

# WEEKLY BRIEFING

26 August 2022

## COVID-19 UPDATE

### COVID-19 infections in UK continue to fall

Regular asymptomatic testing for COVID-19 in all remaining settings in England will be paused from 31 August 2022 as cases continue to fall. The number of people testing positive for COVID-19 in England has decreased by 25.1% compared to the previous seven days. Between 16 August 2022 and 22 August 2022, 4,806 were admitted to hospital with the virus, a 20% decrease compared to the previous seven days. Between 13 August 2022 and 19 August 2022, there have been 620 deaths within 28 days of testing positive for COVID-19. This shows a decrease of 28.2% compared to the previous seven days.

The autumn COVID-19 booster campaign will start on 5 September 2022 in England, with care home residents and housebound people the first to receive jabs. Many of those receiving a further dose will receive a new vaccine from Moderna, which tackles both the original COVID-19 virus and the recent Omicron variant.

## ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL NEWS

### British prime minister Boris Johnson travels to Kyiv for press conference

British prime minister Boris Johnson has travelled to Kyiv in a show of strength and solidarity with Ukraine as he tells President Zelenskyy his country 'can and will win the war'. As part of the visit, his third to the city since the Russian invasion, the prime minister also called on the international community to stay the course in Ukraine, as it continues to valiantly defend its sovereignty six months on from Vladimir Putin's brutal and illegal invasion.

## **Liz Truss personally supported cuts to NHS and doctors' pay**

Liz Truss, frontrunner to succeed Boris Johnson as British prime minister, has personally supported cuts to the NHS, arguing the service “cannot be put on a pedestal” in an article in which she also criticised the “inexorable” rise in doctors’ pay. The Conservative leadership frontrunner told a hustings this week that she would spend the £13bn earmarked for the NHS to catch up on delayed treatment after COVID-19 on social care instead.

## **Energy bill price rise will be 'devastating'**

Millions of households in the UK face an unprecedented 80% increase in their energy costs in October 2022, taking a typical annual bill to £3,549 a year - a £1,578 increase from the current average bill. Regulator Ofgem's new energy price cap means a home in England, Wales and Scotland using a typical amount of energy will pay nearly £300 a month. New forecasts suggest this could peak to over £6,000 a year in 2023, piling pressure on a new prime minister to give urgent extra support for those struggling or unable to pay soaring energy bills.

## **TRADE UPDATE**

### **Holidays 'remain a priority' despite recession fears**

The looming economic downturn and cost of living pressures are failing to dent the nation’s enthusiasm for holidays, a new poll suggests. More than half of consumers (54%) expect to carry out more research to make sure they are saving money and getting value out of every trip, with 17% doing so already. As many as 49% are likely to swap to cheaper destinations, while 40% would switch at least some of their usual overseas holidays for a UK break – more than twice as many as those that did during the last recession in 2008. While 40% said they would likely wait for a last-minute deal, the study by Holiday Extras confirmed that holidays remain a top spending priority. More than a third (40%) of 1,000 recent UK air travellers said they would be likely to cut back on other household expenses to make sure they still had their holiday.

## **Sales “ticking along” despite rising cost of living**

Travel agents say holiday sales are “ticking along” despite increasingly negative media reports about the cost-of-living crisis. Fears of spiralling household bills have so far failed to put a dampener on bookings post-COVID-19 but recent research suggests it is starting to affect consumers’ holiday choices as the latest reports predict inflation will reach 18% next year. However, high-street agents said they have not detected any drop-off in sales, with late bookings for short-haul destinations still dominating enquiries.

## **Agents who focus on complex itineraries will prosper**

Simon Applebaum, managing director of tour operator Gold Medal Travel Group, said agents who focus on complex itineraries for cruising, tours and luxury holidays are most likely to prosper in the coming years. Applebaum said agents need to look at their business models and where they can add value for customers, because holidaymakers can easily book traditional short-haul beach packages themselves. He told a Travel Weekly webcast that the B2B group is investing in its specialist brands – Pure Luxury, Incredible Journeys and Cruise Plus – because these sectors offer great growth potential and urged agents to follow suit. “We’re not focusing on low-cost air and short-haul destinations – the seven or 14-night stays and the traditional space that Thomas Cook operates in – because we don’t see that as where the agents should be” he said.

## **There are reasons for optimism despite adversity, Marriott International CMO says**

Neal Jones, chief sales and marketing officer at Marriott International stated they knew there would be significant pent-up demand for travel post-pandemic and it has been heart-warming to see how quickly travellers have returned to the company’s hotels. In early August, the hospitality company announced its Q2 earnings, which were driven by robust demand for its brands around the world. By June, RevPAR in all regions outside of Asia Pacific had more than fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels, leading to June global RevPAR 1% above 2019 levels. Worldwide occupancy for the month rose to 71%, just 5% points below pre-pandemic levels, with global ADR an impressive 8% over the same month in 2019.

## Leeds Bradford airport deploys AI-powered 'passenger predictability' tech

A technology tie-in aims to improve queue management and passenger flows at Leeds Bradford airport. AI-powered passenger predictability technology is being deployed to optimise security area operations and passenger flow throughout the terminal by analysing real-time data on passengers. The Veovo technology, which aggregates data from multiple sensors throughout the terminal, accurately measures live passenger occupancy, throughput and queue times in security. This enables airport managers to "dynamically resource" staffing, plan layout and lane openings, as well as predict potential queuing bottlenecks. The airport can also proactively communicate wait times to passengers.

### SOCIAL UPDATE

#### BeReal rises to 10 million daily active users

Rising from only 10,000 daily active users just over a year ago, BeReal is quickly becoming the trending app of the moment. The app, which sends out a daily prompt to users asking them to share a photo of what they're doing there and then, is being touted as the anti-Instagram. Other platforms are now looking to replicate its core tools, with Instagram currently working on a [new 'Candid' feature](#) which looks very similar to the BeReal user interface. Brands are also starting to experiment on BeReal with some providing behind-the-scenes content and others sharing exclusive discount codes. While it doesn't allow formal advertising at this stage, this could also be on the cards in the future, as the app continues to scale and build a more sustainable business model.

### MICE UPDATE

#### In-person events are more important post-COVID-19

A new market survey from Pico Group has been released which explores businesses' investments in topics such as event types, sustainability and new technologies including metaverse, and data analytics. From the survey responses, it was evident that, with health restrictions being lifted in most markets, in-person events are now much more important than before the pandemic. 64% of respondents ranked them as 'extremely important' or 'very important', in comparison to 45% pre-COVID-19.

## LIGHTER NOTE

A 13-year-old schoolgirl has rescued more than 45 animals over the past two years by trawling social media for neglected pets that needed rehoming. See [here](#) for further details.