna Jeavons, Trafalgar sales and marketing director and Atas executive board member, said: "We've seen a significant increase in demand for women's only tours in the past 12 months as more travel destinations around the world open up."

SOCIAL UPDATE

Instagram expands video remix option to all videos

Instagram is expanding on its TikTok-like toolset by adding the capacity to remix all videos posted in the app, not just Reels. When users view any video on Instagram, they'll be able to tap on the 'Remix this video' option to create their own take on it. Instagram added its Reels remix option last March, and this new functionality will greatly expand the amount of video content available.

Twitter tests new 'Articles' option

Twitter is currently working on a new option called 'Articles', which appears to provide a means of creating blog posts within the app, which would presumably then be shareable via tweet. This may start as a Twitter Blue option, with paying subscribers able to create long-form posts to share in the app, but has potential to be rolled out on a wider basis.

MICE UPDATE

Demand for large live events increases by 20%

Following the lift of Plan B restrictions earlier this month, UK event planners are increasingly switching large events from virtual to in-person. Planners are wanting to switch to face-to-face events from March onwards and are confirming provisional bookings. A 20% increase in enquiries week-on-week has been reported and demand is expected to surge for venues and event spaces that are able to accommodate larger events. The rise in demand supports recent research from etc. venues that revealed event planners are returning to live events only, faster than expected.

LIGHTER NOTE

Pillow fighting has become a professional sport. A championship was recently held in Florida. Read more [here](#).