

WEEKLY REPORT

17 September 2021



COVID-19 UPDATE

The number of people testing positive for COVID-19 in the UK has fallen by 22.2% in the last seven days. The number of people admitted to hospital has risen very slightly by 2.5% and the number of deaths having tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 30 days has risen by 4.7%.

The vaccination roll out continues with a total of 92.7 million doses given in the UK. A total of 48.5 million first doses have been given, accounting for 89.2% of the UK population over 16-years-old and a further 44.2 million second doses given, meaning 81.4% of the UK population over the age of 16 are double vaccinated. The NHS has also started rolling out COVID-19 booster jabs. Over 50s, people in care homes, frontline health and social care workers and vulnerable people between 16 and 49 are among those who will be offered a third dose. At least six months must have passed since their second jab.

The UK government also published its winter plan this week for England. Prime minister, Boris Johnson, has advised that England aims to avoid another lockdown and will be relying on the vaccine rollout, including the booster and jabs for children. There is however, a plan B which includes a greater use of face coverings, COVID-19 passports and working-from-home orders as well as a "lockdown lite". The government has one criterion for moving to plan B which is unsustainable pressure on the NHS. Currently, 7% of hospital beds are filled by COVID-19 patients.

In Wales, first minister Mark Drakeford has today announced plans, as part of the nation's latest review of coronavirus restrictions. From 11 October, people in Wales will need to show a pass proving they have been fully vaccinated or had a negative COVID-19 test to attend nightclubs and large-scale events. The NHS Covid Pass will be needed for clubs, indoor no-seating events with more than 500 people and outdoor no-seating events with more than 4,000 people. It will also be required for any event with more than 10,000 people. At Friday's news conference, Drakeford also said people should keep working from home where possible.

In Scotland, first minister Nicola Sturgeon addressed parliament on 14 September to discuss COVID-19 updates. Sturgeon advised that booster vaccines will be given to all those over the age of 50. All those aged 16-65 who were initially in one of the top nine priority groups can also receive a booster vaccine, which comes in addition to a third dose programme for those aged over-12 who are severely immunosuppressed, including those with leukaemia and advanced HIV. Sturgeon also advised that children aged 12-15 will be offered a vaccine in Scotland, with the nation the last in the UK to confirm the vaccination of this age group. She also advised that with COVID-19 cases falling across Scotland, there were to be no changes to current regulations.

In Ireland, taoiseach Micheál Martin said that the ongoing reopening of society is going "very well" as the economy is "motoring back". Speaking at Fianna Fáil's party think-in in Co Cavan, Martin said that the "key metrics around COVID-19, case numbers, mortality and hospital numbers" and the vaccination roll-out are facilitating the reopening of society and the economy. Martin said that he hoped lessons will be learned from the pandemic in terms of the future of the health service. When discussing the investment in the health sector over the past year, he said "the idea being (that) emerging from COVID-19 we embed significant, long-lasting reforms, some of which have been accelerated under COVID-19 and which we will learn lessons from COVID-19 in the context of our health service". The government has signalled that it intends to lift most of the remaining restrictions on 22 October. Over 89% of the adult population is now fully vaccinated and over 92% is partially vaccinated. Over 6.9 million vaccines have been administered so far.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

Prime minister's cabinet reshuffle

Boris Johnson reshuffled his senior ministers on 15 September, appointing his party's first female foreign secretary, Liz Truss, as he urged his government to get on with the job of tackling economic inequality after COVID-19. Some of the other big moves included Nadhim Zahawi who moved from leading the vaccine rollout to education at the expense of Gavin Williamson and Nadine Dorries who stepped up from health minister to culture secretary. "The Cabinet I have appointed today will work tirelessly to unite and level up the whole country. We will build back better from the pandemic and deliver on your priorities," Johnson said on Twitter.

Prime minister confirms 1.25% increase to National Insurance Contribution and dividend tax rates

National insurance contributions (NIC) and dividend tax rates will increase by 1.25

percentage points across the UK from April 2022, with the projected £12 billion annual income to be ring fenced to pay for health and social care. In a move that breaks the Conservative's manifesto pledge on raising taxes, the prime minister has confirmed that rates of national insurance are to be increased to pay for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the NHS and to address the long-standing funding gap for health and social care. From 1 April 2022, there will be a temporary 1.25% increase in class 1 (employee) and class 4 (self-employed) NIC paid by workers, as well as a 1.25% increase in class 1 secondary NIC paid by employers (so 2.5% in total). The 1.25% increase will also apply to class 1A and class 1B NIC paid by employers. From April 2023, the increases will be legislated separately as a "health and social care levy" and NIC rates will return to 2021/22 levels. The levy will be hypothecated in law, meaning that the revenues will be ring fenced for health and social care.

TRADE UPDATE

Transport secretary announces changes to rules around international travel

Grant Shapps has announced today (Friday 17 September) that the traffic list system will be simplified to highlight red list countries only. In addition, fully vaccinated people returning to England from non-red list countries will no longer need to take PCR tests from 4 October and later in the month, those people will be able to replace the day two PCR test with a cheaper lateral flow test. Also, eight countries are to be removed from the red list on 22 September, including Turkey, Pakistan and the Maldives. Shapps said the government is "introducing a new simplified system for international travel from Monday 4 October, replacing the current approach with a single red list and simplified measures for the rest of the world - striking the right balance to manage the public health risk as the number one priority".

Please note, details about this story were being announced as this report was finalised.

Three-fold increase in Google searches for travel

Google has seen search queries for travel rocket three-fold in the UK, but questions related to 'can I travel' are rivalling 'where to travel' as pandemic uncertainty continues. Speaking at this week's Travel Weekly Future of Travel Conference, Finnbar Cornwall, industry leader at event partner Google, said there will be turbulence as travel bounces back. However, he said that the signs were good with research from global consultancy McKinsey finding people are preparing to spend more post-pandemic, with travel top of their list. Cornwall said this finding has been backed by Bank of England figures which have shown that middle income households have saved money during the pandemic.

Travel must now trade its way out of the COVID-19 crisis

The Treasury has ruled out a targeted extension of the furlough scheme for the sectors hardest hit by the crisis, including travel, and suggested they must trade their way out of the pandemic. Exchequer secretary to the Treasury, Kemi Badenoch, wrote to TTG this week saying that the government was confident its current package of support measures would provide "substantial support" to businesses as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted "and trade begins to pick up". Badenoch added it would be "challenging" to target furlough support towards specific sectors in a "fair and deliverable way", with some firms working across multiple sectors "creating distortion".

Tiny percentage of travellers testing positive for COVID-19

Arrivals from red and amber list countries are showing less than a 1.5% positive COVID-19 test rate, latest NHS figures reveal. Official figures for the week between 26 August and 1 September show 3,347 (0.9%) day two tests on arrivals from amber list countries were positive, compared to 392 or 1% of day eight tests. There are similar figures for those returning from red list countries. The tiny percentages have fuelled arguments in favour of relaxing some quarantine rules. Testing of arrivals has been led by the NHS's Managed Quarantine Service since 15 February. Since then, 3.6 million people have quarantined at home or in a managed hotel.

AIRLINE UPDATE

Air Malta - Air Malta is set to resume daily flights from the archipelago to Gatwick next summer. The new routes, which also includes 15 flights a week to Heathrow, will start from 27 March next year.

Air Transat - The airline has resumed flights from the UK to Canada, with a Gatwick-Toronto service beginning on Thursday (16 September). The Canadian carrier will initially fly three times a week from Gatwick to Toronto, from where passengers can connect to other major cities. It will also restart Manchester-Toronto services earlier than planned on 20 October, thanks to "strong demand".

Birmingham Airport - The airport has been boosted by the return of British Airways after a three-year absence with a new service to Belfast this winter.

Qantas - Qantas has raised Aus \$500 million (£265 million) through a new bond offering and will use the cash to boost liquidity, repay maturing debt and repair its balance sheet. The Australian carrier is hopeful of restarting international flights shortly before Christmas, including to the UK, with Australia targeting 80% vaccination by then. The country is also gearing up to roll out its own digital vaccine certificate to facilitate a further reopening of its borders.

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES & OTA UPDATE

Baldwins Travel - A multimillion-pound takeover of the business, run by the Marks family with eight branches across Sussex and Kent, was announced on Tuesday 14 September. The deal is aimed at helping Baldwins "navigate its way out" of the COVID-19 crisis facing the travel sector, the company said in a statement.

Barrhead Travel - The agency has opened the doors of two new branches in England this week, taking the Scottish agency's UK-wide network to 47 stores. The new high street locations are in Halifax in West Yorkshire and Plymouth in Devon.

Culture Trip - Travel inspiration website Culture Trip has launched to the trade and set out plans to significantly up its agent focus over the next 12 months. Its Trips by Culture Trip range of small group adventures is now bookable by agents, with the firm claiming to offer "competitive commission". Culture Trip said agents will be supported by a customer support team "with years of experience working with travel professionals", although bookings will initially have to be made via phone or a trade-only email address. However, Culture Trip has pledged to up its trade support over the coming months with the introduction of a dedicated business development team to evolve trade partnerships.

Trailfinders - Trailfinders is expanding with two new agencies and a recruitment drive to find 150 new staff. Its York travel centre opened on 20 August and a branch in Cheltenham will open on 24 September. The two new additions bring the total in the chain up to 41 travel centres across the UK and Ireland. The recruitment drive aims to take on travel consultants throughout the UK and Ireland, as well as support roles in Kensington, London and Oxford.

SOCIAL UPDATE

Instagram adds new 'Map Search' tool

Instagram has launched a live test of a new feature called 'Map Search' in Australia and New Zealand, which enables users to discover businesses and locations of interest on the in-app map. Users with access to the new option are being prompted to tap on the map icon at the top right of the Discover tab. This then connects through to the new Map Search experience, which highlights cafes and restaurants primarily, but also shops, entertainment venues and more. When tapped on, location markers expand and display additional information including hours of operation, addresses and pricing information as well as connecting to their Instagram profile and tagged photos. This is expected to roll out to other countries worldwide.

MICE UPDATE

UK business events to be worth £27.6 billion by 2026, report finds

A new report based on research by Cities Restart claims that UK business events are set to be worth £27.6 billion by 2026. This represents a 42% increase in the value of the sector compared to 2019, despite spending on business events dropping by around 80% in 2020 due to the pandemic. The report, titled 'The Importance of International Conferences and Business Events to Restarting City Economies', also found that inbound international delegates to international conferences and business events are significantly more lucrative than domestic delegates. The research shows that in 2019 the average international delegate was worth £864, whereas the value of an average domestic delegate was £154. By 2026, this is forecast to grow to £1,078 for an international delegate and £180 for a domestic delegate, making international delegates worth six times more than their domestic counterparts.

LIGHTER NOTE

Made you look twice! Optical illusion photos reveal scenes that appear totally different until you take another glance, see [here](#).