

## COVID-19 – Weekly Round-up

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### Friday 15 January 2021

Heart of London Business Alliance is committed to ensuring our members receive the support they need while the situation in relation to COVID-19 is fast-changing. Our Daily Bulletin provides you with an update on the important announcements and guidance from the Government. In addition, it is recommended that our members monitor the [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) website for guidance regarding COVID-19.

Together with our local Member of Parliament, Nickie Aiken, Heart of London will continue to lobby Government for support for our members and your employees during this difficult time.

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### Headlines

- UK Government publishes vaccination programme
- The Chancellor warns of a tough road ahead
- Moderna vaccine approved by MHRA
- Scotland announce tougher measures

### UK Government publishes vaccination programme

**11<sup>th</sup> January:** On Monday, Health Secretary Matt Hancock [published](#) the full plan for the rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations in the UK. The rollout will be the largest vaccination effort in British history, employing the NHS, devolved administrations, local councils and the armed forces.

It is expected that there will be the capacity to deliver at least 2 million vaccinations a week by the end of the month thanks to the accelerated rollout in hospitals, local vaccination sites and around 50 mass vaccination centres. This means that all those in the four highest risk categories as defined by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), will be offered vaccinations by 15<sup>th</sup> February. Ultimately, the plan foresees that every adult in the nation will be offered the vaccine by Autumn.

Speaking to the [Public Accounts Committee](#) on Monday, Chief Executive of the NHS, Sir Simon Stevens, described the plan as being “two sprints and a marathon”, with two sprints to vaccinate the top four risk groups by mid-

February, and the remaining priority groups by the end of April, followed by a marathon programme to roll the vaccine out universally through the Summer and Autumn.

### *The need for success*

The vaccination plan comes at a somber time for the nation as daily death tolls continue to rise; on Wednesday 1,564 people died within 28 days of a positive test, the highest figure recorded since the pandemic began. It is expected to rise even further in the coming weeks, as the increase in transmission over the festive period feeds through into hospitalisations.

There has been some debate over the prioritisation of the vaccines, with frontline workers (other than those in the NHS) not expected to receive their jab until after February. While the government maintains their determination to see schools re-open and other key workers inoculated as soon as possible, it so far chosen to directly follow the advice from the JCVI on prioritisation.

## **The Chancellor warns of a tough road ahead**

**11th January:** On Monday, Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak, delivered a [statement](#) to the House of Commons on the state of the UK economy. In the speech, the Chancellor reported that GDP had fallen by 18.8% in Q2 2020, a direct result of the pandemic. Furthermore, whilst the easing of restrictions had allowed the economy an opportunity to partially recover, it remained 6.7% smaller than it was prior to the pandemic, since when more than 800,000 people had been made redundant.

Sunak's statement laid out the damage wrought on the economy by the pandemic. The total cost of the fiscal stimulus so far sits at over £280 billion as businesses and individuals alike continue to receive direct financial support from the Government. Since March 2020 some 10 million employees had benefited from the Job Retention (furlough) Scheme with a further 3 million people being awarded self-employment grants.

Resisting calls for Business Groups for fresh package of business support, the Chancellor [implied](#) on Monday that no further measures will be announced until the the Budget, scheduled to be announced on 3<sup>rd</sup> March.

## **Moderna vaccine approved by MHRA**

**8th January:** On Friday, the UK Government confirmed that the COVID-19 vaccine developed by Moderna had been given [regulatory approval](#) by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). This makes it the third coronavirus vaccine to be approved for use in the UK. Like other vaccines currently in circulation, the jab produced by Moderna requires two doses for maximum efficacy.

Following approval, the Government announced it has ordered a further 10 million doses of the vaccine, taking the total purchased doses to [17 million](#). In total, UK has now purchased over 367 million doses of various vaccines, including orders of the previously approved Pfizer/BioNtech and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines. Speaking to the Public

Accounts Committee on Monday, Kate Bingham, Chair of the Vaccine Taskforce stated that the average cost of each dose across all vaccines is £10.

## Scotland announce tougher measures

**13<sup>th</sup> January:** On Wednesday, First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon announced a raft of tougher **new restrictions** throughout the country. Under the new rules, those who worked from home in the first lockdown in March have been instructed to do so again, only shops selling essential items will be allowed to offer click and collect services, and takeaway services must now operate from a hatch or a doorway. The rules, which come into force on Saturday are designed to help close an “apparent loophole” in current restrictions where people leave the house for essential reasons but stay out for non-essential ones. With this in mind, the consumption of alcohol in public outdoor places has also been restricted, effectively ending the popularised lockdown trend of takeaway pints.

Scotland currently has close to 1,800 patients in hospital with COVID-19, a number which is expected to rise, leading to warnings that hospitals could soon be **overwhelmed**. The Scottish Chambers of Commerce nevertheless **warned** that the new rules would “only add to the growing desperation of businesses.”

### *The first to act*

The decision of the Scottish Government to act has only increased pressure on other administrations to act in adopting tougher measures. As part of the national effort to promote compliance, Home Secretary Priti Patel warned ‘the minority not adhering to new rules’ that police will now move quicker to fine those found to be in breach of restrictions. If widespread reports of misdemeanour continue in coming days, then serious consideration to tougher restrictions in England seems certain to follow.

## Devolved Nations

- **13<sup>th</sup> January:** On Wednesday morning, the Scottish Finance Secretary Kate Forbes MSP **called** on the UK Government to release £21.3 billion currently held in the COVID-19 reserve, as “virtually all” of the £8.6 billion received so far by Scotland had already been spent. Forbes believes that if the COVID-19 reserve was to be released, Scotland could expect £1.7 billion in additional funding.
- **13<sup>th</sup> January:** On Wednesday, £180 million in funding became available to the Welsh hospitality, leisure and tourism sectors on Wednesday as the Economic Resilience Fund Package **opened**. A typical hospitality business with six full-time staff could be eligible to receive around £13,000. The fund is expected to assist up to 8,000 companies.

## Other News

- **10<sup>th</sup> January:** The Department of Health and Social Care [announced](#) on Sunday that rapid, regular testing for those without symptoms would be made available across the country from this week. Those unable to work from home will be the first targeted under this expansion of asymptomatic testing.
- **13<sup>th</sup> January:** The Government confirmed on Wednesday night that the requirement for arrivals at UK ports of entry to evidence a negative COVID-19 test taken within 72 hours will be brought into effect only from 18<sup>th</sup> January, not 15<sup>th</sup> January as previously advised.
- **14<sup>th</sup> January:** All individuals arriving at UK ports of entry from destinations in South America, Portugal and Cape Verde will be banned from entering the country from 15<sup>th</sup> January. The announcement reflects concerns following the identification of a new COVID-19 variant first detected in Brazil.

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