

**Independent SAGE
End of Year 2022 Statement**

The end of 2022 is looking brighter than in previous years – at least in terms of COVID. At this time in 2020, we lacked the protection of a vaccine and faced a new resurgent wave of COVID infections driven by the emerging Alpha variant. At the end of 2021, the first Omicron variant was raging. This year immunity is up, infections are down and many are looking forward to meeting up with family and friends over the festive season.

At the same time, SARS-CoV2 COVID has not gone away. [According to the latest figures](#), over a million people in the UK are infected with COVID, and this is now rising again. Vaccine immunity is declining over time and only [63% of those eligible for the booster in England have taken it up](#) so far. New vaccinations have all but ground to a halt. On top of all that, an estimated 2 million people are experiencing Long Covid, almost half of them for more than a year.

All this contributes to turmoil in the economy. The UK is the only high-income country where numbers in the workforce have not returned to pre-COVID levels. More specifically COVID – plus the predicted flu wave, outbreaks of RSV and Strep A - adds to the burden on a chronically under-resourced NHS which is fast approaching breaking point.

The continuing costs of COVID is particularly severe for the [nearly 4 million people](#) who are clinically vulnerable, for their families and their carers. The risk of becoming infected severely restricts their everyday lives. For a substantial proportion of the population, the prospect of people meeting up without precaution and spreading the virus is more a source of dread than of pleasure – particularly given recent recommendations that reduce the availability of antiviral medicines should they fall ill.

So, as many celebrate being together again for the festivities, we should all remain considerate and do whatever we still can ensure that we act to keep *everybody* safe and protect our NHS. This involves a few simple steps which won't compromise our enjoyment but which will help ensure that seasonal socialising does not give way to New Year misery.

1. If you haven't done so already, get vaccinated and/or get a booster without delay! This includes the Flu vaccine if eligible.!
2. If you feel poorly, or have been in close contact with someone who is, don't go out and risk infecting others - whether with SARS-CoV2 Covid or anything else.
3. Before visiting others, especially anyone elderly or vulnerable, take a COVID test if you can.
4. When you meet up, make sure the setting is as well-ventilated as possible.
5. Where possible, wear a mask in crowded situations where ventilation or air filtration is poor (e.g. public transport)

So, have a happy healthy end of 2022 and see you all in 2023!

15th December 2022