

PM press conference statement: 24 May 2020

Good afternoon.

I want to begin by answering the big question that people have been asking in the last 48 hours. And that is – is this Government asking you – the people, the public, to do one thing while senior people here in government do something else?

Have we been asking you to make sacrifices, to obey social distancing, to stay at home while some people have been basically flouting those rules and endangering lives?

And it is because I take this matter so seriously and frankly it is so serious that I can tell you today I have had extensive face to face conversations with Dominic Cummings and I have concluded that in travelling to find the right kind of childcare, at the moment when both he and his wife were about to be incapacitated by coronavirus. And when he had no alternative, I think he followed the instincts of every father and every parent. And I do not mark him down for that. And though there have been many other allegations about what happened when he was in self-isolation and thereafter, some of them palpably false.

I believe that in every respect he has acted responsibly, and legally, and with integrity, and with the overwhelming aim of stopping the spread of the virus and saving lives.

And I stress this fundamental aim, because it is thanks to this country's collective resolve in achieving that aim that we continue to make progress.

So let me give you today's figures:

- 3,458,905 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including 110,401 tests carried out yesterday
- 259,559 people have tested positive, that's an increase of 2,409 cases since yesterday – a smaller increase than we were seeing over the last few weeks
- 8,951 people are in hospital with COVID-19 in the UK, down 11% from 10,085 this time last week

And sadly, of those tested positive for coronavirus, across all settings, 36,793 have now died. That's an increase of 118 fatalities since yesterday.

And each of those fatalities represents a family in mourning, the grief of friends and relatives. And as we mourn them we resolve again to beat this virus and get our country back on its feet. We can and we will.

Two weeks ago I set out the Government's roadmap to begin easing the measures we put in place to control the spread of coronavirus.

I said that we would do so in a safe and controlled way, based on our assessment of progress against the five tests we set for adjusting the lockdown.

We're going to set out that assessment in detail in the coming days, but today I can confirm that I do believe we will be in a position to move to step 2 of our plan.

As part of Step 2, we set out plans for a phased reopening of schools.

Because the education of our children is crucial for their welfare, their health, for their long term future and for social justice

And so in line with the approach being taken by other countries, we want to start getting our children back in the classroom in a way that is manageable and as safe as possible.

So we said this would begin with early years settings and reception, Year 1 and Year 6 in primary schools.

Today I can announce that it is our intention to go ahead with that as planned on June 1st, a week on Monday.

We then intend, from June 15th, for secondary schools to provide some contact for Year 10 and Year 12 students to help them prepare for exams next year, with up to a quarter of these students in at any point.

By opening schools to more pupils in this limited way, we are taking a deliberately cautious approach.

And this comes after a constructive period of consultation with schools, teachers and unions, led by the Education Secretary Gavin Williamson.

I want to thank all the Education and childcare staff who have stepped up to the challenge and kept schools open throughout this crisis.

The Department for Education will engage with teaching unions, local authorities and school leaders in the coming days, giving them an opportunity to ask questions and probe the evidence behind our plans.

And the final decision will be taken as part of the formal review into lockdown measures which the law requires us to undertake by Thursday. We will of course continue to consider all the evidence (as we said we would do), and will continue to work hard with those bodies over the course of the coming week.

However, I think it is important for us to be clear about the Government's intentions now, so that teachers and parents can plan in earnest for schools to reopen a week on Monday.

Now I acknowledge that a 1 June opening may not be possible for all schools, but the Government will continue to support and work with the sector to ensure that any schools experiencing difficulties are able to open more

widely as soon as possible.

Detailed guidance has been published by the Department for Education on how schools can open in a way which is safe for children, teachers and parents.

While of course we recognise that full social distancing may not be possible, especially when teaching young children, our guidance sets out a range of protective measures to keep children and staff safe. This includes:

- reducing the size of classes and keeping children in small groups without mixing with others
- staggered break and lunch times, as well as drop offs and pick ups
- increasing the frequency of cleaning, reducing the use of shared items and utilising outdoor space

All children and staff, and their families, will have access to testing if they display symptoms. This will enable children and staff to get back to school if they test negative, and if they test positive we will take the appropriate reactive measures.

We will continue to work with the sector to support them to prepare for wider opening and ensure all children and young people can continue to receive the best care, education and training possible.

We will set out what moving to step 2 means for other areas, such as non-essential retail and more social contacts, over the course of the next week.

And let me stress once again: we are making good progress.

But that progress is conditional, provisional.

We must keep reducing the incidence of this disease.

We must keep that R down below 1.

And that means we must remember the basics.

Wash our hands, keep social distance, isolate if you have symptoms – and get a test.

We are beating this thing, but we will beat it all the faster if we stay alert, control the virus and save lives.