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The Independent Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE)

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## **The Independent SAGE Report 50**

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### **Nine-point Covid Winter Protection Plan: A vaccine-plus approach**

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Submitted to The UK Government and the People of Great Britain & Northern Ireland by Sir David King, former Chief Scientific Adviser, UK Government, Chair of Independent SAGE

## Independent SAGE Nine-point Covid Winter Protection Plan: A vaccine-plus approach

As we move into autumn and winter this year, infections and hospitalisations are far higher than at the same point in 2020—despite the roll-out of vaccines. High case rates will continue to cause disruption to daily life and lead to a significant of long Covid in the population, while also allowing potential for new variants to emerge and spread. Additionally, while vaccination has weakened the link, high cases do lead to more hospital admissions: currently a quarter of people in intensive care in England have Covid. The [British Medical Association have highlighted the continue strain Covid is placing on the NHS](#), which is already under severe pressure from a combination of large backlogs, underfunding, understaffing and staff exhaustion.

On [8 Sept 2021](#), SAGE warned of the NHS becoming overwhelmed again and called for measures to be taken to avoid it—just as they made a similar warning in September 2020. Last year this advice was ignored, resulting in high case rates that required longer severe restrictions in November 2020 and, ultimately, the winter of 2021 to bring the pandemic under control. We must make sure we do not make the same mistake again.

What would make inaction even more culpable is that, this year, high levels of immunity mean that the additional measures needed to bring cases down can be considerably more ‘light touch’ and less restrictive than last year. They should focus more on protection and support for the public rather than restrictions on activities. The experience of other countries (e.g. Denmark, Israel, Italy, Portugal, Singapore) shows that such a combination of vaccination and moderate protections can bring the pandemic under control even with the more contagious delta variant.

Yet the UK Government still chooses to ignore the recent SAGE advice. Moreover, their contingency plans for when figures worsen (which lack metrics or thresholds), as contained in the 2021 [“Autumn and Winter Plan”](#), omit many basic protections that are necessary to keep the population safe and to avoid a substantial rise in cases, hospitalisations and deaths.

Unless such protections are implemented immediately there is a serious danger that more intrusive and wide-ranging restrictions will become necessary later.

Accordingly, Independent SAGE calls for the immediate implementation of a practical vaccine-plus approach - an effective Covid Winter Protection Plan based on the following elements:

1. Roll out of vaccination to everyone 12 years and older, based on a nationally coordinated/funded and locally implemented programme of community engagement to improve vaccine access, and address any vaccine concerns or anxieties. This involves taking vaccination stations into schools, colleges, universities workplaces and communities; ensuring experts are available to address questions and concerns about the vaccine; removing practical barriers to vaccination (e.g., paid time off work to get jabbed and full wage compensation for absences due to vaccination). Local primary care providers and public health should be given additional funding to address improve vaccine take-up.
2. A systematic programme of testing using both individual and aggregated methods (e.g., wastewater analysis), which is underwritten by support, so people can afford to self isolate if they test positive or shield themselves, if they are at particular risk.
3. Centrally funded but locally based contact tracing, with a requirement to self-isolate if a close contact of positive cases, enabled by comprehensive financial and practical support

4. An obligation for workplaces, educational places, hospitality, venues, and other indoor public spaces to adhere to, and publicly display Covid protection standards (especially for ventilation) as a condition of opening.
5. All live events (including outdoor events) to be allowed but contingent on independently and rigorously assessed Covid protection plans.
6. The right to work from home where possible and no requirement to attend the workplace unless strictly necessary.
7. Requirement for effective and certified masks in crowded indoor spaces (shops, public transport etc.)
8. Comprehensive information tailored to groups about how to identify their specific risk and keep themselves and others safe combined with a systematic messaging campaign stressing the continued importance of reducing infections and of acting in ways that make all members of the community safe.
9. UK support for international efforts to tackle the pandemic on a global level through vaccine patent waivers and facilitating vaccine production in all parts of the world.

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