

WEEKLY REPORT

25 March 2022

COVID-19 UPDATES

The number of people testing positive for COVID-19 has increased in the last seven days by 14.5% taking the total number of people who have tested positive to 20.7 million. The number of patients admitted to hospital is also rising with an increase of 19.5% recorded in the last week. In regard to the vaccination rollout, 91.7% of people aged 12 and above have received their first dose, 85.8% their second and a further 67.3% of the population have received their booster dose.

The number of hospitalisations continues to creep up, with new figures revealing COVID-19 hospital admission rates for people aged 75 and over in England have jumped to their highest level for more than a year. The UK Health Security Agency estimates case rates among people aged 50 and over are back up to early January levels, when the original wave of Omicron variant infections was at its peak. Factors thought to be contributing to the growth of infections include the gradual increase in social contacts over recent weeks and the ending of legal requirements for self-isolation.

As of 18 March, all remaining COVID-19 travel restrictions have now been lifted for passengers entering the UK. Unvaccinated arrivals will no longer have to take tests and passenger locator forms have been scrapped. This comes almost exactly two years after the first COVID-19 restrictions were imposed in the UK and was deliberately timed, says the Government, to come into force before the Easter holidays.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATES

The UK Government Spring Statement

Yesterday, chancellor of the exchequer Rishi Sunak announced his spring statement in an address to the House of Commons. A number of measures were announced to support the UK population at a time where inflation rates are predicted to rise to around 8.7% - the highest in 40 years, economic growth is predicted to reach 3.8% - palling in comparison to the previously forecasted 6% and real living standards are set to fall by 2.2% – the largest financial year fall on record.

Measures of note to support households during the current cost-of-living crisis included a 5p per litre cut to fuel duty from March 2023, the removal of VAT payments for homeowners installing energy-efficient materials such as solar panels, heat pumps or insulation, and a doubling of Household Support Funds for Local Authorities to £1bn from April 2022. Regarding taxation, the income threshold for people starting to pay national insurance (NI) contributions will rise to £12,570 from July and the basic rate of income tax will be cut from 20p to 19p in the pound before the end of this Parliament. Employment Allowance will increase from £4,000 to £5,000, in a bid to support small businesses.

The War in Ukraine: Ukrainians take shelter

Reuters reports that an unprecedented summit took place in Brussels this week, where the NATO transatlantic alliance, G7 rich nations and European leaders address Europe's worst conflict since the 1990s Balkans wars. Britain has continued to impose sanctions on Russian oligarchs, the latest of which included the stepdaughter of Russia's foreign minister and more aid has been supplied to Ukraine. Tensions continue to rise as British prime minister Boris Johnson claimed "Putin has already crossed the red line into barbarism" and NATO announced plans for new combat units in four eastern European countries near Ukraine, amid preparations for a possible Russian attack using chemical, biological or even nuclear weapons.

US president Biden has said he supports the removal of Russia from the G20. Biden also announced the United States plans to accept up to 100,000 Ukrainians fleeing Russia's invasion and is pledging \$1 billion in new humanitarian aid.

TRADE UPDATE**Hong Kong lifts flight ban from nine countries**

A ban on UK flights to Hong Kong is to be lifted from 1 April as part of a relaxation of some of the world's strictest COVID-19 restrictions.

The UK is one of nine countries listed for the resumption of international flights, also included are the US, Canada, Australia, India and France. Other measures will see quarantine reduced for international arrivals.

Carrie Lam, chief executive of the Chinese-ruled territory said: "The flight ban is no longer timely and appropriate...it will bring huge disturbances to Hong Kong people who are stuck in these nine countries if we continue the ban."

Hotel quarantine for arrivals could be halved to 7 days from 14 if residents tested negative, Lam said. She had previously said measures would be in place until 20 April.

Affordable Car Hire enters voluntary liquidation

Affordable Car Hire has entered voluntary liquidation after 18 years of operation.

Founder and chief executive Angela Day said she made the "tough decision" on 1 March and said she was "devastated and deeply saddened" to close the business.

Day said she had spent the last few days calling all her trade partners to inform them of the move but said "there are going to be some that are hit by this".

Gatwick to offer 30 summer long-haul routes as South Terminal reopens

More than 30 long-haul routes will become available this summer from Gatwick as the airport prepares to reopen its South Terminal after pandemic closure.

The reopening will see airlines including British Airways and Scoot operating long-haul routes from South Terminal, alongside JetBlue, Tui, WestJet, Air Transat and Emirates from North Terminal.

Start-up Norse Atlantic last week became Gatwick's latest airline, announcing low-cost long-haul routes this summer, having secured slots at the airport.

Spanish Tourism Chief says travel agents are 'closest allies'

The boss of the Spanish Tourist Board has described travel agents as the organisation's "closest allies" in boosting the country's inbound tourism.

Miguel Sanz Castedo, director general for Turespaña, said he wants people to discover more of Spain beyond the most popular destinations in 2022, adding agents will play a crucial part in doing that.

"Agents are the closest allies to tourist officers and destination management officers because they are our commercial force".

AIRLINE UPDATE

JetBlue - JetBlue and American Airlines are ramping up their Northeast Alliance (NEA) once again. The two airlines say they are elevating the travel experience for their most loyal travellers by introducing new perks for TrueBlue Mosaic and AAdvantage status members when travelling on either airline.

Jet2 - Jet2.com and Jet2holidays have added more capacity and extra flights to eight popular resorts from Manchester. The company has added extra services to Madeira, Crete, Corfu, Mykonos and Kefalonia in Greece, Dalaman in Turkey and Split and Dubrovnik in Croatia.

Jet2 ceo Steve Heapy said: "With international travel starting to look like it did before the pandemic, we are seeing continued demand across the board from Manchester Airport, as customers make the most of being able to travel on their well-deserved holidays once again."

Virgin Atlantic - Virgin Atlantic is flying 50 Ukrainian orphans and their legal guardians to the UK. The orphans and their guardians are currently in Poland after having been evacuated a week ago.

Virgin Atlantic will take the group from Warsaw to London, where they will stay for a few days before heading to Scotland, where the charities will work to house them and help them settle into their new lives.

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES, OTA UPDATE

Althams Travel – Althams Travel managers have hailed a move to a four-day working without a cut in pay as a “game changer” for the agency chain’s staff.

The changes come as the company prepares to return to profitability this year after reporting losses in the last two years as a result of COVID-19. The company went into the pandemic after its best year to date.

EasyJet Holidays - EasyJet holidays has launched an exclusive travel agent promotion, with savings of £100 on summer 2023 holidays. The operator is offering holidays to over 50 destinations, with seven-night packages starting at £276pp and three-night city breaks from £165.

The promotion will run until 14 April 2022 and is valid on all easyJet holidays taking off between 1 April 2023 and 31 October 2023.

P&O - P&O Cruises is preparing for a full return to service this week with Arcadia due to sail to the Canary Islands on Sunday. The departure will mark the first time the line’s six-ship fleet is in full service since the pause in operations brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

P&O Cruises president Paul Ludlow said: “It is evident that our guests are reassured by the steps we have taken to protect their health and wellbeing and that they are delighted to be back on board re-igniting their passion for travel.”

SOCIAL UPDATE

Instagram launches algorithm-free feed sorting options

Instagram has launched its algorithm-free, chronological feed option. Users will now have two new Instagram feed options to choose from to control their main content display. ‘Favourites’ will show the latest posts from up to 50 accounts which users can prioritise by adding to their ‘Favourites’ list. ‘Following’ will show posts from all the accounts that they follow in the app, as per the regular Instagram feed. Users will need to manually select either feed each time the app is opened, however, the default will remain algorithm-based with a push towards Reels and Stories content.

Facebook is developing reactions for Reels

Facebook is now developing Reels reactions, which would provide another way to respond to its short-form video content. Currently, on both Instagram and Facebook, users can Like a Reel, or comment on it, however this new option would enable people to assign one of seven emoji responses to a Reels clip. Reactions have become a habitual behaviour for many and this could become another algorithmic sorting factor to help highlight the most relevant clips to each individual.

MICE UPDATE

Recovery continues as 2,000 buyers register for IMEX in Frankfurt

More than 2,000 buyers from 70 countries have registered for IMEX in Frankfurt as the global business events sector continues to recover. The numbers released by the IMEX Group show increasing demand from both buyers and suppliers for the upcoming edition of IMEX in Frankfurt on 31 May - 2 June. Confirmed buyers are an international mix of agencies, corporates, associations and independents.

The global exhibitor list continues to grow and includes a range of destinations, hotels, venues and more. Whilst business meetings and networking opportunities remain at the heart of the show, more than 150 educational sessions will also take place throughout the three days.

LIGHTER NOTE

Lighter Note

Meet Snow, the caring canine who loves taking scared and timid new foster cows under his wing. See it [here](#)