

WEEKLY BRIEFING

2 September 2022

COVID-19 UPDATE

Regular asymptomatic testing for COVID-19 in all remaining settings in England was paused this week on 31 August 2022 as COVID-19 cases continue to fall. The number of people testing positive for COVID-19 in England has decreased by 19.6% in the past seven days. The number of deaths within 28 days of positive test results also fell by 38.2%, and there was a 14.2% decline in the number of patients admitted to hospital. As of 30 August 2022, 69.3% of people over the age of 12 in England have received their third or booster dose.

The autumn COVID-19 booster campaign will start next week in England, on Monday 5 September 2022, with care home residents and housebound people the first to receive jabs.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UPDATE

COVID-19 inquiry starts to examine Boris Johnson's pandemic decisions

The UK inquiry into the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic has started to investigate decisions made by prime minister Boris Johnson and his senior advisers in early 2020. Key players, including Mr Johnson and former health secretary Matt Hancock, are likely to appear in person at hearings next summer. Decisions over the timing of lockdown and testing delays will be scrutinised. The inquiry was recently widened to include a focus on children. The latest area of the inquiry's investigations, known as Module 2, will focus on decisions and announcements made by the UK government at Westminster between early January and late March 2020.

Energy industry backs plan to save businesses and homes up to £18bn a year

The energy industry has thrown its weight behind a plan it says could save homes and businesses up to £18bn a year, by reducing the prices charged for electricity generated from sources other than gas. Energy UK, the trade body for the sector, said its proposals could cut £18bn a year from energy bills, including £11bn for businesses. This could deliver a saving for households of between £150 and £250 a year. The business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, is understood to have met members of Energy UK to discuss the proposal and is said to be considering it seriously as an option to present to the next prime minister.

Sizewell C: Boris Johnson says 'go nuclear, go large'

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has pledged £700m for a new nuclear power plant on the Suffolk coast, with a call to "go nuclear and go large and go with Sizewell C". In a speech at Sizewell, he said he was "confident" the plant would go ahead. The project, which is being developed by French energy company EDF, is estimated to cost about £20bn overall. Critics have argued Sizewell C will be hugely expensive and take years to build. The government gave the go-ahead for the plant in July with negotiations on raising funds continuing. It is not expected to begin generating electricity until the 2030s.

TRADE UPDATE

Strong August sales help ease fears over cost-of-living impact

Travel agents remain largely bullish about soaring inflation and sky-high energy bills, saying bookings are buoyant and they can capitalise on higher prices. Advantage Travel Partnership chief commercial officer Kelly Cookes reported strong late sales, with 46% of bookings for departures within 12 weeks. Alistair Rowland, chief executive for Blue Bay Travel, added "Overall, Blue Bay Travel is trading well, significantly up on 2019 levels, which puts us in a strong position to weather the storm."

Government launches review of CAA to 'strengthen' regulator

An independent review of the Civil Aviation Authority has been launched by the government, which it says will "ensure the provision of world-leading regulation and public services for decades to come". The review will focus on five key points including the regulator's efficiency and effectiveness in delivering its services and its relationship with the Department for Transport. The review will run until spring 2023.

Eurostar to drop direct Disneyland Paris service

Direct Eurostar trains between London and Disneyland Paris are being dropped from next summer. The Channel Tunnel high speed passenger train operator will abandon the route from June 5 2023. Eurostar blamed difficult economic circumstances plus the logistical implications of Brexit and said it was concentrating on the core cities it serves in France, Belgium and the Netherlands. More complex rules are due to come in for visitors to the European Union in 2023. The new Entry Exit System (EES) involves a new database for registering travellers from outside the EU and Schengen area as they arrive and depart.

AIRLINE UPDATE

British Airways

British Airways has announced a new direct service from Gatwick to Las Vegas for the 2023 summer season. The British flag carrier already serves Harry Reid International Airport in Las Vegas from Heathrow. The new Gatwick flights will run from March 26 2023 to October 28 2023 and tickets are now on sale. The Boeing 777-200 service will operate three times a week on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays.

Ryanair

Ryanair passenger numbers rose by 52% in August to almost 17 million. The year-on-year increase came as Europe's largest low fares carrier operated 92,800 flights across its network. The increase – from 11.1 million carryings in August 2021 – is the sixth successive monthly boost in passenger volumes. The passenger load factor also jumped from 82% to 96%. The August total compared to a pre-COVID-19 peak of 14.9 million in August 2019. It was the fourth consecutive month of record passengers.

Saudi Arabian Airlines

Saudia has increased its seat capacity to London by 51%, providing 21 flights a week to meet a strong growing demand for travel. The airline operates a mix of Boeing 787 Dreamliner and 777-300ER aircraft to Riyadh and Jeddah. Europe regional manager Hisham Bindkhail said: "The celebration of our 55th anniversary of operations to and from London Heathrow marks a special occasion for us. We are very proud to connect Saudi Arabia with the United Kingdom seven days a week".

TOUR OPERATORS, TRAVEL AGENCIES, OTA UPDATE

Gold Medal

The mix of destinations offered by B2B supplier Gold Medal has mostly returned to pre-pandemic patterns, with strong growth seen in several long-haul countries. Managing director Simon Applebaum, announced that Australia has returned to being in Gold Medal's top three destinations after reopening to tourists earlier this year, while Thailand has also bounced back. "What we're seeing now is a return to broadly where we were before the pandemic, but with some really strong growth areas", he commented, "We've certainly seen in the Indian Ocean, Mauritius and Maldives...a big swing in our business, because they were open sooner."

Jet2 Holidays

Jet2 Holidays expects to increase its customer base as "price-conscious" customers increasingly look to book package holidays in "challenging economic times". Philip Meeson, executive chairman of Jet2 plc, expressed his confidence in package holidays, during a statement delivered at the company's annual general meeting on Thursday 1 September. "We are very confident that package holidays are the right product for price-conscious customers, especially in challenging economic times, and this provides further opportunity for us to grow our customer base" he said.

SOCIAL UPDATE

TikTok tests new 'Nearby' content feed

TikTok has [confirmed](#) that it's currently experimenting with a new 'Nearby' content feed, in addition to the current 'For You' and 'Following' tabs. TikTok's 'Nearby' feed displays content posted by users in their current location which could enable the platform to showcase locally relevant updates that relate to a user's interests. This could be a big consideration for brands with a dedicated local feed, giving access to a huge, engaged nearby user group. While it is only experimental at this stage, the emerging trend of TikTok's [rising share of search activity](#) means the app could possibly rival Google in SEO importance in the future.

MICE UPDATE

Freelancer confidence in the UK economy falls

New research from the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self Employed (IPSE) has found that freelancers' confidence in their own businesses has fallen to -11.4 this quarter. The state of the UK economy was listed as the most detrimental factor. However, day rates have increased from £516 in Q1 2022 to £528 this quarter and spare capacity has fallen from 3.2 weeks without work to 2.8 weeks within the same time period.

LIGHTER NOTE

Stowaway squirrel sails thousands of miles to Aberdeen. Read more [here](#).