

British prime minister urges Britons to get COVID-19 jab for Christmas

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London, December 24 (RHC)--British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, on the eve of Christmas, has urged people to get vaccinated against COVID-19 as a gift to their families and the nation, as a surge in cases

driven by the highly transmissible Omicron variant casts a shadow over the festivities.

“Although the time for buying presents is theoretically running out, there is still a wonderful thing you can give your family and the whole country. And that is to get that jab, whether it is your first or your second or your booster,” Johnson said on Friday in his annual seasonal message, posted as a video clip on Twitter.

Calling vaccination “an invisible and invaluable present”, he praised the “immense spirit of neighbourliness” of the millions of Britons who had already come forward for inoculation. The prime minister, who has rejected imposing harsher virus restrictions in England over Christmas despite soaring infection rates, also used his address to warn that the pandemic was not yet over.

Health authorities recorded a record high 119,789 COVID-19 cases on Thursday, marking the second day in a row that the number of new infections topped the 100,000 figure and a further 147 deaths within 28 days of a positive test.

“Omicron is surging,” Johnson said. “[And] we all know we must together try to stop the spread of this new variant – we must test ourselves and take extra care when meeting elderly or vulnerable relatives.”

His remarks came as National Health Service (NHS) England confirmed mass vaccination efforts would continue over the Christmas weekend, with the health service’s “jingle jab” campaign set to see inoculations administered at clinics and local sites such as town halls and pharmacies on Christmas Day on Saturday and Boxing Day on Sunday.

The agency, which is racing to deliver the third jab to every person aged more than 18 years of age by the end of the year, said on Friday there were some 200,000 vaccination appointments still available over the weekend.

“This Christmas, before sitting down to your dinner with your family, I would encourage anyone not already boosted to come forward, book an appointment and get the gift of a jab,” said Dr Emily Lawson, head of the NHS COVID-19 vaccination programme.

To date, more than 82 percent of Britons aged over 12 have received two doses of COVID-19 vaccine, according to official figures. More than 55 percent have also had a third jab, also known as a booster, seen as a critical tool to help stem the spread of Omicron.

In his Christmas message, Johnson also said he hoped this year’s festive period would be “significantly better than the last”, when indoor gatherings were heavily restricted throughout the UK. However, he has refused to rule out imposing further measures after the holiday season if the COVID-19 surge continues. The devolved nations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have already announced more post-Christmas restrictions.

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