

Rugby figures urge fans to get vaccinated and ventilate indoor spaces



PUBLISHED NOV 12, 2021
BY [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)

New film to be shown at Twickenham stadium to 80,000 fans during England v Australia match today

Eligible people urged to get booster jab as soon as possible to top up protection ahead of winter

Rugby figures are urging people to get vaccinated and take action, including ventilating indoors spaces, to cut COVID-19 transmission in a new film which will be shown to rugby fans at one of the most anticipated games of the Autumn Nations Series today (Saturday November 13).

The Rugby Football Union and English international rugby union referee Wayne Barnes have come together to remind sport fans to get the vaccine and to let fresh air in when socialising indoors and watching the rugby games in the series throughout November.

In a film being shown to 80,000 fans at Twickenham Stadium for the men's England v Australia game, rugby fans are seen socialising at a pub as rugby pundits give 'real-time' commentary on their actions, specifically those that could spread COVID-19 in an indoor environment.

Refereeing the fans, Wayne Barnes whistle stops 'play' as a fan is pulled up for his 'infraction' as he attempts to close the window in the pub and then forgets to wear a mask in his taxi as he goes home.

The film informs viewers that opening a window when socialising indoors will help reduce the chances of catching COVID-19, as well reminding them of the importance of vaccination, testing regularly using lateral flow tests, and

wearing a face covering in enclosed spaces.

This follows the launch of the government campaign to 'STOP COVID-19 HANGING AROUND', aimed at increasing understanding on how to reduce COVID-19 levels indoors by opening a window for just 10 minutes every hour when socialising with others.

Wayne Barnes, English international rugby union referee and barrister, said:

It's great to have been asked to support this campaign. COVID-19 had a big impact on rugby, both at a community and elite level and I know everyone really did miss coming together to watch and play. The RFU worked hard to get rugby back up and running in England, like the other home unions have done, and we want everyone to enjoy the game again safely.

We have all had to adapt but it's been great to see sports fans being able to socialise and watch games across the country together. We had the first capacity crowd back at Twickenham for 609 days to see England play Tonga last weekend and are expecting the same again for England v Australia on Saturday.

This couldn't have been done without the collective effort of everyone remembering the COVID-19 safety measures. As people continue to come together during the Autumn Nations Series I'd remind fans are as safe as they can possibly be and follow the guidance.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Sajid Javid said:

It is fantastic to have rugby fans coming together to enjoy the Autumn series – whether that's at Twickenham, the pub or watching at home.

Having rugby referee legend Wayne Barnes championing the vital importance of getting your vaccine and the simple safety measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 delivers a crucial message ahead of the winter months.

I urge everyone who is eligible to get their booster vaccine as

soon as possible to maintain the protection the vaccines give us all as we spend more time indoors with our loved ones this winter.

The film will be released and played at the men's England v Australia game today and the England v South Africa game on 20th November.

Whilst the life-saving vaccines remain our best defence against COVID-19 – giving us over 90% protection against hospitalisation from the virus – people can still catch COVID-19 even if they have been double vaccinated.

With one in three people with COVID-19 showing no symptoms, it is easy to pass it onto others without knowing. With fewer restrictions in place this winter, the action of letting fresh air into indoor spaces is even more important for everyone to keep COVID-19 cases down.

Vaccines give high levels of protection but immunity reduces over time, particularly for older adults and at-risk groups, so it is vital that vulnerable people come forward to get their COVID-19 booster vaccine to top-up their defences and protect themselves this winter.

The latest evidence from SAGE shows that protection against symptomatic disease falls from 65%, up to three months after the second dose, to 45% six months after the second dose for the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, and from 90% to 65% for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. Protection against hospitalisation falls from 95% to 75% for Oxford/AstraZeneca and 99% to 90% for Pfizer/BioNTech.

Although the vaccine effectiveness against severe disease remains high, a small change can generate a major shift in hospital admissions. For example, a change from 95% to 90% protection against hospitalisation would lead to doubling of admissions in those vaccinated.

The booster programme is designed to top up this waning immunity. Early results from Pfizer show that a booster following a primary schedule of the same vaccine restores protection back up to 95.6% against symptomatic infection.

The campaign comes research revealing that only around a third of people (29%) are currently ventilating their home when they have visitors over and only 3% of those surveyed continued to ventilate their homes for a period after their guests left.

As well as opening windows for a few minutes every hour to dilute virus particles, other simple actions the public can take to reduce the spread of COVID-19 include wearing a face covering over the mouth and nose in busy indoor spaces, such as public transport or shops. In addition, the government advises everyone to get their booster vaccination when eligible and continue to get tested with a rapid lateral flow device, even if they don't feel ill, if they are planning to mix with others indoors, or visit someone vulnerable.

Testing is the quickest and easiest way to find out if someone has the virus, even if they show no more information.

Notes to editors:

Opinium online survey conducted across a representative sample of 3,000 people in England, 15th - 20th October 2021 over 18 years.

Full video available to download here:

Press release distributed by Media Pigeon on behalf of GOV.UK, on Nov 12, 2021. For more information subscribe and follow us.

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