

London declares major incident over Omicron spread



People walk past a government health campaign advertisement encouraging people to take a coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccine booster dose, at a bus stop in London [Toby Melville/Reuters]

London, December 18 (RHC)-- A “major incident” has been declared in London amid “huge concern” over the spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant across the capital. It comes after London Mayor Sadiq Khan said on Saturday he was “incredibly worried” about staff absences in vital public services including the NHS, fire service and police due to rapidly rising cases.

The declaration of a major incident will allow authorities to work together and support each other to reduce service disruption and allow more time to give out booster jabs, the mayor's office said. "The surge in cases of the Omicron variant across our capital is hugely concerning, so we are once again declaring a major incident because of the threat of COVID-19 to our city," Khan said.

"The Omicron variant has quickly become dominant, with cases increasing rapidly and the number of patients in our hospitals with COVID-19 on the rise again. "We are already feeling the impact across the capital and while we are still learning about this variant, it's right that London's key agencies work closely together to minimise the impact on our city, including helping to protect the vital vaccination programme."

Georgia Gould, chair of London Councils, said, "The rapid spread of Omicron across our city is of huge concern. "Local councils have stepped up and played a vital role in supporting their communities through the pandemic, I know they will continue with these efforts but we cannot do this alone."

Khan called on people to come forward for their boosters and insisted for those who had not had even a first dose of vaccine that it is "never too late" to get a jab.

Omicron is now the dominant coronavirus variant in London, with figures published by the UK Health Security Agency on Saturday showing that 83.4 per cent of a sample of detectable cases in the capital from December 15 and 16 were found to have S gene target failure (SGTF), a way of detecting the likely presence of Omicron.

The number of people in hospital with COVID-19 in London, which has seen some of the biggest rises in cases in the last seven days, has risen to 1,534, up 28.6 percent from last week, according to government figures on Friday.

Omicron cases in the UK jumped sharply to almost 25,000 while the total number of reported deaths among people with it so far rose to seven, according to British health authorities.

Meanwhile, 90,418 daily COVID cases were reported across the UK on Saturday, after days of record highs.

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