

*UK coronavirus cases top 3
million as death toll passes 80,000*



COVID-19 infections and related deaths pass grim milestones

London, January 10 (RHC)-- The number of confirmed coronavirus cases recorded in the United Kingdom has now surpassed three million, as the human cost of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to mount amid growing fears about the fast-spreading new variants of the virus.

UK authorities on Saturday announced another 59,937 new infections and 1,035 related fatalities, taking the total death toll to 80,868 – one of the highest in Europe, alongside Italy.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson imposed a third stay-at-home order at the start of the week as alarm deepens that hospitals could be overwhelmed, while London Mayor Sadiq Khan on Friday declared a “major incident” in the capital and said the spread of COVID-19 was “out of control.”

To date, more than 1.5 million people in the UK have received coronavirus jabs, with the elderly, their carers and health workers prioritised during the immunisation drive. The British government has launched a new public awareness campaign to get people to better comply with coronavirus restrictions, with Chief Medical Officer Professor Chris Whitty appearing in a video advertisement urging people to stay home as much as possible, protect the National Health Service (NHS) and save lives.

Citizens are also encouraged people to not be complacent and act as though they have the virus, or people around them might have COVID-19.

The infection surge threatens to overwhelm hospitals, putting more strain on doctors and nurses who are already tired after almost a year of the pandemic. “We are hearing about people being treated in ambulances and car parks outside the hospital because there’s no room inside to bring people in,” said Dr Tom Dolphin, a hospital anaesthetist and spokesman for the British Medical Association council. “It’s getting to the point where we are struggling to maintain basic standards in some hospitals.”

The number of COVID-19 patients treated in hospital in London was up in the first week of January alone by almost a third, and the number of artificially ventilated patients rose by more than 40 percent, according to Khan. Hundreds of firefighters came to the aid of the health service to drive ambulances.

Meanwhile, Britain’s Queen Elizabeth II and her husband, Prince Philip, were among those to be vaccinated on Saturday. It is understood the monarch decided the information should be made public to prevent inaccuracies and speculation.

The UK is banking on the roll-out of the Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines to halt the spread of the virus. Regulators in the country this week also approved U.S. firm Moderna’s vaccine – the third to be authorized for use.

The government aims to have inoculated 15 million of the most vulnerable groups -- including front-line staff at the NHS -- by mid-February, and has deployed armed forces to help with the roll-out.

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