

WEEKLY REPORT

27 May 2022



COVID-19 UPDATE

The number of people testing positive for COVID-19 in the UK has decreased in the last seven days by 13.1%. Meanwhile, the number of patients admitted to hospital has also dropped by 17%. In regard to the vaccination rollout, 92.9% of people aged 12 and above have received their first dose, 86.8% their second dose and a further 68.1% of the population have received their booster dose.

The wearing of face masks will no longer be legally required in Welsh health and social care services from Monday. First minister Mark Drakeford is set to axe the last of Wales' COVID-19 rules, which have been in place in some form since March 2020. Ministers said the public health situation had continued to improve over the last few weeks. Wales was the last part of the UK with restrictions still in place.

Meanwhile in Ireland, the number of cases of COVID-19 in hospitals has reduced to 191, the lowest number since early August last year.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

Sue Gray's long-awaited report into Downing Street parties has been published

Senior civil servant Sue Gray has said there were "failures of leadership and judgement in No. 10 and the Cabinet Office" for which "the senior leadership at the centre, both political and official, must bear responsibility". Eighty-three people who attended these events received fines as a result of the police investigation, including the prime minister and the chancellor of the exchequer.

The report adds that junior civil servants were led to believe that their involvement in these events was acceptable, given the involvement of senior civil servants and political advisors. Some staff had "witnessed or been subjected to behaviours at work which they had felt concerned about but at times felt unable to raise properly", and there were multiple examples of an "unacceptable" lack of respect and poor treatment of security and cleaning staff. The report also included several photographs of the prime minister, taken at some of the events within the report's scope.

More Tory MPs join calls for Boris Johnson to quit over 'Partygate'

Four Conservative MPs have now broken cover to call for Boris Johnson to resign since the publication of Sue Gray's report on lockdown parties at No 10. John Baron, David Simmonds, Stephen Hammond and Julian Sturdy have joined a list of Conservative MPs urging the prime minister to resign. Mr Hammond said he "cannot and will not defend the indefensible".

Johnson has said he is "humbled" by the report's findings, but did not lie to MPs and is not going to quit. In a news conference on Wednesday, he said he wanted to "keep moving forward" and focus on the "people's priorities". Labour's shadow levelling-up secretary, Lisa Nandy, accused the prime minister of "passing off responsibility" for 'Partygate' to junior staff, telling the BBC "he's not sorry that he did it, he's sorry that he was caught."

Chancellor sets out £15 billion emergency package to mitigate soaring cost of living

Following pressure from Labour and the Liberal Democrats over the last several weeks to provide extra help with bills, millions of households will receive a £400 discount off their energy bills and a £5 billion tax will be levied on oil and gas giants as Rishi Sunak moved to counter the soaring cost of living.

Reports suggest that the Government is split over the tax, amid fears it will hinder investment and economic growth. Inflation - the rate at which the cost of goods and services is rising - is currently at 9%, pushed higher by rapidly increasing food and energy prices. It is expected to hit double digits later this year.

While many will welcome this additional money, others have speculated that this plan is simply a distraction from the recently published Sue Gray report and another attempt from the government to divert attention.

TRADE UPDATE**Dollar exchange rate starts to bite but sales robust**

The travel trade is starting to feel the impact of the weak pound-dollar exchange rate but sales remain resilient, despite rising living costs. The value of the pound against the dollar plunged to \$1.21 in mid-May, although it rallied this week to about \$1.25. The Advantage Travel Partnership said the exchange rate was hitting new sales due to higher flight prices and resort costs. Leisure director Kelly Cookes said: "People are looking at whether they can go to the Indian Ocean or Far East where it is cheaper." She added: "Trading-wise, the U.S. is dropping off versus 2019, and we're hearing that from suppliers too. But in volume terms it is still one of the top long-haul destinations." Travel agents have confirmed that increasing flight prices and the strengthening of the dollar, although damaging, is not putting people off travel.

Japan to open to international tourists on 10 June

The destination will initially only allow groups who are on guided tours, with the prime minister Fumio Kishida, saying that border restrictions would be eased gradually. It will be the first time Japan has opened its borders since the COVID-19 pandemic. Kishida said: "We will resume accepting tourists on package tours with guides from the 10th of next month. Step by step we will aim to accept [tourists] as we did in normal times, taking into consideration the status of infections." Specialist operator InsideJapan says the decision to allow package group tours is positive news and hopes this will be "another small but quick step towards opening the country".

Dnata Travel Group optimistic about future following market rebound

Dnata Travel Group chief executive Alisa Pollard has told a two-day strategy meeting for the company's UK brands that she is optimistic about the future following a strong rebound in the market. The meeting brought together nearly 100 members of the group's UK management teams working under its key brands Travel Republic, Gold Medal, Netflights, Sunmaster and Travelbag as well as its supporting service areas. Pollard told the meeting the group's brands were making a strong recovery as a result of demand returning to the market, and shared "ambitious" strategic plans for the next two years. Speaking at the event, she said "all of our operating businesses are making a strong recovery on the back of improved trading conditions. Given the current economic outlook there are sure to be some challenges ahead of us, but we are feeling optimistic about the future."

Advantage urges holidaymakers to book now for summer

Advantage Travel Partnership is advising holidaymakers looking to get away this summer to book soon or risk missing out. The agency says its latest research shows consumers may still be able to find some late summer availability, but warns it is becoming increasingly limited with many tour operators reporting capacity and promotional offers are now in short supply. The advice for consumers comes off the back of hesitancy around summer bookings earlier this year, with many people reluctant to book far in advance. They believe the doubt among holidaymakers has been exacerbated by media coverage of issues at airports surrounding passport delays and airport queues.

AIRLINE UPDATE

EasyJet - EasyJet cancelled around 200 flights due to an IT failure on 26 May, with thousands of EasyJet passengers having their travel plans disrupted. EasyJet has apologised to affected passengers for the inconvenience and said its IT specialists have now resolved the issue. They advise customers due to travel with them to continue to check Flight Tracker for the status of their flight before making their way to the airport. The airline now faces the prospect of mass compensation claims but assures affected passengers that they can apply for compensation in line with regulations.

Norse Atlantic - Norse Atlantic has started selling tickets for transatlantic flights from London. A daily service to New York is set to start on 12 August with fares starting at £255 return. Flights to the U.S. are due to launch from Oslo on 14 June and the airline has been lining up services from Gatwick after securing slots at the airport. A service between Oslo and Gatwick is also scheduled from August. The airline is to operate Boeing 787 Dreamliners on North Atlantic routes, with other U.S. destinations from Gatwick set to be announced soon.

Virgin Atlantic - Virgin Atlantic has shelved plans to launch a new route to Havana from Heathrow due to "unique complexities" with Cuban operations. A spokesperson for the airline says impacted customers will be contacted to inform them of the cancellations and their options, including a travel voucher or a full refund for their cancelled flight or package holiday.

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES & OTA UPDATE

APT - APT has added Egypt, Jordan and Israel to its 2022/2023 programme of cruises and tours for the first time. The new additions include an eight-day Treasures of Egypt and The Nile land and cruise itinerary which takes guests "into the heart" of Egypt. APT's UK and Europe managing director Paul Melinis said the new additions come following the "successful reception" of Croatia, which the company introduced as a new offering for this season. Melinis said "we polled our customers at the end of last year, and they made it clear that they were interested in exploring more exotic destinations with APT and Travelmarvel, so we have delivered."

Explore Worldwide - Explore Worldwide has upped its sustainability focus with new European trips, including 11 new "slower-paced" European itineraries with a stronger focus on utilising public transport and exploring on foot to encourage more sustainable travel practices. The operator's product team has been briefed to feature travel by public transport wherever possible, stressing it was not only a "more sustainable way" to travel but also an "authentic way" to see countries. Explore said the new range took advantage of Europe's rail and ferry networks, with tours including a journey through Spain, France and Italy and a seven-day trip through Croatia's Dalmatian Coast.

Sandals - Sandals will install carbon monoxide detectors in all hotel rooms across its portfolio following the deaths of three guests at a resort in the Bahamas. Sandals has installed detectors in all hotel rooms at Emerald Bay, and has plans to fit them at all its resorts. A spokesperson said "ensuring the safety and wellbeing of our guests and team members is and will always be paramount. It is for this reason that we have taken additional measures such as engaging environmental safety experts for a comprehensive review of all systems across the resort."

SOCIAL UPDATE

TikTok to launch the first stage of its LIVE subscriptions programme

TikTok continues to explore more creator monetisation pathways with the addition of LIVE subscriptions. This offering will enable live-streamers in the app to generate recurring revenue from their efforts by sharing exclusive streams with their paying audience. Subscribers that pay a monthly fee will get access to a range of exclusive features, including: subscriber badges, custom emotes and a subscriber-only chat. These custom tools will help enhance connection between creators and their paying audience.

MICE UPDATE

IMEX Frankfurt education to reflect new business reality

In the three years since the last IMEX in Frankfurt, technology has transformed the event landscape and the delegate experience, whether it's in-person, virtually or as an avatar in the metaverse. Taking place from 31 May - 2 June, the free learning programme explores the latest innovations as well as diving into current issues around sustainability, events design, wellbeing, contract negotiations and more.

The expert-led programme focuses on the new skills and mindsets needed for a changed business climate with topics including professional development and upskilling; creativity in communication; diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility; innovation and tech; and purposeful recovery. Over 150 education sessions will run at IMEX, free of charge and open to all.

LIGHTER NOTE

On a lighter note...

The 22-year-old 3D-printing schools in countries where children lack the opportunity to get an education - watch her [here](#).