

At last! Millions to get their Covid booster shot a month early as ministers rip up system to stop faltering roll-out triggering winter spike - while Sajid Javid plans to make vaccines MANDATORY for all NHS staff

- *Sajid Javid has ordered NHS chiefs to allow over-50s to book their third jab a month earlier than at present*
- *Only around 4.5 million out of the 9.3 million eligible people in England have so far received the third dose*
- *Patients are eligible for booster six months after second jab, but cannot even start the process until that date*
- *Under the new plan, it will be arranged for the vaccine to be given on the first day when people are eligible*
- *Javid is also planning to make vaccines mandatory for all NHS staff to prevent hospital infections*
- *NHS England's national director Professor Stephen Powis called on Brits to get jabbed to save Christmas*
- *Leaked document warns Covid passports and face masks will be enforced to stop winter surge*

By GLEN OWEN POLITICAL EDITOR FOR THE MAIL ON SUNDAY

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Ministers are ripping up the booking system for Covid booster jabs with millions set to receive their vaccines a month early amid growing fears the faltering programme risks triggering a winter spike – and another dreaded lockdown.

Health Secretary Sajid Javid has ordered NHS chiefs to allow over-50s to book their third jab a month earlier than at present in a bid to turbocharge the sluggish rollout of boosters to combat Covid.

It comes as Javid is also planning to enforce laws to make Covid vaccines mandatory for all NHS workers, making them a 'condition of employment' as soon as possible.

He believes it will help protect vulnerable patients from contracting the virus in hospitals but there are fears it could spark a backlash among vaccine hesitant staff or civil rights groups.

People are eligible for the booster six months after their second jab. But as it stands, patients cannot even start the booking process until that date, and then must wait an average of 18 days to get their appointment.

The delay is believed to be a key reason why only around 4.5 million out of the 9.3 million eligible people in England have so far received the third dose.

The new plan, which Government sources say will be put into effect as soon as possible, will allow people to book in advance so they can get it as soon as the first day they are eligible.

Downing Street advisers have also examined whether the six-month period should be shortened, but concluded the period is still the 'sweet spot' which maximises the boost to immunity levels.

The development comes amid signs of growing tensions in Whitehall over the slow take-up of boosters and jabs for 12- to 15-year-olds which has coincided with a sharp rise in infections and hospitalisations.

One source claimed Boris Johnson had 'taken his eye off the ball' because No 10's energies had been consumed by preparations for the forthcoming COP26 climate conference in Glasgow.

An analysis by The Mail on Sunday found if the current rate of vaccinations for those aged 12 to 15 is not accelerated, then barely one-third of the age group will have received a jab by the start of December.

The slow progress has led to calls for Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi to write directly to pupils to urge them to have the vaccine. But the move is opposed by other Cabinet Ministers who believe it is wrong to bypass parents.

MPs say they have been bombarded with complaints from constituents about the glacial pace of the booster jab rollout.

The booster jabs are intended to deal with waning immunity among groups which first received the vaccines at the start of the year – but the number administered each day has been a fraction of the rate during the initial programme.