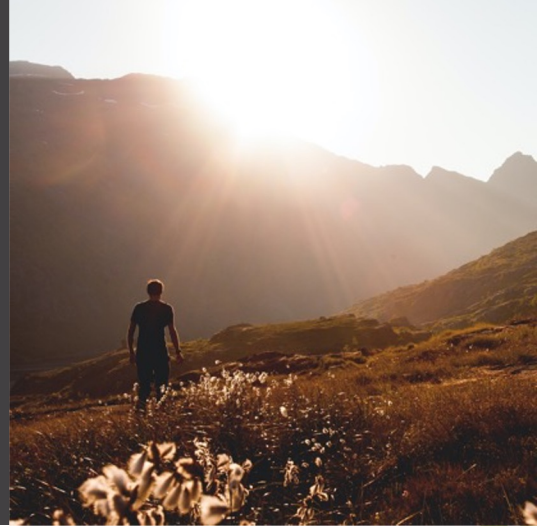


# WEEKLY REPORT

10 June 2022



## COVID-19 UPDATE

Covid hospital admissions are on the rise again as experts warn there could be another wave of infections. The number of people in England admitted to wards with Covid has begun to grow, new data from the NHS shows. Analysis by John Roberts of the Covid Actuaries group, set up in response to the pandemic, showed hospital admissions had stopped falling after a period of decline. Figures on Tuesday showed weekly admissions increased by 4 per cent across England as of 5 June and were up by 33 per cent in the North East and Yorkshire. Between 29 May 2022 and 4 June 2022, 38,511 people had a confirmed positive test result in England. This shows an increase of 8.5% compared to the previous 7 days.

Moderna has said its new two-strain Covid-19 booster increases people's immunity against the dominant Omicron variant, bolstering the company's hopes to roll it out as a fourth dose in the late summer. The US biotech company is the first to report preliminary results from a clinical trial of a vaccine targeted to Omicron. It said on Wednesday that the trial showed the "bivalent booster" — which contains the genetic code of the Omicron variant and the original strain of the virus — was safe and well tolerated. Moderna's bivalent booster elicited an eight-fold increase in antibodies to tackle the Omicron variant, compared to pre-booster levels, when administered as part of a four dose regimen. It produced 1.75 times more antibodies than people who received a booster shot of Moderna's existing vaccine.

### **Shanghai locks down 2.7m people a week after easing restrictions**

Shanghai and Beijing went back on fresh Covid-19 alert on Thursday after parts of China's largest economic hub started imposing new lockdown restrictions while the most populous district in the Chinese capital shut entertainment venues. Both cities had eased widespread Covid curbs recently after a decline in new cases. However, the country has stuck with a "dynamic zero-Covid" policy aimed at shutting down transmission chains as soon as possible.

## **Eastern Europe is now the most restriction-free area of the world**

Being the first collective of nations to bar tourism in the wake of Covid, Europe is ironically paving the way for the reinstatement of international travel and pushing for pre-pandemic normality. More than half of the continent has dropped Covid entry requirements, and along its Eastern front, the Balkans have become the most-restriction free area in the world.

## **ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE**

### **Petrol prices reach new high**

The cost of filling a typical family car with petrol has exceeded an average of £100 for the first time, with a litre of petrol costing an average of 182.3p on Wednesday. This marked a jump of 3.8p per litre compared to the start of the week, according to data analytics company Experian Catalist. The increase takes the average cost of filling a 55-litre family car to £100.27. The RAC has called it a “truly dark day” for motorists. RAC spokesperson Simon Williams called on the government to do more to tackle rising fuel costs, labelling it “a national crisis” for the UK’s 32m motorists. “What we really need is the chancellor to take action and either further reduce duty or cut VAT because VAT at the moment equates to 30p a litre,” Williams added.

### **London commuters told to work from home amid tube strikes**

Train passengers have been warned not to travel to work unless absolutely necessary during upcoming rail strikes that will reduce British railways to a part-time service. The industrial action from the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) is set to take place on 21st, 23rd and 25th June, with the whole network likely to be reduced to a skeleton service from 21st June to 26th June because of the knock-on impact.

### **Trump accused of coup attempt**

A US congressional inquiry has heard that former president Donald Trump orchestrated last year’s Capitol riot in an “attempted coup”, according to Republican vice-chair of the committee Liz Cheney. On 6th January 2021, Trump supporters stormed Congress as lawmakers met to certify Joe Biden’s presidential election victory. The hearing began yesterday after almost a year of investigation, showing interview clips the Democratic-led US House of Representatives select committee conducted with members of Trump’s inner circle.

### **Ryanair defends Afrikaans test**

Irish budget airline Ryanair has defended its policy that all South Africans travelling on flights to the UK must prove their nationality by taking a test in the Afrikaans

language. This followed outrage in South Africa, where many Black people associate Afrikaans as the language of white-minority rule. South Africa has 11 official languages and Ryanair has not explained why it chose Afrikaans.

### **Gas goldrush threatens climate**

Multiple countries – including the UK, US, Canada and Germany – are investing heavily in new natural gas facilities to boost production in response to soaring energy prices and the war in Ukraine, prompting concerns of their destructive impact on limiting global heating. Analysis from the Climate Action Tracker research initiative found the investment will lock countries into fossil fuel use at a time when scientists have warned a decisive turn towards lower-carbon alternatives is needed within the next few years.

### **Thailand partially legalises cannabis**

Thailand has legalised the growing of cannabis and its consumption in food and drinks – the first Asian country to do so – although smoking cannabis is still against the law. The move aims to boost Thailand’s agriculture and tourism sectors, marking a significant departure from the country’s reputation for strict anti-drug laws. Coming into effect yesterday, shoppers queued up at outlets selling cannabis-infused drinks, sweets and other items.

## **TRADE UPDATE**

### **Travel spend in May defied cost of living concerns, Barclaycard reveals**

Spend on travel jumped in May despite rising cost of living and airport disruption. Last month was “particularly strong” for the travel industry, which outpaced inflation and grew year-on-year and month-on-month, according to Barclaycard’s monthly consumer spending index. Spending on holidays increased by almost 190% compared with the same month last year, when the industry continued to be hit by Covid-related travel restrictions.

### **British travellers are still prioritising travel spend, latest PwC-TTG report reveals**

Operators are feeling positive about the summer season, with demand stronger than at any time during the past two years, and many companies now expecting to get back to pre-Covid sales levels this year. The latest trade survey of around 30 travel firms by business consultancy PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers) for TTG revealed that neither the cost-of-living crisis nor the war in Ukraine have so far derailed their recovery. Instead, pent-up demand from clients determined to travel again continues to fuel the recovery in bookings. Operators are also benefiting from higher demand from clients for more premium options, as well as deferred holidays finally going ahead and increased bookings for experiences and activities.

### **Costa del Sol wildfire forces evacuation of 2,000**

At least 2,000 people have been evacuated after a wildfire broke out in mountains above the Costa del Sol in Spain amid a heatwave. People from the centre of the town of Benahavis were forced to leave as three firefighters were injured. The blaze reportedly started on Wednesday afternoon on the slopes of Pujerra mountain in the Sierra Bermeja on the Andalusia coast.

### **Heathrow Terminal 4 sets to reopen**

Heathrow Terminal 4 – which has been closed for two years – is set to reopen to travellers on 14 June as part of the airport's plan to meet pent-up demand in time for summer. Around 30 airlines including Qatar Airways will move to the reopened terminal to allow for more check-in space and stand capacity, freeing up space at other terminals. Local buses, the Piccadilly Line and the Elizabeth Line will operate into the terminal from 14 June.

### **Japan reopens borders to UK tourists**

Japan reopened to foreign tourists on Friday 10 June after more than two years of closed borders due to the Covid-19 pandemic. During the first phase of reopening, travellers from 98 countries, including the UK, will be allowed entry on the condition they are on a fully-guided package tour. Visitors will still need to obtain a tourist visa, after receiving an ERFS confirmation from a Japan-based tour operator, and wear a mask. The daily entry cap has been doubled to 20,000, and all visitors must test negative for Covid-19 within 72 hours prior to departure. However, visitors from certain "blue list" countries – including the UK – will be able to skip the additional test upon arrival as well as the previous three-day quarantine, regardless of vaccination status.

## **AIRLINE UPDATE**

**British Airways** - British Airways has confirmed its 'book with confidence' policy, introduced during the pandemic, is being removed. The change covers new bookings made from 8 June while existing bookings made on or before 7 June and for travel by the end of September will not be affected. The flexible booking arrangement allowed changes in flight dates and destinations without charges but it was seen by the airline to be a temporary measure during the pandemic. British Airways is now ramping up its schedule and moving away from the 'book with confidence' policy, with passengers advised to ensure they have comprehensive travel insurance.

**Virgin Atlantic** - Virgin Atlantic will increase its newly launched Heathrow-Austin route to a daily service next spring off the back of "huge demand" for the Texas city.

The carrier is currently flying to Austin, its first new US route since 2017, four times a week using a Boeing 787-9 with 31 upper class, 35 premium and 192 economy seats onboard and return fares starting from £516pp. Plans to expand the service were revealed during a celebration flight to the Texas state capital on Wednesday 8 June with Virgin Group founder Sir Richard Branson and Virgin Atlantic chief commercial officer Juha Jarvinen among the VIPs marking the occasion.

**WestJet** - WestJet has launched a new service between Toronto and Edinburgh. The addition means the carrier will now fly non-stop to five European destinations from Toronto this summer including Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dublin, London and Barcelona. The new transatlantic flight will operate three times weekly.

**London City** - London City airport has reported a surge in passengers this May after numbers steadily increased throughout 2022, and has now passed its one-million-passenger milestone for the year following two years of logging passengers below that level. The airport said it is confident of closing out the year with three million passengers having passed through its terminal. May saw 290,000 passengers fly from City airport, up from 256,000 in April, and representing 65% of 2019 figures for the same period. The total number of travellers using the airport this year is already 29% higher than in 2021.

## TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES, OTA UPDATE

**Easyjet Holidays** - EasyJet Holidays has sent a letter of apology to travel agents following the disruption to customers' holidays over the half-term period, confirming it will honour agent commission for holidays cancelled at the last minute. The operator wrote to trade partners on Wednesday 8 June acknowledging its role in recent last-minute cancellations to customers' flights and holidays, with commercial director Paul Bixby stating the firm was committed to honouring commission for nixed trips.

**Intrepid Travel** - Intrepid Travel is bringing back National Travel Agent Day for its third year on 22 July. The tour operator is encouraging agents around the country to get behind the day and share any activity on social media via the #NTADUK hashtag. The idea is to promote the week of National Travel Agent Day as a time when customers should book with their local travel agent. Suppliers are being urged to support agents with special deals or incentives to increase bookings.

**Flight Centre** - Flight Centre has launched its first-ever television advertising campaign in the UK to mark its 40th anniversary. The month-long Your Centre campaign highlights the "breadth of holiday experiences" available through the

agency. It will be shown on channels including Channel 4, Channel 5, Sky channels and ITV Digital stations, as well as on radio stations including Radio X, LBC and Greatest Hits, alongside being displayed on billboards and social media.

**Titan Travel** - Titan Travel has revealed its first-ever escorted private jet tour, visiting nine destinations across six countries. The 23-day Captivating Cultures: A Grand Tour from Rome to Rajasthan by Private Jet trip departs 13 September 2023 from Stansted. Customers will first travel to Rome before heading south to Montenegro, Jordan, India and on to Uzbekistan and Istanbul. The tour includes 34 excursions, including visits to the Vatican museums before opening hours, a candlelit night walk through Petra and a private gala dinner in a Jaipur Palace. Prices start from £28,000pp.

## SOCIAL UPDATE

### **Instagram adds new option to pin posts**

Instagram has officially launched its new option to pin posts to profiles. This will enable users to pin both posts and Reels, providing a range of creative considerations as to how to maximise the appeal of their profile. Instagram is looking for more ways to give creators control over their profile display and has been testing the option since April, along with other profile customisation options, like the ability to rearrange the entire post display on a user's grid.

### **TikTok adds new insights to its Creative Centre platform**

TikTok has added some new insights elements to its evolving Creative Centre platform. The new insights provide data on trending songs, hashtags, regional performance stats, key influencers and more, enabling marketers to dig deeper into top trends. The advanced insights could be beneficial for guiding a TikTok content approach, and determining key influencers for brands to work with.

## MICE UPDATE

### **Event tech firm Cvent acquires VenueDirectory**

Cvent has acquired UK venue finding database VenueDirectory in a bid to expand their European offer. VenueDirectory provides the largest data centre of venue information to the UK meetings and events sector, enabling both agency and corporate planners to search for event venues. Although acquired by Cvent on 1 June, VenueDirectory will continue to operate as a standalone business unit. The acquisition into the Cvent portfolio will connect more venues with planners as the expansion enhances the current offer and provides additional support for clients across Europe.

## LIGHTER NOTE

Today is National Ballpoint Pen day. This day encourages us to honour the humble product.