

# 80% of adults in England now have Covid antibodies, ONS survey finds

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Eight out of 10 adults in England now have signs of immunity to coronavirus from either a vaccine or having had the virus in the past, official data suggested today.

Blood-testing data analysed by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimated 80.3 per cent of adults across the country had Covid antibodies in the third week of May, up from 76 per cent at the end of April.

Antibodies are virus-fighting proteins that give people immunity to the virus and should stop them from getting sick if they catch it, although they don't always give total protection.

There are fears that antibodies developed from vaccination or older variants of the virus won't work as well against the now-dominant Indian 'Delta' strain, but they still appear to offer protection to most people. So far only three people who have had two vaccines have been hospitalised by the variant, according to Matt Hancock.

The country's huge vaccination programme, which yesterday started offering jabs to over-25s for the first time, is the driving force behind the surging numbers of people who show signs of immunity.

Across the whole of the UK 40.6million people have had at least one dose of a jab – more than three quarters of all adults – and 28.2m have had both jabs giving them the maximum possible protection.

NHS bosses say the vaccine rollout has now entered the 'home straight', with health chiefs urging everyone to get a jab as soon as possible to help the country end lockdown rules.

The ONS report said: 'There is a clear pattern between vaccination and testing positive for Covid antibodies.'

Despite the positive news, the concerns that a single vaccine dose doesn't protect well against the new Delta variant mean plans to end lockdown on June 21 hang in the balance. Ministers have hinted it could be pushed back by up to a month to buy time for the vaccine rollout to make more progress – Boris Johnson is expected to set out the last step of roadmap on Monday.

© Provided by Daily Mail Antibody positive levels are highest among older age groups who have had two doses but rising fast in younger adults, too. In those who were first to get vaccinated the rate of immunity has flattened off at over 99 per cent, showing almost everyone has at least some protection against the virus



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Most people develop antibodies after being vaccinated but some will have them from having been infected with Covid in the past.

Antibodies are proteins that the body makes in response to a virus so they can stick to the viruses and prevent them from causing infection.

They are super-specific and antibodies for one type of virus generally don't work for another type, and they only start to be made when someone is infected or given a vaccine.

## Vaccine hesitancy 'more likely in poorer areas'

Adults living in the most deprived areas of England are three times more likely to be hesitant about getting a Covid vaccine, figures suggest.

In the poorest areas one in 10 people said they weren't sure about getting a jab or didn't want one, compared to just three per cent (one in 33) in the richest areas.

The findings came from a survey of 15,000 adults by the Office for National Statistics during April and May.

Overall, more people felt positive about vaccines than earlier in the pandemic and 94 per cent were pro-jabs while six per cent were hesitant. This split changed from 93/7 during March and April.

Most anti-vaccine by age were people aged 16 to 29 (13 per cent of them), by ethnicity it was black or black British people (21 per cent) and by religion it was people who said they were Muslim or Other (11 per cent in each).

Safety and health concerns were the main reasons people were afraid to get a jab and more than a third of people who didn't want a vaccine said they didn't think it was necessary

The immune system then stores the memory of how to fight the virus and maintains its ability to mass-produce the antibodies at the drop of a hat in case the body is faced with the same bug in the future.

Testing positive for antibodies does not make someone completely immune, however, and people who have them can still get sick. Getting a positive test result means only that there were a certain amount of them in their body at the time of the test.

Scientists say antibody levels dip naturally after peaking in the weeks following an infection or first vaccine, and that people may not have detectable antibodies now even if they did so earlier in the year.

### **Video: Vaccine uptake on the increase (Sky News)**



### **Vaccine uptake on the increase**

And likewise, people who test negative for antibodies may still be protected from the virus because there are other types of immunity such as T-cell immunity which is based on white blood cells.

Studies have suggested that virtually everyone infected with Covid seems to develop T-cell responses, though these don't show up on antibody tests.

The ONS report showed that Wales had the most people testing positive for antibodies in the UK, with 83 per cent. In Scotland it was 73 per cent and Northern Ireland 80 per cent.

Across the regions of England, positivity was highest in the East Midlands and the North West, with 80 per cent, and lowest in London with 76 per cent.

Vaccine uptake is significantly lower in the capital, with only 68 per cent of adults having had a jab, compared to more than 76 per cent in every other region.

Higher rates of infection in London in the first and second waves have boosted immunity, however, because most people also test positive if they have had coronavirus in the past.

The age distribution of immunity is directly linked to the vaccine rollout, with higher rates in older people and lower ones among younger people who haven't yet had their jabs.

In over-50s in England, for example, more than 98 per cent of people showed signs of immunity.

In those aged 35 to 49 it was 78 per cent, in 25 to 34-year-olds it was 59 per cent and in under-25s it was 53 per cent.

There is a clear break between the vaccine and antibody levels in younger people, showing huge numbers of under-35s have developed natural immunity after catching and surviving Covid.

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## **Freedom Day delayed for a MONTH? Minister warns 'wait until you've heard from the PM' on Monday**

People in England making summer plans for after 'Freedom Day' were today told to 'wait until you've heard from the Prime Minister', in another hint that June 21 easings will be pushed back due to the Indian variant.

No10 is considering delaying the final stage of the roadmap out of lockdown following jittery warnings from scientists about the spread of the mutant strain.

Some are pushing for restrictions to stay until as late as the start of English school holidays on July 23, hoping the move would enable millions more over-50s to be fully vaccinated and protected against the Delta variant.

Cabinet minister Robert Jenrick today appeared to drop the biggest hint yet that the final unlocking will be delayed, with cases 'clearly rising'.

Asked whether weddings with more than 30 guests will once again be allowed from June 21, he said: 'I wouldn't make plans until you have heard from the PM if that is important to you.'

'We have always said that the roadmap is subject to review of the data. That is what is happening right now, so whether it is weddings or international travel or any of these other important topics, you always have to wait until the judgement is made on the basis of the data at the decision point.'

Weddings are one of the last big things still restricted in England, alongside allowing clubs to reopen and people to invite more than six others into their homes.

Boris Johnson is expected to confirm by Monday at the latest whether the

June 21 plan will go ahead and he is running the roadmap timetable down to the wire, so far refusing to give any indication of what he will do.

The report explains: 'Antibody positivity increases with age, with the highest percentage testing positive for antibodies in the older age groups and lowest among the youngest groups across the four UK countries.'

'This reflects the age prioritisation in vaccination programmes in place across the UK.'

'The percentage of adults who have received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine is lowest in the younger age groups but is increasing.'

The vaccine rollout has, for the past two months, been focusing on getting second doses to older people while first doses were gradually offered to more age groups under 40.

A surge in cases of the Indian 'Delta' variant, which is now dominant in the UK, has made it extra important that people get their second doses as soon as possible, and the time between the two jabs was cut from 12 to eight weeks for people in older groups.

The strain has mutations that make the vaccines slightly less effective against it and Public Health England has warned a single dose of vaccine does not protect people as well as it did for the Kent variant.

June 21's planned end of social distancing laws now looks likely to be put on hold for two to four weeks to allow the second dose rollout to push through everyone over the age of 50 and allow time for their immunity to kick in.

People under the age of 30 were this week invited to book vaccine appointments for the first time as progress among older people has gone so far that the low-risk groups can now get jabs.

Almost half a million people booked their first dose appointments yesterday in a 'Glastonbury-style rush', the NHS said but scientists and ministers are concerned uptake will be lower than average in younger adults who are not personally at risk from the virus.

The Health Secretary said on Monday that the vaccine is 'breaking the link between infections, hospitalisations and deaths, a link that was rock solid back in the autumn'.

He said: 'Despite the rise in cases, hospitalisations have been broadly flat. The majority of people in hospital with Covid appear to be those who haven't had the vaccine at all.

'I want to update the House [of Commons] on some new information that we have on this. As of the third of June our data show that of the 12,383 cases of the Delta variant, 464 went on to present at emergency care and 126 people were admitted to hospital.

'Of these 126 people, 83 were unvaccinated, 28 had received one dose and just three had received both doses of the vaccine.'

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