

Our scientists have confirmed this new variant is between 50 and 70 per cent more transmissible – that means you are much, much more likely to catch the virus and to pass it on.

As I speak to you tonight, our hospitals are under more pressure from Covid than at any time since the start of the pandemic.

In England alone, the number of Covid patients in hospitals has increased by nearly a third in the last week, to almost 27,000.

That number is 40 per cent higher than the first peak in April.

On 29 December, more than 80,000 people tested positive for Covid across the UK – a new record.

The number of deaths is up by 20 per cent over the last week and will sadly rise further. My thoughts are with all those who have lost loved ones.

With most of the country already under extreme measures, it is clear that we need to do more, together, to bring this new variant under control while our vaccines are rolled out.

In England, we must therefore go into a national lockdown which is tough enough to contain this variant.

That means the Government is once again instructing you to stay at home.

You may only leave home for limited reasons permitted in law, such as to shop for essentials, to work if you absolutely cannot work from home, to exercise, to seek medical assistance such as getting a Covid test, or to escape domestic abuse.

The full details on what you can and can't do will be available at [gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus).

If you are clinically extremely vulnerable, we are advising you to begin shielding again and you will shortly receive a letter about what this means for you.

And because we now have to do everything we possibly can to stop the spread of the disease, primary schools, secondary schools and colleges across England must move to remote provision from tomorrow, except for vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

Everyone will still be able to access early years settings such as nurseries.

We recognise that this will mean it is not possible or fair for all exams to go ahead this summer as normal. The Education Secretary will work with Ofqual to put in place alternative arrangements.

We will provide extra support to ensure that pupils entitled to free school meals will continue to receive them while schools are closed, and we'll distribute more devices to support remote education.