

WEEKLY REPORT

11 February 2022



COVID-19 UPDATE

The number of people testing positive for COVID-19 has decreased in the last seven days by 22.8%. Meanwhile, the number of patients admitted to hospital has also dropped, by 12%. In regard to the vaccination rollout, 91.2% of people aged 12 and above have received their first dose, 84.6% their second and a further 65.4% of the population their booster dose.

Transport secretary Grant Shapps' announcement comes into effect from 04:00 GMT on February 11. From this time, there will be no requirement for vaccinated passengers arriving in England to do post-arrival lateral flow tests, but they will need to complete a passenger locator form. Those who are not fully vaccinated - two jabs, or a single Janssen jab - will need to test before they depart for England, take a post-arrival PCR test, and complete a passenger locator form. They will no longer need to isolate, however, or complete a day eight test.

Prime minister, Boris Johnson, stated this week that all remaining COVID-19 restrictions in England could end later this month: "Provided the current encouraging trends in the data continue, it is my expectation that we will be able to end the last domestic restrictions - including the legal requirement to self-isolate if you test positive - a full month early". The current restrictions are due to be lifted on 24 March. This has been criticised by experts as a political decision rather than being governed by science due to his increasingly tenuous position as prime minister.

Elsewhere in the UK, the Scottish government's remaining COVID-19 powers are set to be extended for several more months. Legislation mandating face coverings and vaccine passports was due to expire on 28 February. This, however, looks set to be pushed back to 24 September, with deputy first minister John Swinney saying it was important to keep options on the table. Scottish ministers will continue to assess the rules every three weeks, with the next review on February 22. The Welsh government has not yet announced any further changes but will do so by the end of this week.

The Irish government has made no further changes since easing restrictions two weeks ago, including: pubs and restaurants can return to normal opening times (no longer must close at 20:00 GMT); nightclubs can reopen; you no longer need a vaccination or recovery certificate to access hospitality or indoor activities; social distancing is no longer required in hospitality or other settings; restrictions on numbers attending indoor and outdoor events or activities no longer apply; and limits on household visits no longer apply. However, an announcement is expected from the Irish government in the coming days.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

Three quarters of firms to put up prices as they face soaring wage and energy costs

Around three quarters of firms say they are putting up prices in response to surging costs such as wages, energy and raw materials, according to a new survey. The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), which conducted the poll, said it highlighted the intense pressure creating a "cost of doing business crisis" for firms across the country. However, the consequences of higher prices on consumers has also been laid bare as the results of a separate survey - released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) - showed almost a third of all trading businesses had reported decreased sales - with hotels and restaurants hit hardest. The BCC called for the chancellor to introduce a temporary energy price cap for small businesses and to extend to those firms the financial support announced for households last week.

EDF Energy confirms plans to hike bills after price cap rise

EDF has confirmed bills will rise by an average of £693 a year from April in line with the new energy price cap – affecting two million people on standard variable tariffs. The supplier will raise its rates from spring, after regulator Ofgem gave providers the go-ahead to increase the maximum rate on variable tariffs by a staggering 54%. It follows the collapse of two dozen suppliers due to soaring wholesale costs and comes as households face the biggest cost of living squeeze in decades.

Northern Ireland economy: jobs growth to lag despite strong forecast

Northern Ireland's economy is forecast to be one of the better performing UK regions in the next few years. However, employment growth is expected to lag behind. The forecast from the National Institute for Economic and Social Research (NIESR) assumes that the economy will start to "reorganise" due to the Northern Ireland Protocol. It suggests that this reorganisation will lead to improved economic performance overall. However, it also thinks jobs will be lost in lower productivity industries, which will not be fully replaced by more productive industries. NIESR's forecast incorporates experimental estimates of economic output produced by the ONS.

UK consumers slowed their spending as COVID-19 rules returned in January

British consumers slowed the pace of their spending last month as the Omicron COVID-19 wave hit fuel sales and kept people away from bars and restaurants, according to a survey which also pointed to the impact of rising inflation. It said nine in 10 people it surveyed felt their household finances and discretionary spending were being impacted by the recent jump in prices. Britain's inflation rate hit a 30-year high of 5.4% in December and looks set to top 7% in April, according to the Bank of England which last week raised interest rates for the second time in two months and said further increases were likely.

TRADE UPDATE

A day of celebration for the UK travel industry

After two of the hardest years on record for the UK outbound travel industry, the 11 February is indeed a day of celebration for the UK's travel industry.

With many of the testing regulations to enter the UK now relaxed, it will become much easier for holidaymakers and business travellers to return to the UK from abroad and to allow inbound tourists, who contribute so much to the UK's economy, plan a return visit.

UK travel and tourism set to generate £192bn in 2022

The World Travel & Tourism Council forecasts that the UK's travel and tourism sector's contribution to the economy could rise to £192 billion in 2022, which is just 19% below pre-pandemic levels. An estimated 4.3 million people will be employed within the travel and tourism industry in the UK by the end of the year, 70,000 more than in 2019.

Spain eases strict child vaccination rules

The Spanish government is set to relax its entry restrictions on children aged between 12 and 17. From 14 February, those in this age bracket will be able to present a negative PCR test, or similar, taken within 72 hours of arrival to the country, as an alternative to proof of full vaccination. All other UK travellers, excluding children under 12, will need to present a certificate showing proof of being fully vaccinated, with both doses of a two-dose vaccine or one dose of a one-dose vaccine, administered at least 14-days prior to arrival. If more than 270 days have passed since the last dose was administered, proof of a booster jab is also required.

India drops quarantine requirements

Fully vaccinated travellers from the UK will no longer be required to quarantine on arrival to India, the UK foreign office has confirmed. Rather than the previously enforced seven-day mandatory quarantine period, fully jabbed arrivals will need to self-monitor for 14-days instead. Travellers who provide evidence of a course of full

vaccination against COVID-19 will also no longer have to take a PCR test to gain entry. The requirement for a PCR test on the 8th day of arrival has also been removed. All travellers, regardless of vaccination status, will need to submit a self-declaration form online via the Air Suvudha portal before arrival. Unvaccinated travellers will still need to provide evidence of a negative PCR test taken within 72 hours of departure and undertake a week-long quarantine period on arrival. A PCR test will then be required on the 8th day.

Families 'more likely' to book via trade than before COVID-19

Families are increasingly turning to agents and operators to help with holiday bookings in the wake of the pandemic, according to ABTA. The UK's relaxation of travel rules from Friday 11 February will see "hundreds of thousands" of people travel abroad this half term, the association said. The removal of all tests for fully vaccinated adults and under 18s on return to the UK makes foreign travel much easier, including significant savings on the cost of tests. ABTA sees this as an important next step in the industry's recovery. Not being able to holiday abroad has ramped up families' appetite for travel, according to new data from the association. Almost two-thirds (64%) of families with children under 16 say the limited opportunities to travel due to the pandemic have made their holidays more important to them than before – higher than all other groups, including young people and over 45s with no children at home. At the same time, families are increasingly keen to enlist the help of a travel agent or tour operator. Those with children under 16 are 50% more likely to book with a travel professional now than before the pandemic – compared with 30% more likely for the population as a whole. This is primarily for the security of a package holiday (43%), followed by guidance with COVID-19 travel requirements (35%).

Gatwick to reopen South Terminal

It is now confirmed that London Gatwick South Terminal will reopen after nearly two years of inactivity from the pandemic. Flights have been operating solely from the airport's North Terminal since 15 June 2020 to save costs, but activity is set to resume as the airport enters what is expected to be a busy summer season. Airlines who will be operating from the South Terminal include: BA, Vueling, Wizz, Ryanair, Norwegian, Turkish Airlines, TAP, Eastern Airways, Aurigny, Aer Lingus, Air Baltic, Air Malta, Air Europa and Enter Air, while easyJet will operate across both South and North Terminals.

AIRLINE UPDATE

Aer Lingus - The Dublin-Miami service is set to re-start from 21 October with seats already on sale. Flights to Miami will operate Friday and Sunday with an additional

flight on Wednesday added from 29 October. The airline offers connections to Miami via Dublin from Heathrow, Gatwick, Birmingham, Manchester, Bristol, Leeds Bradford, Edinburgh and Glasgow. The initial two services per week will increase to three per week from 29 October and flights to San Francisco will also resume 25 February.

EasyJet - Easyjet is set to introduce a new route from Gatwick to the Croatian island of Krk this summer. The addition comes as the carrier celebrates its 20th anniversary of flying from Gatwick. The new flight will fly twice weekly on Tuesday and Saturday from 3 May. In the last two decades the airline has reportedly carried more than 200 million passengers to and from the London airport and has now added more than 1.1 million additional seats for next summer.

Qatar Airways - Qatar is increasing its Dublin-Doha frequency as part of a travel industry pandemic recovery. The expansion from 27 March is to accommodate the rising demand for international travel and the schedule is going up from seven to ten flights per week with a Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft being deployed on the route. The rise in capacity will give Irish passengers greater access to Qatar Airways' global network. UK and Ireland country manager Gary Kershaw said: "Demand for flights and international travel is returning at pace, and we are absolutely thrilled to be able to offer our passengers flying from Dublin more choice about how and when they fly."

Tui - Tui is raising frequency to more than nine destinations from Glasgow airport this summer. As many as four flights a week will be offered to Antalya and Dalaman in Turkey and Majorca. The number of flights to Malaga, Corfu, Paphos and Rhodes will be increased to twice a week. Tui UK commercial and business development director Richard Sofer said: "As the airline with the largest regional airport network in the UK, we're committed to offering our customers as much availability as possible to our great range of holidays. We're delighted to expand our summer 2022 programme from Glasgow with increased flying to several destinations, providing even more flight options for our customers."

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES & OTA UPDATE

Flyr - The new Norwegian low cost airline Flyr is to operate its first UK route to Edinburgh airport from Oslo before Easter. Three flights a week have been scheduled for the year-round service which starts on 8 April. Flyr began operations last year and will use Boeing 737-800 aircraft on the Scottish connection. Edinburgh airport aviation director Kate Sherry said: "It's great to see a new airline like Flyr choosing Edinburgh for its first Scottish route – it really demonstrates the strength

of the market and the desire to come and experience what our fantastic capital city and country has to offer."

Kuoni - The tour operator has launched a new brand focussing on North America, "Breeze by Kuoni". Digital first with end-to-end booking and personalisation on its new website - all supported by an expert service team. Breeze by Kuoni will give consumers the same travel know-how and security as Kuoni as well as all the convenience of online booking and feature heavily curated product lines and the most popular destinations for the UK market.

Newmarket - Newmarket Holidays is expanding its small group tours programme as the escorted tour specialist predicts "significant growth" in this market. The tour operator has been running small group tours for five years and usually operates with about 20 customers per group. Newmarket currently has a programme of 17 in its latest brochure, with more coming in 2022. Richard Forde, head of trade sales said "certain destinations are really suited to smaller group sizes" and that "these tours are definitely more popular with customers post-pandemic."

Travel Counsellors - Travel Counsellors reported that bookings have hit pre-pandemic levels and show "no signs of slowing down" during the first week of February. Indeed, bookings are now at the same level as they were pre-pandemic in 2019. Last month saw the firm's biggest booking month post COVID-19 and second most successful month in its 27-year history, with new group bookings of over £71.2m, surpassing the previous two months combined for both corporate and leisure travel.

Variety Cruises - Variety Cruises makes its Pacific island debut with its first sailings from Tahiti. The Greek company will sail from the port of Papeete around French Polynesia year round from May until December 2023. A range of eight and eleven day itineraries are being offered on the forty nine passenger sailing vessel with cruise-only rates starting at £1,688 per person. Variety Cruises chief executive Filippou Venetopoulos said: "We are excited to share that Tahiti is our newest destination addition to the Variety Cruises family. We take pride in bringing friendly and enthusiastic Greek hospitality to ports all over the world, now including French Polynesia. We're a growing company and this new destination launch is indicative of the expansion our company will be seeing in the years to come."

SOCIAL UPDATE

Twitter tests new direct DM option

Twitter is looking to facilitate more private message interactions in its app by adding a new 'Direct Message' icon to tweets for some users. The new DM response

icon, now available to some users on iOS, provides a quick and easy way to respond to a tweet author in one-tap, direct from any tweet. This could be useful for brands looking to make contact with customers in the app.

Instagram experiments with Stories highlights to Reels conversion

In its latest bid to push short form video content, Instagram is testing an option which enables users to convert Story highlights into short Reels clips. The process allows users to sync these clips to music, enabling a whole new way to create Reels content. This addition would mean users can recycle their best highlight posts, boosting overall engagement on Instagram.

MICE UPDATE

Association of Black Event Professionals launches

Black event professionals are being invited to join a newly-launched association as it aims to “change the global event landscape.” Founded by Black eventprofs [Nadu Placca](#), Nicole Wallace-White and Aaron Raybe, the Association of Black Event Professionals represents Black individuals, businesses and suppliers within the events industry.

A spokesperson said: “Today, we are proud to announce we are launching the Association of Black Event Professionals (ABEP). Instead of asking for a seat at the table, we are building our own table. For us by us. ABEP’s vision is to support sustainable growth for Black Event Professionals in the events industry with a predominant focus on the UK and a secondary focus on the USA and Africa. Our mission is to achieve this via advocacy, networking, partnerships and a collective voice.”

LIGHTER NOTE

Dog Banksy art raises £500 for animal charity. Read more [here](#).