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## Covid-19: Prepare for a third wave, warns England's chief medical officer

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Current trajectories suggest that the UK is facing a third surge of covid-19, while booster vaccinations are likely to be required for the next two to three years to tackle new variants, England's chief medical officer has said.

Speaking at the NHS Confederation conference on 17 June, Chris Whitty praised NHS staff for their efforts in responding "quite remarkably" to the pandemic over the past 15 months.

But while he highlighted the positive impact that the vaccination programme is having on deaths and serious illness, Whitty said the growth of the significantly more transmissible delta variant made a third wave likely.

"In the next few weeks, I am anticipating, unfortunately, that the rates will continue to go up," he said. "The height of that surge is still uncertain, but it will definitely translate into further hospital admissions and, unfortunately, it will undoubtedly translate into further deaths."

He added, "It's a slightly gloomy point, but we as the NHS have to be realistic and get ourselves prepared."

Whitty said that a late autumn or winter covid-19 surge was also likely given that these months typically favour respiratory viruses. He said the extent of the wave would partly depend on whether new variants emerge which can evade vaccines, and partly on how the current wave passes through the UK.

In the longer term, Whitty said he anticipated that within five years, polyvalent vaccines will have been developed that will "hold the line to a large degree against even new variants as they come in." But he added, "In the period over the next two or three years, new variants may well lead to us having to revaccinate or consider boosting. We have to be aware that covid has not thrown its last surprise at us."

Whitty also stressed the importance of focusing on the "prolonged and deeply entrenched" deprivation that has repeatedly seen certain parts of the country hit worst by both covid and other serious disease.

"You see areas of deprivation that have been hit over and over again and indeed in many of them, if you had a map of covid's biggest effects now and a map of child deaths in 1850, they look remarkably similar. These are areas where deprivation has been prolonged and deeply entrenched. These are not the areas with the largest number of doctors, nurses, and others, and we need to concentrate on these efforts seriously," he said.

Whitty also singled out UK research for praise, hailing the role that the NHS has played in conducting "very large scale, incredibly well conducted observational studies," adding, "that is something we should feel very proud of."