

The jabs will not be rolled out to the under-50s until a greater proportion of the older age group have been jabbed, which at the current rate is expected to be in early 2022.

Mr Johnson responded to the criticism this weekend by asking Emily Lawson, the head of the No 10 Delivery Unit, to return to her old job running England's vaccine programme.

The effort has also been stymied by Mr Zahawi's move to Education Secretary, Sir Simon Stevens' departure as head of the NHS and Matt Hancock's resignation as Health Secretary over his breach of social distancing rules with an aide.

Mr Javid has warned the number of new cases could peak at 100,000 a day this winter, prompting fears of another lockdown – although Mr Johnson insisted that was 'not on the cards at all'. Chancellor Rishi Sunak also said that the country could not return to 'significant economic restrictions'.

Professor Peter Openshaw, a Government scientific adviser, said yesterday that he was 'very fearful' there will be another 'lockdown Christmas'.

However, modelling by experts on the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies indicated it was 'highly unlikely' the NHS would be overwhelmed by the virus, as a combination of vaccine-acquired and natural immunity means fewer people would need hospital treatment than in the early weeks of the pandemic last year.

It comes as Javid pushes for the remainder of NHS staff to get double jabbed, with 106,351 still not vaccinated, about 7 per cent of the total workforce.

## **Education Minister will send teenagers 'please get the vaccine' letter as four out of five 12-15 year olds remain unjabbed - despite experts claiming the cohort holds the power to stop the virus spreading**

By Anna Mikhailova and Stephen Adams for the Mail on Sunday

Ministers are considering writing to every 12 to 15-year-old in the country to urge them to get their Covid vaccine.

The letter would be signed by Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi in a bid to improve the slow jab rollout in schools.

So far only 19.8 per cent of that age group has been jabbed.

However, the move has sparked a row within Government over whether writing to children directly would be appropriate.

Whitehall officials have raised concerns that the move would risk undermining parental consent.

Since the rollout was extended to all 12- to 15-year-olds more than a month ago, MPs have warned that parents must be given a final say in whether their child should be vaccinated.

Schools normally send forms to parents seeking permission for pupils to receive a jab.

However, children also have a say and in some cases can override their parents, although the Government has insisted this would only apply 'very rarely'.

It comes as analysis for The Mail on Sunday shows only a third of 12- to 15-year-olds will be jabbed by December if the rollout continues at the current pace.

Just 564,518 out of 2.8 million 12- to 15-year-olds in England had been vaccinated by last Friday – compared with nearly two thirds of 16- to 18-year-olds.

The jab rollout has averaged just 12,100 of such children a day in the past month.

Failing to significantly speed up kids' jabs could leave the majority of children in that age group unprotected by Christmas because the vaccine takes 14 days to take full effect.

Last week, the Prime Minister held a meeting with Mr Zahawi, Health Secretary Sajid Javid and Chief of Staff Dan Rosenfield about how to speed up the rollout.

NHS bosses are also scrambling to use half term to vaccinate as many children as possible, with England's top GP, Dr Nikki Kanani – medical director of primary care for NHS England – making a plea to parents to book their children in by revealing her 13-year-old has received the jab.