

Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 3 July 2020

Good evening,

Since I last spoke to you from this podium, we have continued to make progress nationally against the virus.

We are now reporting regularly fewer than 1,000 new cases each day.

The Office for National Statistics estimates that between 14 June and 27 June, the most recent period they have analysed, 25,000 people in the community in England had the virus – 1 person in every 2,200.

SAGE assess that the R rate – the average number of people each infected person passes the virus onto – remains between 0.7 and 0.9 across the UK.

SAGE also assess that, in England, the number of new infections is shrinking by between 2 and 5% every day.

And while the number of people dying with coronavirus remains too high, the numbers do continue to fall.

Now of course this picture is not universal. There are areas – such as Leicester – where the virus is still more prevalent than we would like.

We always said there would be local outbreaks requiring local action. This is to be expected and will, I'm afraid, be a feature of our lives for some time to come.

But that should not take away from the great progress we have made, together, as a country against this vicious disease.

This progress is the reason why we have been able – slowly, carefully, cautiously – to ease the national lockdown.

Without doubt, lockdown has saved many hundreds of thousands of lives – but it has also had a devastating impact on our way of life and our economy.

And of course, lockdown has not yet been lifted entirely.

Indoor gyms, nail bars and swimming pools are still closed, mass gatherings are still prohibited, social distancing is still essential.

I want these restrictions to be lifted as soon as possible – of course I do.

We have established taskforces to work rapidly and closely with the sectors that remain closed to explore how they can be Covid Secure. I am pleased to report good progress is being made.

Next week we will set out a timetable for their re-opening – though of course

I can only lift those remaining, national restrictions as and when it is safe to do so.

Our goal remains to enable as many people as possible to live their lives as close to normally as possible – in a way which is as fair and as safe as possible.

To achieve this we need to move away from blanket, national measures, to targeted, local measures.

So instead of locking down the whole country, we will lock down specific premises or local areas where the virus is spreading.

Instead of closing down non-essential retail and hospitality nationwide, we will only shut establishments locally as required.

Instead of shutting all schools for most pupils, from September we will only shut those schools where it is absolutely necessary to control an outbreak.

And instead of quarantining arrivals from the whole world, we will only quarantine arrivals from those countries where the virus is, sadly, not yet under control.

We are already implementing this targeted approach in England.

In Weston-Super-Mare, we identified an outbreak in a hospital, closed it to visitors and new admissions, tested all staff and patients and gave the hospital a deep clean. The outbreak was contained and the hospital is open again.

In Kirklees, we identified an outbreak at a meat packing plant, shut down the plant, moved in a mobile testing unit, tested all employees and traced the contacts of those who were positive. The outbreak was contained and the plant has reopened with additional safety measures in place.

And of course more recently in Leicester, we identified a community-wide outbreak which was not restricted to a single location, unlike Weston-Super-Mare and Kirklees. Public Health England engaged with the local authority, mobile testing units were deployed, full data was shared – council-wide data was shared on 11 June, and postcode-level data was shared last week.

This enhanced monitoring through additional testing showed that the infection rate in Leicester was three times the next highest infection rate in any other city in the country. So on Monday, the Health Secretary announced local lockdown measures in Leicester for an initial period of 2 weeks.

In each of these cases, the problems identified were specific to Weston-Super-Mare, Kirklees and Leicester. So of course it made sense to take action locally, rather than re-impose restrictions on the whole country.

And we are learning the whole time. With each local outbreak, we see what works well and what not so well, so that we do better next time.

Informed by our experience of these cases, we have developed an approach for controlling future local outbreaks which has five principle components: monitoring, engagement, testing, targeted restrictions and finally, as a last resort, lockdown.

First, monitoring. Public Health England, working with the Joint Biosecurity Centre, will examine carefully data on the spread of the disease and people's behaviour across the country. They will look out for emerging trends, rising case numbers and other indicators, while taking into account local factors. Critically, we have made local data available to all Directors of Public Health in local authorities, so they too can monitor what is happening in their area. And local data will also be available to the public on the gov.uk dashboard.

Second, engagement. If monitoring identifies local problems, NHS Test and Trace and PHE will work with the relevant local authority to develop a deeper understanding of the problem and identify solutions. Working with local agencies, we will seek to keep the local community informed at every stage, so they know what is happening and what actions, if any, they need to take.

Third, testing. We now have substantial testing capacity nationwide and we have the ability to target that capacity at local areas in order to get a grip on emerging outbreaks. Scaled-up testing at a local level, combined with contract tracing through NHS Test and Trace, can control the virus and thus avoid more stringent measures.

Fourth, targeted restrictions. If the virus continues to spread, we will restrict activities at particular locations and close individual premises. As in Weston-Super-Mare and Kirklees, we will restrict access to places which become hotspots for the virus, while testing people who have spent time in those places, and tracing the contacts of anyone who tests positive.

Fifth, local lockdown. If the previous measures have not proven to be enough, we will introduce local lockdowns extending across whole communities. As in Leicester, that could mean shutting businesses venues that would otherwise be open, closing schools or urging people once more to stay at home. Local lockdowns will be carefully calibrated depending on the scientific and specific circumstances of each outbreak and we are continually exploring smarter means of containing the virus.

So that is the approach we will take as local outbreaks occur and we will set out more detail soon.

Let me end by looking forward to this weekend.

Tomorrow, there will be a moment of remembrance for those whose lives have tragically been lost before their time.

And at 5pm on Sunday, the NHS's 72nd birthday, we can all come together to clap those who have worked tirelessly and selflessly to help the nation get through this pandemic.

I know everyone will be looking forward to the relaxation of national

restrictions. As lockdown eases, we should focus on supporting the livelihoods of business owners and their employees up and down the country – all of whom are opening their doors for the first time in more than three months.

They are our local restaurants, hairdressers, libraries, museums, cinemas, and yes, pubs. They are also hotels, B&Bs, indeed much of our tourism industry.

All these businesses and their workers have put in a heroic effort to prepare their venues for this reopening, to work out a way to trade in a way that keeps their customers safe.

But the success of these businesses, the livelihoods of those who rely on them, and ultimately the economic health of the whole country is dependent on every single one of us acting responsibly. We must not let them down.

Lockdown only succeeded in controlling the virus because everyone worked together, and we will only succeed in reopening if everyone works together again. Because we are not out of the woods yet. The virus is still with us and the spike in Leicester has shown that. If it starts running out of control again this Government will not hesitate in putting on the brakes and re-imposing restrictions.

Anyone who flouts social distancing and COVID-Secure rules is not only putting us all at risk but letting down those businesses and workers who have done so much to prepare for this new normal.

So as we take this next step, our biggest step yet, on the road to recovery, I urge the British people to do so safely.

Remember – don't gather in groups of more than 6 outside or 2 households in any setting.

Keep your distance from those outside your household – 2 metres if you can, 1 metre with precautions if you can't.

Wash your hands.

Let's all stay alert, control the virus, save lives – and enjoy summer safely.