

WEEKLY REPORT

8 April 2022



COVID-19 UPDATE

The number of people testing positive for COVID-19 in the UK has decreased by 30.3% compared to the previous seven days. However, the number of patients admitted to hospital has risen by 3.7% in the last week. In regard to the vaccination rollout, 91.9% of people aged 12 and above have received their first dose, 86.1% their second dose and 67.6% of the population have received their booster, a slight increase from last week.

Free testing for COVID-19 from the NHS has ended for most people in England. Free testing services have now closed at pharmacies, testing centres and community collection points such as libraries, schools, nurseries and universities. The success of the COVID-19 vaccination programme has meant that the requirement for shielding and identifying people as clinically extremely vulnerable is no longer necessary. However, there remains a smaller number of people whose immune system means they are at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19, despite vaccination. In the UK, you are eligible for a free COVID-19 test if you have a health condition which means you're eligible for COVID-19 treatments, your doctor or healthcare professional has told you to get a test because you're being admitted to hospital, or you've spoken to your GP or healthcare professional recently and they asked you to get a test.

Scotland has lifted most legal restrictions against COVID-19, although it is still a requirement to wear a face covering on public transport and in some indoor settings until 18 April. Free COVID-19 tests will be available until the end of April, until which time physical test sites will close and contact tracing will also end. At the end of April, those with symptoms will no longer be required to test and instead will be advised to stay at home until they feel better.

In Wales, masks remain compulsory in health and social care settings, but are no longer required in shops or on public transport, though they are still recommended. The weekly infection rate is no longer a guide to the spread of COVID-19 in Wales as 30 March was the last day people could book themselves a PCR test, with all sites beginning to close from 31 March. The latest infection rate based on PCR tests for the seven days up to 31 March was 311.7 cases for every 100,000 people, a big fall from the 414.1 cases recorded on 4 April. If the current public health situation remains stable in Wales, all remaining COVID-19 restrictions will be removed on 18 April.

Northern Ireland's government continues to recommend the wearing of face masks in certain places, such as enclosed public spaces and health and social care settings. At present, all COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted for travelling to Ireland, removing the requirement for a completed passenger locator form and proof of vaccination, recovery or a negative test. All restrictions have been lifted in the hospitality sector and those with symptoms of COVID-19 are advised to self-isolate and order a PCR test.

Irish people aged 65 and older are set to receive another COVID-19 booster, the health minister has said. Stephen Donnelly confirmed on Wednesday that he had accepted advice from the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) that will see a fourth dose of the COVID-19 vaccine recommended for all those aged 65 and older. The Department of Health and the HSE will now be charged with rolling out a fresh dose of the COVID-19 vaccine to thousands of people nationwide. The Republic of Ireland is currently experiencing soaring case numbers, with hospitals still under significant pressure.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

Energy strategy: UK plans eight new nuclear reactors to boost production

Up to eight more nuclear reactors could be delivered on existing sites as part of the UK's new energy strategy. The plan, which aims to boost UK energy independence and tackle rising prices, also includes plans to increase wind, hydrogen and solar production. But experts have called for a bigger focus on energy efficiency and improving home insulation. Consumers are facing soaring energy bills after the Russian invasion of Ukraine pushed gas prices even higher. Under the government's new plans, up to 95% of the UK's electricity could come from low-carbon sources by 2030.

Economy 'surged higher' in March but risk to growth intensifies as firms raise prices

A rise in demand for leisure and entertainment activities last month helped the UK economy grow more than had been expected, according to a closely watched survey, as fears intensify that soaring inflation will apply the brakes. The S&P Global/CIPS UK Services PMI, which measures the sector accounting for 80% of the country's economy bar retail, showed business activity rising at the fastest rate in 10 months. The return of improved weather and end of COVID-19 restrictions provided a boost to workplace food outlets, cinema audiences and the like despite a rise in the cost of living that pushed inflation to a 30-year high in March.

TRADE UPDATE

Easter holiday books 'boom' despite costs of living hike

Bookings for the Easter holiday period have hit a record high for the first time in two years as families look to take advantage of relaxed travel restrictions, according to travel insurance provider Staysure. The firm reported a record March for policy sales with a 175% increase when compared to the same period pre-pandemic. The company's contact centre has also seen an increase of 92% in calls for travel insurance enquiries for the same period. Ryan Howsam, chief executive of Staysure Group, said consumers are "not willing to sacrifice" their holidays despite the recent squeeze on the cost of living. "With all remaining COVID-19 travel measures, including the Passenger Locator Form and tests for unvaccinated arrivals now ending in the UK, consumers are ready to get back to travelling like they used to, and the increase in demand that we're seeing clearly reflects that," he added.

Mature holidaymakers more likely to book with agents in 2022

The proportion of mature holidaymakers looking to book with a travel agent has almost doubled since last summer, according to a poll by Silver Travel Advisor. The over-50s specialist said: "In July 2021, 48% of respondents indicated they would book their holiday direct with a hotel or airline, which has now dropped significantly to just 24%. "These travellers are instead looking to book with an operator or travel agent, with both of these categories taking the majority of responses in the March 2022 survey – direct with a tour operator grew from 30% to 39%, while a travel agent (online and contact) booking method jumped from 20% to 37%."

Easter weekend travel delays

Holidaymakers attempting to get away on Easter breaks over the weekend faced chaotic scenes at airports and the port of Dover as staff shortages and the shutdown of P&O Ferries after the sacking of 800 seafarers caused major disruption. EasyJet reportedly cancelled 100 flights on Monday, including 62 from the UK, after further weekend cancellations, blaming higher than usual numbers of staff absent due to COVID-19. Flights have also been cut by British Airways. Manchester airport issued an apology and admitted passengers' experiences fell "below the standard we aim to provide". Travellers at the airport have faced long queues for check-in and security over the past month, with some missing flights at the start of the Easter school holidays.

Strike action at Heathrow postponed

Strike action at Heathrow which threatened to cause further chaos across the airport hub has been postponed following a new pay offer. More than 160 baggage handlers belonging to the Unite union have postponed next week's walk-out plans after their employers Vanderlande Industries made an offer. The strike, which had been scheduled to take place between 8-10 April, has been stalled to allow Vanderlande members of Unite to vote on the deal. Unite said if the deal is rejected then the strikes will be rescheduled for a later date. It added any strike action would "impact all airlines at Heathrow", including British Airways, KLM, Air France and Lufthansa.

Sri Lanka travel alert issued as public emergency declared

An island-wide curfew has been imposed in Sri Lanka amid protests over shortages of basic necessities. The Foreign Office updated its travel advice over the weekend after the country's government declared a public emergency. The guidance said: "The economic situation is deteriorating in Sri Lanka with shortages of basic necessities including medicines, fuel and food because of a shortage of hard currency to pay for imports.

Spain rolls back entry rules for non-fully vaccinated arrivals

Non fully-vaccinated travellers will continue to be barred from Spain for the foreseeable future, the Spain tourist office in the UK has confirmed. UK travellers aged 12 and above are still required to show proof of full vaccination, or a certificate of recovery for infections dating from 11 to 180 days before the date of travel. There is an exception for those aged 12 to 17, who can show a negative COVID-19 test taken within 72 hours of arrival.

All arrivals must fill out Spain's Health Control Form before travel.

Malta further eases COVID-19 rules for visitors

Malta is to remove its quarantine requirement for travellers who are not fully vaccinated from next week, as the country continues with its COVID-19 exit roadmap. From 11 April, travellers coming into the archipelago from a country on the red list will be allowed to enter with a negative PCR test taken up to 72 hours prior to arrival. People who have a recognised Covid recovery certificate presented within 180 days of arrival may also enter the country.

AIRLINE UPDATE

Aer Lingus - Irish carrier Aer Lingus is restarting several key US routes from its Dublin base for the first time since 2020. Flights to Philadelphia resumed on Thursday (7 April), Los Angeles will begin again on 12 May, and the Seattle service takes off from July 7. There are connections for UK passengers from Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Newcastle, Heathrow and Gatwick, travelling through Aer Lingus' hub at Dublin. Further UK connections to North America from Bristol and Leeds Bradford will follow from 15 April and Exeter and Newquay from 29 April via the Irish capital.

British Airways - British Airways has agreed a five-year deal to serve Jersey from Heathrow, after almost 12 months of negotiations with Ports of Jersey, which represents maritime and aviation activity on the island. The arrangement is expected to carry more than two million passengers to and from BA's global Heathrow hub.

Emirates - Emirates will restart flights from Stansted to its hub in Dubai this summer, following a hiatus since March 2020 because of the pandemic. Operations from its third London gateway will resume on August 1 with a five-weekly service, increasing to a daily service from 1 September, with a wide-body Boeing 777-300ER aircraft. By October, the airline will be serving the UK with 110 weekly flights, from Heathrow, Gatwick, Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle and Glasgow.

JetBlue - Low-cost US carrier JetBlue will start services from Boston to Heathrow and Gatwick this summer. A non-stop service between Boston Logan International Airport and Gatwick begins on 19 July, then Boston-Heathrow takes off from 22 August. The carrier said London is among the most requested destinations from the airline's large Boston customer base.

Wizzair - Wizz Air's delayed introduction of a new base at Cardiff airport will see eight new routes flown this summer. The budget carrier is serving Alicante, Faro, Heraklion, Palma, Larnaca, Lanzarote and Tenerife, with flights to Corfu planned to start in June. A service to Sharm El Sheikh in Egypt will be added in November. The expansion into Wales, delayed due to the pandemic, increases the annual capacity at Cardiff airport by more than 330,000 seats.

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES, OTA UPDATE

ABTA - ABTA's 2022 Travel Convention will take place in Marrakech on 10-12 October, marking a return to an overseas conference following the COVID-19 pandemic. The event was originally due to take place in the Moroccan city in 2020 and will feature two days of business sessions in addition to networking events and the opportunity to experience the latest tourism developments.

Travel Counsellors - Travel Counsellors' UK leisure bookings are 50% up on the same time in 2019 while average spend is up by 20% on three years ago. The homeworking firm said March had become the most successful sales month since the start of COVID-19, with Dubai, Tenerife, New York and France the most popular destinations for last minute Easter departures. As well as leisure, corporate sales have also risen and are up by 20% on the same time in 2019. The company reported that UK holidaymakers were now spending more on upgrading their trips and planning slightly further ahead, with bookings coming in for around 100 days ahead of departure.

Tui Group - Tui Group is to recruit 1,500 new staff as it gears up for a post-pandemic summer. More than 1,000 are being sought for roles in 100 holiday destinations, including Antalya, Crete, Majorca and Rhodes, while 500 are needed to fill technology and e-commerce positions. Recruitment will take place in the UK and Ireland as well as Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands for roles in countries including Greece, Spain and Turkey in its largest recruitment drive for roles in holiday destinations.

USAirtours - USAirtours' March bookings have matched 2019 for the first time while the operator has introduced a sales support team to help agents. The trade-only tour operator said it has already achieved sales revenue of £26 million for its financial year ending September 2022. The company thanked the trade for its loyal support during the challenging pandemic period, when its main destination, the US, was closed for 20 months and it had to cut its workforce from 83 to 32.

SOCIAL UPDATE

Instagram updates Reels editing tools

Instagram recently updated the editing process within Reels to make it easier to trim and rearrange video clips within the Reels composer. The new editing flow enables users to edit each clip by tapping on the thumbnail and cutting down the specific segment. Users can then re-order each of the clips in the new 'Re-Order Mode', simplifying the editing process. With more people looking to create short video clips, this will help facilitate more customised creations, and get more people publishing interesting and engaging Reels clips.

Twitter confirms work on an 'Edit' button

After years of being the most requested Twitter upgrade, tweet editing may finally become a reality. When Elon Musk, Twitter's largest shareholder and latest board member, posted a Twitter poll, nearly 4 million people voted, with 73.5% of them in favour of an edit option. Twitter CEO, Parag Agrawal, advised users to 'vote carefully' which suggests this anticipated option is currently being developed.

MICE UPDATE

ABPCO event enquiries total almost 17,000 delegate days

The Association of British Professional Conference Organisers (ABPCO) has received enquiries tallying more than 16,860 delegate days' worth of in-person events. The received enquiries range from 50-1000 delegates for a minimum of one to six days per event. The data indicates that confidence in face-to-face events is increasing as the value of in-person events is recognised. The enquiries also suggest the increasing need to employ an accredited professional conference organiser to help deliver events.

LIGHTER NOTE

Lighter Note:

Rare baby wallaby emerges at Chester Zoo, find out more [here](#)