

WEEKLY REPORT

25 February 2022



COVID-19 UPDATE

The number of people testing positive for COVID-19 has decreased in the last seven days by 18.4%. Meanwhile, the number of patients admitted to hospital has also dropped by 10.1%. In regard to the vaccination rollout, 91.4% of people aged 12 and above have received their first dose, 85.1% their second and a further 66.2% of the population their booster dose.

On Monday 21 February 2022 prime minister Boris Johnson announced that it was time to move on from government restrictions in England, instead allowing the public to act with personal responsibility when dealing with COVID-19. The policy changes, which came into effect Thursday 24 February 2022 mean those who test positive for the virus are no longer legally required to self isolate. The government is still advising those who test positive to isolate for at least a full five days in order to control the spread of the virus. Those who are fully-vaccinated who come into close contact with a positive case and those under 18 are no longer legally required to test for seven consecutive days, as routine contact tracing has also been drawn to a close.

From Friday 1 April 2022 free mass symptomatic and asymptomatic testing will end across England for the general public and be targeted towards those who are vulnerable. The government guidance on COVID-19 passports will end, meaning venues will no longer be under the recommendation to require the domestic NHS COVID-19 pass as a condition of entry.

Boris Johnson believes the ability to forgo restrictions is down to the success of the vaccination programme, which produced high levels of immunity amongst the general public. A fourth booster vaccination will be offered to all adults over-75 and the most vulnerable over-12s in the UK during spring time in order to maintain these high levels of protection against COVID-19. England is now the fourth European country to have lifted restrictions, following in the footsteps of Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, also announced the end of all legal restrictions on people and businesses from Monday 21 March 2022 in an effort to "return to a normal way of life".

Businesses will no longer have to enforce government COVID-19 measures and venues will not need to keep customer contact details. Prior to that, on Monday 28 February 2022, Scotland's requirement for businesses and venues using the COVID-19 certification scheme will end. In contrast to Boris Johnson's strategy, Nicola Sturgeon's government will still advise people to self-isolate if they test positive for COVID-19 and intends to continue testing the public to manage the virus. A detailed plan for a "more targeted system" of testing is due to be announced in March.

In Wales, the legal requirement for a domestic COVID-19 pass for entry to events and venues was dropped on Friday 18 February 2022. From Monday 28 February 2022 face coverings will only be legally required in retail, public transport and health and care settings. The changes act as a continuation of the gradual easing of COVID-19 restrictions. As of Monday 28 February 2022, the Irish government will end the legal requirement to wear a face mask and the need to test unless the person with symptoms is over the age of 55, has a high-risk medical condition, lives in the same household as someone who is immunocompromised or is pregnant.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

Russian forces enter Ukraine

Russian President, Vladimir Putin, launched a military operation on Ukraine. He declared the intervention to be an act of self-defence with the hopes of demilitarising the country's southern neighbour. In response, Ukraine has declared martial law, granting temporary control to the military and has cut diplomatic ties with Russia. World leaders have condemned the attack, placing financial sanctions on the Russian government. Boris Johnson intends to act diplomatically, politically and economically in a bid to force a Russian retreat before any discussion of military involvement from British troops. On Thursday 24 February 2022 the UK Prime Minister tweeted his decision to call a meeting involving all NATO leaders.

The Queen continues light duties following testing positive for COVID-19

Queen Elizabeth II tested positive for COVID-19 on Thursday 10 February 2022. In a statement from the Palace, it was announced that the Queen is experiencing only mild cold-like symptoms and assured the public she is receiving the highest standards of medical care. The Queen is thought to be in high spirits as she continues light-duties at Windsor Palace, such as congratulating Team GB's Women's Curling team on their performance at the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter

Games. The news comes as celebrations get underway for her historic Platinum Jubilee of 70 years on the throne.

TRADE UPDATE

The UK Industry braced for consumer reaction to Ukraine invasion

Agents and industry observers expect a delayed reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine as consumers await to see how the conflict unfolds.

Bahrain has eased COVID-19 travel rules for UK arrivals

Bahrain has eased its COVID-19 travel rules and says it is ready to start welcoming back British visitors. As of last Sunday 20 February 2022, visitors no longer need to undergo a PCR test on arrival. The Kingdom has also removed quarantine requirements for all arrivals, regardless of vaccination status. However, a vaccination certification card may be required to enter some venues.

Iceland drops all remaining COVID-19 travel restrictions

As of today, Friday 25 February 2022, Iceland has removed all remaining COVID-19 related travel and domestic restrictions in a bid to achieve "widespread societal resistance" to the virus. All public and border regulations in relation to COVID-19 have been removed for all visitors, regardless of vaccination status and the country's quarantine requirement for those infected has also been lifted.

EU to relax rules for non-essential travel next month

The European Union will drop restrictions on non-essential travel for vaccinated and recovered UK travellers from 1 March 2022. New recommendations by the European Council will permit the lifting of restrictions on non-essential travel for vaccinated and recovered travellers, provided they have received their second dose at least 14 days and no more than 270 days before arrival, or they have received a booster dose.

ABTA overhauls sustainability guidance for agents

New guidance to help agents incorporate sustainability into their business has been published by ABTA. The new guidance focuses on four areas – environment, destination management, animal welfare and human rights – as identified in ABTA's Tourism for Good report. The report found that almost three times as many people now say sustainability is important to them when planning their holiday compared to 10 years ago.

Holiday demand exceeds pre-pandemic levels for the first time in two years

Consumer demand for overseas holidays has exceeded pre-pandemic levels for the

first time in two years, according to travel insurance company, Staysure. The company reported on Thursday 24 February 2022 it had seen a "staggering" rise in bookings taken in February 2022 compared to the same time in 2020, before the onset of the pandemic. To meet the increase in demand, the business announced further plans to create 200 new positions in its operations team with an additional 100 staff members by the end of March 2022.

AIRLINE UPDATE

Virgin Atlantic - With services to Seattle and Washington set to resume next week, Virgin Atlantic has officially restored its pre-COVID-19 roster of US destinations. According to the airline, the reinstatement follows "renewed customer confidence and a strong uptick in bookings, which are up 50% year on year".

Air Canada - Air Canada is to restore some routes to the UK and Ireland among a wider restart of its services. The flag-carrier has expanded its summer 2022 international schedule, with 34 Routes to Europe, Asia, Africa and the Middle East to be restored. Resumptions include its route between Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Heathrow, from 30 April; between Toronto and both Manchester and Edinburgh from 30 May; between Vancouver and Dublin from 1 June; and between Montreal and Dublin from 2 June.

International Airlines Group (IAG) - British Airways' owner IAG is expecting a "robust summer" as bookings for its airlines pick up after being slowed by the spread of the Omicron variant. IAG, which also owns Aer Lingus, Iberia and Vueling, said it was seeing a "strong recovery" in sales for Easter and the summer, as the company announced its financial results for 2021. IAG significantly reduced its operating loss to €2.8 billion in 2021, compared with a loss of €7.45 billion in 2020, as revenue rose by 5.9% to €5.8 billion year-on-year.

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES & OTA UPDATE

Intrepid Travel - Intrepid Travel has launched a £1 deposit offer on hundreds of tours departing before 31 December 2022. The new offer launched on Tuesday (22 February) and will run until the end of March. It's available on a number of the brand's most popular tours, including its 15-day Classic Costa Rica tour, which starts at £1,220pp, and its six-day Portland to San Francisco Discovery itinerary, which costs £1,695pp.

Travel Counsellors - Travel Counsellors Group saw over £71 million of new bookings in January, with more than £50 million of those sales for the UK Leisure part of the

Company. This resulted in the company's second-best month in history, with over 300 Travel Counsellors having their best individual months since joining. According to the company's latest survey, 79% of customers would book their holiday through a travel advisor rather than online and 64% said they want to book with someone they can trust. Customers also indicated they would be willing to spend more on their holiday in 2022, whilst 31% of respondents said they plan to book and travel within two months.

On the Beach - On the Beach Group has reported "a significant strengthening of traffic and booking volumes" since the lifting of UK travel restrictions on 11 February. In a trading update in advance of its annual general meeting due to take place today (Friday 25 February), the online retailer said it has seen sales up 50% against 2019 levels in the four weeks to 23 February.

SOCIAL UPDATE

Meta launches Facebook Reels

Meta is expanding its Instagram Reels to Facebook, making them available in 150 regions. Facebook is capitalising on the popularity of short-form video with a new Reels display at the top of user feeds. Creators will be able to make Reels up to 60 seconds in length, remix existing ones, and share publicly posted Reels to their Stories, adding even more engagement potential.

Twitter adds option to pin Direct Messages

Twitter has added a new option to pin DM chats, with the capacity to pin up to six chats at once to the top of an inbox. When users swipe to the right on any chat, they will now see a new pin option appear, which will enable them to keep that exchange at the top of the stream, even as new DMs come in. This could be a great way for brands to keep track of in-progress chats with customers enabling them to offer better customer service.

MICE UPDATE

Governments told to use business events to stimulate economic recovery

Some of the global meetings sector's biggest associations have called on governments to use business events to stimulate economic recovery. The International Association of Convention Centres, the International Congress and Convention Association and the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry have

co-produced the 'Business Events are the Fast Track to Recovery' white paper. The trade bodies believe that business events will be a key driver of recovery, both locally and internationally, by bringing communities, markets and industries together face to face.

The policy paper gives examples of what countries are doing to support the return of events as the COVID-19 pandemic recedes, highlighting the initiatives taken to boost the sector. It addresses the importance of Business Events to governments and policymakers and the need to take a sustainable and strategic approach in moving the industry forward.

LIGHTER NOTE

A magpie is spotted barking like a dog to get a well-deserved dose of attention. See more [here](#).