

## COVID-19 – Weekly Round-up

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### Friday 28 May 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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### Indian variant surges but vaccinations prove resilient

**27<sup>th</sup> May:** The UK recorded a 3,542 coronavirus case increase in 24-hours yesterday, with the daily infections figure the highest since 12<sup>th</sup> April. Health Secretary Matt Hancock said that as many as 75% of new Covid-19 cases are now of the Indian variant. Government figures also show that another 10 people have died with Covid-19. This comes as Boris Johnson drops [hints](#) that the UK may have to wait longer than the 21<sup>st</sup> June for a full unlocking of the economy. Whilst this may seem cause for alarm, a [new study](#) by PHE has shown that 2 doses of the Covid-19 vaccines offer good protection against the Indian variant. Analysis of 5,600 cases of the Indian variant shows 60% were unvaccinated and only 3% were fully vaccinated. This is positive news, but the Government's cautious words may start alarm bells ringing for those parts of the economy yet to reopen fully. Nevertheless, the vaccine programme moves forward, with everyone over 30 now [invited](#) for their first doses. It was expected that there would be an uptick in cases when the UK reopened, but the emergence of the Indian variant has pushed case numbers beyond what had been anticipated.

### Government backtracks over local lockdowns

**25<sup>th</sup> May:** Advice for eight local authority areas in England worst-hit by the new variant have been [updated](#) after the Government clarified that it was not imposing local restrictions. This followed earlier guidance which had asked people to avoid non-essential travel altogether. People in the affected areas, which include Bedford, Blackburn with Darwen and North Tyneside, are being asked to meet outdoors and stay 2 metres apart from anyone in other households, wherever such an approach is possible. This comes after the Government was accused by Shadow Health Secretary Jonathan Ashworth of attempting to impose lockdown "by stealth" as the new guidance was issued without any formal announcement. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer called on the Government to "provide clarity fast" and

said that "local lockdowns are the wrong approach for both public health and local economies". The Government has been quick to stress that imposing local lockdowns was not its intention. It has also increased vaccinations and testing in the eight impacted areas.

### **Dominic Cummings lashes out**

**26<sup>th</sup> May:** Boris Johnson's former adviser Dominic Cummings made a series of claims about mistakes made by the Government during the pandemic in a seven-hour joint session of the Commons Health, and Science and Technology committees. Cummings stated that the Prime Minister was not fit for office and that Health Secretary Matt Hancock "should have been fired for at least 15 to 20 things". The appearance hit the front pages and cast a shadow over a Government basking in the glow of a successful vaccination scheme. However, it remains to be seen whether the criticism will have any material impact provided the vaccination programme continues and the country unlocks as planned. It comes as no surprise that both the Prime Minister and the Health Secretary have vigorously refuted Cummings' criticism. Johnson said some of the "commentary" did not "bear any relation to reality". However, Labour have seen an opportunity to criticise the Government and are pushing for the public inquiry into the Covid-19 pandemic to be brought forward to this year, as well as accusing Matt Hancock of failing to answer "pressing questions" on testing, PPE and care home mistakes.

### **Glasgow remains in Level 3 and Northern Ireland vaccinates the young**

**21st May 2021:** The Scottish government [announced](#) that Moray will be the only local authority area to change protection level as it moved to Level 2 on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2021, following improvements in the prevalence of the virus. The same cannot be said for Glasgow as both the proportion of cases and of positive tests have continued to rise, with the Indian variant thought to be driving the spread, meaning the city will remain in Level 3 for at least another week. Enhanced testing, vaccination and public health measures and extra support for businesses are being deployed to help the area combat the virus and its impact.

**27<sup>th</sup> May 2021:** The Northern Irish Government [invited](#) all those aged 18-24 to get vaccinated, meaning that Northern Ireland is the first part of the UK to offer an appointment to its entire adult population. This comes as Northern Ireland celebrated the return of many freedoms as lockdown eased considerably on Monday this week. Restaurants, cafes, bars and other hospitality venues can now operate indoors and six people from two households can now meet inside homes, while non-essential travel is allowed to the rest of the UK.

## Other News

- **24<sup>th</sup> May:** The Health Secretary has **unveiled** new plans to launch nine pilot schemes in England to test new, creative ways to help ensure people stick to self-isolation rules in areas with higher prevalence of infection including from new variants. In partnership with local authorities, the Government is backing the pilots with £12 million which will be used for a range of initiatives including providing alternative accommodation for people in overcrowded households, social care support such as increasing existing support for vulnerable adults and providing ‘buddying’ services for people whose mental health has been affected by lockdown.

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