

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE

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CABINET (21)30

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CABINET

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COVID-19 RESPONSE: AUTUMN

PAPER BY THE COVID-19 TASKFORCE

1. Today the Government will publish its strategy for managing COVID-19 during the autumn and winter.

#### PLAN A

2. In England, the number of deaths and hospital admissions with COVID-19 has remained relatively stable over the last month. Although deaths increased at the beginning of the summer, they have remained far below the levels in either of the previous waves. There is clear evidence that the vaccination programme is working and vaccines continue to prove effective.
3. As a result, COVID-O has agreed that the Government will maintain the current approach and continue to live with the virus with minimal restrictions on lives and livelihoods, while ensuring that the NHS does not come under unsustainable pressure. The Government's "*Plan A*" is:
  - a. **Building our defences through pharmaceutical interventions:** vaccines, antivirals and disease modifying therapeutics.
  - b. **Identifying and isolating positive cases to limit transmission:** Test, Trace and Isolate.
  - c. **Supporting the NHS and social care:** managing pressures and recovering services.
  - d. **Advising people on how to protect themselves and others:** clear guidance and communications.
  - e. **Pursuing an international approach:** helping to vaccinate the world and managing risks at the border.

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4. **Vaccine boosters will be offered to the over 50s in line with JCVI advice, starting with the most vulnerable** from week/beginning 20 September. Following JCVI advice, and the UK CMOs consideration of wider impacts, the government will offer a first dose of Pfizer to **12-15 year olds**.
5. **The NHS will also continue to enhance communications, and wider efforts to maximise vaccine uptake across all groups, including first and second doses, will be strengthened.**
6. **Test, Trace, and Isolate will remain a key intervention and will continue in its current form.** This includes: all current tracing activity; the symptomatic and asymptomatic testing offers; universal access to free lateral flow tests; the legal requirement to self-isolate; and all practical and financial support self-isolation support. The Government will signal that, in the future, universal free provision of LFD tests will end, and individuals and businesses using the tests will be asked to pay for them.
7. Reflecting the new context of living with the virus, **The Shielded Patient List and associated shielding support model will formally end**, in line with advice from CMOs.
8. **The Government will set out the key behaviours the public should follow during autumn and winter:**
  - a. **Let fresh air in if you meet indoors.** Meeting outdoors is safer.
  - b. **Wear a face covering** in crowded and enclosed settings where you come into contact with people you do not normally meet.
  - c. **Get tested, and self-isolate if required.** Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 - or anyone identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive - should take a free PCR test as soon as possible. All positive cases and all unvaccinated adult contacts of a positive case, must self-isolate.
  - d. **[Stay at home if you feel unwell.]**
  - e. **Wash your hands** with soap and water or use hand sanitiser regularly throughout the day.
  - f. **Download and use the NHS COVID-19 App.**

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9. **The Government will maintain the same work from home policy**, expecting a continued return to workplaces. Guidance will be that *“as workers return to the workplace, employers should follow the Working Safely guidance”*.
10. **The regulations that give local authorities power to respond to imminent threats to public health** will be extended to expire on 24 March 2022. **The Coronavirus Act will be renewed**, but unnecessary and disproportionate provisions will be expired or suspended.

### PLAN B

11. There is significant uncertainty about the course of the virus over the autumn and winter. Autumn and winter will be difficult for the NHS, as it grapples with both COVID and non-COVID demands. The usual challenges of flu and other winter illnesses may be greater this year, putting additional strain on both adult and pediatric services.
12. In light of these uncertainties the Government will also set out a Plan B, which will be deployed only if it is necessary to protect our NHS against unsustainable pressure. Plan B includes:
  - a. Communicating clearly and urgently to the public that the level of risk has increased, and with it the need to behave cautiously;
  - b. Introducing mandatory vaccine-only COVID status certification in certain, riskier settings. The list of proposed settings for a future scheme will be published today.
  - c. Legally mandating face coverings in certain settings. A final decision on the precise settings would need to be made at the time.
13. Asking people once again to work from home if they can will also be considered. Working from home causes more disruption and has greater immediate economic costs to some businesses than the other Plan B interventions and a final decision would be made based on the data at the time.

### NEXT STEPS

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14. The Health Secretary will set this out to Parliament today, 14 September, and the Prime Minister will host a press conference.
15. The publication '*COVID-19 Response: Autumn and Winter Plan*' will be published today.
16. The necessary regulations will be extended, and the Coronavirus Act will be reviewed.