

Lockdown exit will only succeed if SNP sorts out testing

21 May 2020



The SNP's route out of lockdown will only succeed if it sorts out problems with testing, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Nicola Sturgeon revealed the four-stage plan today, which will see restrictions gradually lifted from the end of next week.

However, the Scottish Conservatives have warned that every phase of that exit will be dependent on an adequate testing system being in place.

Since the outbreak, the Scottish Government has been severely criticised for not testing enough people, not using capacity properly, and not getting the tests out to the people who need them most.

And at the weekend, it was reported that not a single contact tracer had been recruited, despite promises to hire 2000 by the end of the month.

Those contact tracers will be key to the SNP's test, trace and isolate scheme which the lockdown exit relies upon.

Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw said:

"We all want to exit lockdown as soon and as safely as possible, for the sake of the economy and for the physical and mental health of the nation.

"And while many of the plans outlined today are welcome and give cause for optimism, they will only succeed if the SNP get testing absolutely right.

"Unfortunately, failings on testing so far have been the weakest aspect of this SNP government response to the coronavirus crisis.

"Tens of thousands of tests have gone unused and there have been major problems in getting tests to the vulnerable people who need them most, and those who work with them.

"And now we learn that the health secretary badly misled the public on the issue of elderly people being discharged from hospital to care homes without being tested for Covid-19.

"The SNP has to significantly up its game on coronavirus testing, otherwise every stage of this lockdown exit will be put in grave jeopardy."

Health Secretary has lost the confidence of the public

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Jackson Carlaw, leader of the Scottish Conservatives, has written to the First Minister and stated that the Health Secretary, Jeane Freeman no longer has the confidence of the public.

The letter comes after it emerged that almost 1,000 hospital patients were discharged to care homes before compulsory Covid testing was enforced, significantly more than previously stated.

The shock figures were revealed in the media last night and are over three times higher than the previous number given by Health Secretary, Jeane Freeman.

Jackson states to the First Minister, "it was not inevitable care homes became the frontline, a serious strategic error made it so, and that you and the Health Secretary have, not for the first time in this crisis, failed to be transparent with key information."

He goes onto write, "it is surely impossible to see how in respect of Coronavirus in care homes, public confidence can be maintained in the Cabinet Secretary for Health."

Ms Freeman has previously stated that only 300 patients were discharged from hospitals to care homes during March to April 15 this year, prior to the new testing regime, as health boards raced to free up capacity.

The real figure, confirmed by the Scottish Government last night, is that 921 patients were released from hospital into care homes during this period.

The fact is that the total figure could be even higher as this number does not include April 15 onwards.

Jackson Carlaw, Scottish Conservative leader said:

"This astonishing revelation poses real questions about the Health Secretary's competence, honesty and transparency.

"The care sector is at crisis point and has been for weeks.

"It was not inevitable that care homes became the frontline, a serious strategic error on behalf of the SNP government made it so.

“In the light of these events, it is impossible to see how public confidence can be maintained in the Cabinet Secretary for Health.

“Jeane Freeman simply can’t be trusted on care home coronavirus.”

Scotland faces ‘significant cancer crisis’

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Experts have warned Scotland faces a “significant cancer crisis” due to a backlog in diagnosis and treatment.

A briefing from Cancer Research UK has urged the SNP government to set out an urgent strategy to return cancer services to pre-coronavirus levels.

The document for Holyrood’s Cross-Party Group on cancer states around 2000 urgent cancer referrals are not taking place each week because of the NHS response to Covid-19.

That’s despite the health service in England restoring cancer services nearly a month ago.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary, and co-chair of the CPG, Miles Briggs said:

“There is significant and increasing concern in the medical and cancer sector at the negative impact the ongoing pause on cancer services and screening will have on patients’ cancer outcomes in Scotland.

“It is now approaching a month since NHS England resumed pre-coronavirus cancer treatment levels; we need to see urgent action to do the same here.

“The Scottish Government must publish a plan to deal with the current backlog of operations and treatments and give everyone access to the healthcare they need before it’s too late.

“We have made good progress in recent years to save lives and improve the survivability of many cancers in Scotland.

“All that progress could be under threat if we don’t see action from SNP ministers and a cancer services and research recovery plan.”

Anas Sarwar MSP, co-chair of the CPG on Cancer, said:

“There is a risk of an unprecedented cancer crisis in Scotland.

“Cancer services in Scotland were already struggling due to major NHS staff shortages, but the COVID-19 outbreak means referrals are plummeting.

“The sad reality is that many people may die of cancer in the future because they are not receiving early treatment now.

“We urge the Scottish Government to accept the recommendations made by Cancer Research UK and hope this month’s virtual summit will chart a way forward to save lives.”

Cancer Research UK, which provides the secretariat for the CPG, states in its briefing:

“It is paramount that NHS organisations, Scottish Government, healthcare professionals, charities, MSPs and others work together to help address the immediate and near-term challenges we face.

“People affected by cancer now must continue to receive the care they need, in as safe a way as possible, during this crisis.

“Attention must also be given to returning the provision of cancer care to pre-COVID-19 levels as soon as possible, again in a safe and effective way.

“Given the backlog in diagnosis and treatment we are currently seeing, this will require swift and clear action. Strong national and local leadership and a clear governance framework are paramount to ensure the return

the provision of safe and accessible cancer services in the most effective way.”

It adds: “Around 2,000 urgent suspected cancer referrals are not happening each week, which could mean cancer diagnoses are being missed.

“This will likely contribute to more cancers diagnosed at a later stage, where curative treatment options are reduced.

“It is also creating an extremely worrying backlog of people that need to be assessed and we are in danger of creating another, potentially more significant cancer crisis, particularly as diagnostic services were struggling

with capacity before COVID-19.”

[Sturgeon ducks responsibility on Nike](#)

conference scandal

20 May 2020



Nicola Sturgeon has been accused of ducking responsibility after claiming she had nothing to do with keeping details of a coronavirus-hit Nike conference secret.

The First Minister has been under increasing pressure over the summit which took place at the end of February, and resulted in several people being infected with Covid-19.

But despite being keen to be front up the Scottish Government's response to the pandemic on a daily basis, today she said "it's not me" in response to who makes the decisions on whether or not to publicise outbreaks.

She wouldn't even provide an assurance that, should another large-scale public event find itself at the epicentre of a coronavirus outbreak, the SNP wouldn't keep those details secret too.

Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw challenged her on the issue at First Minister's Questions.

He pointed out that, at least week's FMQs, she stated: "I take responsibility for all aspects of the government's response," and that even her "sternest critics" couldn't say otherwise.

Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw said:

"For someone who wants to be seen to be taking responsibility, Nicola Sturgeon's behaviour on this issue is completely unacceptable.

"It seems she's desperate to hide behind public health officials when it transpires mistakes have been made.

"The First Minister should admit she got this wrong, and that decision could have allowed the virus to spread.

"Instead, she can't even give a guarantee that it hasn't happened since, or won't happen again.

"This is yet another failure by the SNP government in the fight against coronavirus.

"Nicola Sturgeon needs to make her mind up – if she wants to be in charge of this, she needs to take the responsibility which comes with it."

SNP must establish pupils who are losing out in lockdown

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The SNP has been urged to establish exactly how many school pupils are without access to digital learning during coronavirus lockdown.

The Scottish Conservatives have repeatedly asked ministers to publish figures on the estimated number of children whose homes don't have the sufficient technology to deliver home-learning.

However, education secretary John Swinney has repeatedly dodged the issue, and again failed to provide the figures when asked in Holyrood yesterday.

Scottish Conservative education spokesman Jamie Halcro Johnston said while the closure of schools harmed all pupils, it was those in poorest communities who stood to lose the most.

He added that, with Scotland's attainment gap already too wide, the lengthy lockdown would only increase inequality.

Scottish Conservative education spokesman Jamie Halcro Johnston said:

"The SNP government needs to establish exactly how many pupils across Scotland are being left behind here.

"We know not everyone will have functioning internet access or the devices needed to access material.

"They need help urgently – they can't just have months of being ignored by the education system.

"At least by working this number out and providing them with urgent assistance, some impact could be made before the schools go back.

"Scotland's attainment gap has been allowed to grow under SNP rule – it should be taking action now to stop it increasing further."