

WEEKLY BRIEFING

6 August 2021



COVID-19 UPDATE

UK COVID-19 infections have continued to fall, dropping 10.4% in the last seven days, with the number of patients being admitted to hospital also declining by 10.3%. One in five people admitted to hospital in England with COVID-19 are aged between 18 and 34, the new chief executive of NHS England, Amanda Pritchard, has said. Pritchard commented it was "so important" people came forward to get vaccinated. NHS sources said the latest figures on hospital admissions reflected the success of the vaccination programme in protecting older age groups. As of this week, 88.7% of the adult population have had at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and a further 73.5% are fully vaccinated.

The declining results are due to several factors, including the fact that 4% of adults had self-isolated at some point in the last seven days. Along with this, according to the latest estimate by the Office for National Statistics, 92% of adults in England and Wales have antibodies to Sars-Cov-2 in their blood, either through vaccination or from previous infection.

Wales will move to alert level 0 from Saturday 7 August, removing the number of people who can meet indoors, including in private homes and events. This will also mean that any vaccinated adults, under 18s and vaccine trial participants will not need to self-isolate if they are in close contact with someone with COVID-19. Wales' first minister, Mark Drakeford said the nation is on the "final lap" of emerging from the pandemic.

In Scotland, the number of cases also continues to drop, with now only one in 120 infected. Scotland is already in level 0, but first minister Nicola Sturgeon has said this week that the nation will move beyond this level on 9 August, though some protective measures will stay in place. Sturgeon also said: "The move beyond level 0 will entail the lifting of most of the remaining legally imposed restrictions - most notably, on physical distancing and limits to the size of social gatherings. It also means that from 9 August, no venues will be legally required to close."

In Ireland, Dr Tony Holohan, chief medical officer at the Department of Health has

said: "Vaccination offers a real way out of this pandemic. The positive news is that take-up in Ireland is extremely high, which shows people understand the benefits for themselves and for their communities of getting vaccinated. Those with at least a first dose in the over 40s is over 90%, in the over 30s it is 84%, in the 18 to 29 year age group it is over 73%, and in the 16-17 year age group, it is over 46%". Dr Holohan commented that "each person who has come forward (for a vaccine) should be commended".

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

Rishi Sunak encourages young people to return to the office

Chancellor Rishi Sunak has said young people will see their careers benefit by working in the office, doubting that he would have done as well if he had started his working life virtually. The government has recommended a gradual return to work in England since restrictions were lifted on 19 July. However, the Scottish government has asked that people remain working at home until at least 9 August, where possible.

TRAVEL AND TOURISM UPDATE

Changes to the UK travel traffic light system

On 4 August, the UK government announced changes to the UK travel traffic light system which come into force at 04:00 BST on Sunday 8 August. The green list - whereby there is no quarantine for returning passengers - has been expanded to include Germany, Norway, Slovenia, Austria, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Malta and Croatia. Four countries will move from red to the amber list: India, UAE, Qatar and Bahrain. Whilst La Reunion and Mayotte, both French islands in the Indian Ocean, will be moved to the stricter red list, along with Mexico and Georgia. Amber list rules will now apply to France for fully vaccinated passengers arriving in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and means they will no longer need to self-isolate for 10 days. Arrivals from red list countries remain subject to a 10-day hotel quarantine, with the cost increasing from Thursday 12 August to £2,285 for a single adult and £1,430 for a second adult.

Agents report "peak-like" business boost since traffic light update

Clients appear to have been waiting for this week's traffic light update before committing to 2021 holidays, with several travel agents reporting the day after the government's late-night 4 August announcement as one of their busiest. Jet2.com

and Jet2holidays reported an increase in demand for summer 2021 green and amber-listed destinations immediately after the government's update. On 6 August, Hays Travel chair Dame Irene Hays told Sky News the company had a "tremendous" day on Thursday, with bookings up 193%. "What we've seen over the past couple of weeks is a lot of inquiries. So we have many people who were ready to book who were just waiting for the announcements. We are expecting more today and in the days and weeks to come," she said.

Amber watchlist idea scrapped

A proposal to create an 'amber watchlist' of countries at risk of moving to the red list in the travel traffic light system has been abandoned. On Monday, prime minister Boris Johnson said he wanted a "simple" and "balanced approach" to travel. Conservative MPs and travel industry figures earlier warned a complex system risked putting people off travelling. The government had been considering the idea of a new level which would warn people when a destination was at risk of a sudden shift from amber to red - meaning that travel would be banned for everyone except UK nationals and residents, who would be required to quarantine in a hotel on their return.

European Union visas for Britons

Britons travelling to the Schengen countries of Europe will need to apply for a visa costing €7 (about £6) when a new scheme comes into force by the end of 2022. News about the timeline for the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) came in an update from the European Commission on 3 August. The announcement said: "Visa-exempt non-EU nationals will only need a few minutes to fill in an online application which in a vast majority of cases (expected to be over 95%) will result in automatic approval. The process will be simple, fast and affordable: the ETIAS authorisation will cost €7, which will be a one-off fee, and will be valid for three years and for multiple entries."

COVID-19 vaccine passports to remain for the foreseeable future

The transport secretary said it was likely destinations would require proof of vaccination for the foreseeable future, with quarantine rules for some arrivals into England remaining in place into the autumn. Speaking to BBC Radio 4 on 5 August, Grant Shapps reiterated it was "vital to protect the domestic unlock" after the latest traffic light changes were announced. "It is a reality that in this new world, we're living with coronavirus," said Shapps. "I think double vaccination or full vaccination is going to be a feature for evermore, and probably all countries will require full vaccination for you to enter." Shapps added that in an "ideal world", ministers would not have to impose quarantine restrictions or demand people pay money for expensive tests, but said the current system was likely to remain in place after summer.

TTG launches new campaign to save travel industry jobs

TTG Media has launched the next stage of its #SaveTravel campaign by calling on the government to step up and #SaveTravelJobs. TTG Media has drafted a new letter to prime minister Boris Johnson and chancellor Rishi Sunak, highlighting the immense challenge still facing the sector, along with demands for them to provide urgent support in order to save hundreds of thousands of jobs. The letter has three key demands; to provide furlough support beyond 30 September until at least April 2022 and to introduce dedicated financial support for the industry, including 100% business rates relief for the full financial year, as well as a dedicated grant scheme. Finally, to use MPs' positions to publicly voice support for the travel industry – especially travel agents – to restore confidence in the sector, similarly to the government's Eat Out To Help Out scheme for restaurateurs which launched last year.

AIRLINE UPDATE

American Airlines - From 3 August, American Airlines will return to London Heathrow Terminal 3, with the exception of the New York JFK service which will continue to operate from Terminal 5, in order to further enhance its collaboration with the Atlantic joint business partner, British Airways. To ensure a more comfortable experience, eligible customers will have access to the British Airways Galleries Club Lounge in Terminal 3. As of 4 August, American Airlines' nonstop service between Seattle and Heathrow will be upgraded to a daily frequency. American Airlines has continued to increase the Atlantic Joint Business capacity to Seattle with partner British Airways, which currently offers four flights per week.

Air Canada - On 4 August, the carrier resumed operations from Heathrow to Montréal with a three-times weekly service, increasing to four times a week from 8 September. In addition to the service, Air Canada offers a daily non-stop route from Heathrow to Toronto and a six-times weekly non-stop service from the London airport to Vancouver, increasing to daily from 17 August. On 3 August, the airline resumed flights between Dublin and Toronto with a three-times weekly non-stop service. Stephen Gerrard, Air Canada's UK and Ireland general manager of sales, said: "Our non-stop service from Heathrow provides our customers from the UK with greater travel choice and the possibility to connect via our Montréal hub to 20 onward destinations across North America."

Jet2 - Jet2 and Jet2holidays has put its 2022/23 winter sun programme on sale early from eight of its 10 UK bases. Destinations include the Canaries, Madeira, Antalya and Paphos, with the programme running from early November 2022 through to the

end of April 2023. At its peak, Jet2 and Jet2holidays would operate up to 175 weekly flights to the Canaries. Winter 2022/23 flights and holidays are on sale from Belfast International, Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester, Newcastle and Stansted. Jet2 has said "many more" destinations will be added from these eight bases, along with confirmation of its schedules at East Midlands and Leeds Bradford airports.

Ryanair - Ryanair plans to base two aircraft in Newcastle next summer, offering 63 flights across 19 routes to destinations including Lanzarote, Ibiza and Milan. High demand this summer for the budget carrier's seven routes to places such as Palma, Malaga, Alicante and Faro out of Newcastle prompted the decision to add 12 new routes next year, Ryanair said. The other new destinations are Paphos, Chania, Riga, Menorca, Fuerteventura, Tenerife, Gran Canaria and Krakow.

Virgin Atlantic - Virgin Atlantic will launch twice-weekly flights from Heathrow to the Bahamas in November. The new route to Nassau, from 20 November, will operate on a Boeing 787-9 aircraft with 31 Upper Class, 35 Premium and 192 economy seats. The route will go on sale from 11 August. Next winter will also see a 60% increase in Virgin's Barbados flights, with five per week from Manchester and 11 a week from Heathrow. Juha Jarvinen, the airline's chief commercial officer, said: "We're currently flying to Barbados, Antigua, Jamaica and Grenada and expect to restart Tobago and Havana, Cuba in the upcoming months. We look forward to launching new services to the Bahamas as well as the first direct service from Europe to St Vincent and the Grenadines in October 2021."

TOUR OPERATOR UPDATE

Booking.com - Booking.com's parent company, Booking Holdings, has reported a half-year loss of \$222 million - a substantial improvement on the \$577 million loss for the six months to June last year. Second-quarter bookings were worth close to \$22 billion, almost double the value Booking.com reported in the first quarter and just 12% down on the same quarter in 2019. Chief executive Glenn Fogel said: "We're encouraged by another quarter of meaningful sequential improvement in booking trends, with second quarter room nights increasing 59% versus the first quarter of 2021, primarily driven by stronger results in Europe and in the U.S.."

Charitable Travel - Charitable Travel has started a 'Revive London' campaign to help the capital's tourism sector recover from the effects of the COVID-19 downturn. The social enterprise travel company said London's visitor economy is not seeing

the success of others elsewhere in the UK, and there is still availability for accommodation and experiences. Customers booking a 'Revive London' package through Charitable Travel can donate 5% of the cost of their holiday to a London-based charity of their choice through a partnership with JustGiving, at no extra cost to themselves. Melissa Tilling, managing director of Charitable Travel, said: "Charities have been hit hard by the pandemic and the resulting lockdowns. We want to encourage travellers to 'Revive London' this summer, by booking a trip to our beautiful capital city. Spending time in London is always a great idea, but there's no better time than now to support the restaurants, hotels, theatres and more who have been sitting empty for so long."

Intrepid Travel - Intrepid Travel has launched a fundraising and advocacy campaign in a bid to support global vaccine equity. According to the adventure operator, fewer than 1% of COVID-19 vaccine doses have been delivered to low-income countries. The company believes vaccine equity is "essential" to restarting the global travel industry. Through its non-profit The Intrepid Foundation, the company has committed to raising AUD \$100,000 for UNICEF Australia to support universal access to COVID-19 vaccines. It has teams across the globe working to provide easier access to vaccines for tourism workers and their families in remote communities, while educating staff to help resolve vaccine hesitancy. James Thornton, Intrepid Travel chief executive, said the company is "very concerned" about the "unequal access" to vaccines around the world. "Intrepid was founded on ideals of inclusivity and equality...Ending the pandemic is not only about you and your vaccine," he added.

Kuoni - Kuoni has introduced a selection of three-day adventure packages in Malaysia as part of its Far East collection. The move comes due to the operator's focus to promote multi-centre holiday packages. A Borneo rainforest experience gives travellers the chance to see orangutans and other wildlife, while a Cameron Highlands trip visits tea plantations and forests. Both trips can be added to longer itineraries and coupled with beach stays in 2022.

SOCIAL AND DIGITAL UPDATE

TikTok tests 'TikTok Stories'

TikTok is joining Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Snapchat by adding its own version of Stories to the platform. TikTok Stories will disappear after 24 hours and be displayed in a collapsible left-hand side panel in the main feed of the app. The addition of a Stories tool will provide more content options and advertising opportunities for creators. On the cusp of the next stage of its growth, analysts estimate that TikTok will become the next billion-user social app by the end of this year.

MICE UPDATE

Event professionals see boost in booking confidence

A new Hotel Booking Agents Association (HBAA) poll has revealed that almost two-thirds of event professionals (65%) are seeing an increase in client confidence to book and confirm events following the removal of all COVID-19 related restrictions on 19 July. The poll also revealed that 14% have seen a “major boost” in business and client confidence, while 51% are experiencing a “slight boost”. In another indication that the industry is rebounding, a new survey by The Hub, a recruitment platform dedicated to the business events and experiential sectors, has revealed that almost a third of respondents have already started recruiting, with 40% planning to start recruiting in September.

LIGHTER NOTE

Doorbell footage captures an inquisitive pair of owls enjoying a late-night snack on a family’s porch. See [here](#).