

Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick on COVID19 response

Good afternoon,

I would like to update you on our response to COVID-19.

I'm joined today by Dr Jenny Harries, the Deputy Chief Medical Officer.

As of 9am today:

127,737 people have now been tested for the virus.

108,215 have tested negative.

19,522 have tested positive.

Of those who have contracted the virus, 1,228 have, sadly, died.

The virus is indiscriminate

It doesn't matter who you are, where you are or how old you are.

We each have a part to play by staying at home, protecting the NHS and helping to save lives.

We all have a duty to one another to keep everyone safe.

So today I would like to give you two updates, before answering questions.

The first on the plans I have put in place to ensure that every corner of the country can confront the coronavirus epidemic.

The second on what the government is doing to shield the most vulnerable people in society.

On the first question, I have put in place in all parts of the country procedures to ensure that everywhere can be ready to move forward together. All parts of the country are now on an emergency footing.

This is an unprecedented step in peace time.

We haven't done anything like this since the Second World War.

This means that we're establishing strategic co-ordination centres across the whole country.

Each centre is led by gold commanders.

We are bringing together senior members of the emergency services

- the police, the fire service, the ambulance service
- with local authorities and the NHS, to lead communities through this challenging period.

From Cornwall to Cumbria.

And we have embedded within each of these groups members of the armed forces – including some of the finest military planners in the world.

These groups are planning the local response to the virus.

Using their expertise, their judgement and their leadership to ensure a comprehensive, a coordinated, and consistent response across the country.

One issue that they have been helping us to coordinate and about which I know there is a lot of concern is the provision of personal protect equipment.

We simply cannot and should not ask people to be on the frontline without the right protective equipment.

We have a clear plan to ensure that those serving this country at this time have the right equipment.

We have established the National Supply Distribution Response Team and they are supported now by the armed forces and other emergency services who are working round the clock to deliver the equipment to the people who need it most:

- 170 million masks
- 42.8 million gloves
- 13.7 million aprons
- 182,000 gowns
- Almost 10 million items of cleaning equipment
- and 2.3 million pairs of eye protectors

all delivered to 58,000 NHS Trusts and healthcare settings including GP surgeries, pharmacies and community providers.

Every single GP practice, dental practice and community pharmacy has had a PPE delivery. All care homes, hospices and home care providers have or will shortly receive a delivery.

To NHS and social care workers, all those who rely on this equipment and to their families and loved ones watching this afternoon – we understand.

And we will not stop until we have got you the equipment that you need.

Last weekend, at this press conference, the Prime Minister and I explained why 1.5million people who are extremely vulnerable to the virus, due to their underlying health conditions, needed to stay at home for a period of 12 weeks and avoid face to face contact.

Since then, the NHS have written to almost a million of these people and outlined the steps that they need to take to protect themselves.

We have also established a dedicated web page on gov.uk which those in receipt of a letter should go to, to let us know whether or not they need further assistance over the course of the next 12 weeks. There is also a new phone number, which is on the letter they have or will receive shortly.

If this applies to you, I know that you will find this a very worrying time.

You will be thinking about how you can continue to access the medicine that you need, how you can get the food and other essential supplies that you rely on.

If you don't have family or friends or neighbours nearby who you can rely on then the NHS will deliver your medicines through the community pharmacy network.

And if you register online or using the phone service that we have set up, letting us know you need support, then we will deliver food and supplies to your doorstep.

And this weekend I saw for myself first-hand the first deliveries being made.

The packages included cereal, fruit, tinned goods, teabags, biscuits, toiletries and other essentials.

The first 50,000 will have been sent out by the end of this week and we are ramping up production to send out as many as are required for as long as it takes.

If this applies to you, while you will now have to be at home for a prolonged period of time and that will be difficult, I want you to know that you are not alone. We are here to support you for as long as you need us.

We have all been hugely impressed by the commitment and the dedication of those working in social care, in local councils delivering essential public services like ensuring that the bins continue to get collected. None more so than me, as the Secretary of State for Local Government.

We all respect the 12,000 heroic former doctors and nurses and paramedics who have come back to work and been deployed this weekend.

And I think we have all been moved by the number of people who have signed up to be one of the NHS Voluntary Responders – today we can announce an extraordinary, three quarters of a million people have signed up to do that.

In every city, in every town, in every village, there is going to be work to be done and in each of us there is the power to do it.

And so please take part, please play your part, please consider your friends, your family, your neighbours when you are shopping, please call the elderly and support them.

When this is done, and it will be done, we all want to be proud of the part that we've played together.

Thank you very much.