

Foreign Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 16 April 2020

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab:

Good afternoon,

Welcome to the daily coronavirus press conference from Downing Street.

I'm joined by Sir Patrick Valance, the Government's Chief Scientific Advisor, and Professor Chris Whitty, the Government's Chief Medical Officer.

Sir Patrick will provide an update on the latest data on coronavirus.

But, first, let me update you on the steps we are taking to defeat the coronavirus, and the decisions we have taken today.

Step-by-step, our action plan aims to slow the spread of the virus.

So that fewer people need hospital treatment at any one time, and that is the way we can protect the NHS from being overwhelmed.

At every step along this way, we have followed, very carefully and deliberately, the scientific and medical advice that we have received.

So that we take the right steps at the right moment in time.

At the same time, we are dramatically expanding NHS capacity, in terms of the numbers of beds, key staff and life-saving equipment on the front-line, so people get the care they need, at the point in time that they need it most.

And that's also why we have directed people to stay at home. To deny coronavirus the opportunity to spread, to protect the NHS and save lives.

Now, today's data shows that:

327, 608 people in the UK have now been tested for the coronavirus;

103,093 people have tested positive;

And sadly, of those with the virus, 13,729 have now died.

These are heart-breaking losses for every family affected.

And it remind us exactly why we need to follow the social distancing guidance.

Earlier today, I chaired meetings of the Cabinet and COBR to consider the advice from SAGE on the impact of the existing social distancing measures.

There are indications that the measures we have put in place have been

successful in slowing down the spread of the virus.

But, SAGE also say that it is a mixed and inconsistent picture and, in some settings, infections are still likely to be increasing.

SAGE assess that the rate of infection, or the R value, is almost certainly below 1 in the community.

That means that on average each infected person is, in turn, infecting less than one other person. But, overall, we still don't have the infection rate down as far as we need to.

As in other countries, we have issues with the virus spreading in some hospitals and care homes.

In sum, the very clear advice we have received is that any change to our social distancing measures now would risk a significant increase in the spread of the virus. That would threaten a second peak of the virus, and substantially increase the number of deaths.

It would undo the progress made to date, and as a result, would require an even longer period of the more restrictive social distancing measures. So early relaxation would do more damage to the economy over a longer period.

I want to be clear about this. The advice from SAGE is that relaxing any of the measures currently in place would risk damage to both public health and our economy.

Patrick and Chris will be able to go into further detail on all of this shortly.

But based on this advice, the Government has determined that current measures must remain in place for at least the next 3 weeks.

Now, in terms of the decisions that lie ahead, we want to be as up front with the British people as we possibly can.

So, let me set out 5 specific things which the Government will need to be satisfied of before we will consider it safe to adjust any of the current measures.

First, we must protect the NHS's ability to cope.

We must be confident that we are able to provide sufficient critical care and specialist treatment right across the UK.

The NHS staff have been incredible.

We must continue to support them as much as we can.

Second, we need to see a sustained and consistent fall in the daily death rates from coronavirus so we are confident that we have moved beyond the peak.

Third, we need to have reliable data from SAGE showing that the rate of infection is decreasing to manageable levels across the board.

Fourth, we need to be confident that the range of operational challenges, including testing capacity and PPE, are in hand, with supply able to meet future demand.

Fifth, and this is really crucial, we need to be confident that any adjustments to the current measures will not risk a second peak of infections that overwhelm the NHS.

The worst thing we could do now is ease up too soon and allow a second peak of the virus to hit the NHS and hit the British people.

It would be the worst outcome, not just for public health, but for the economy and for our country as a whole.

So, the current restrictions will remain in place.

The Government will continue to monitor the data on the impact of the virus.

We will soon be able to test 100,000 people every day.

That will give us greater understanding of the scope of infection across the country.

It will also help us plan how to change the measures when we are ready to.

When we are confident on these five points.

Guided by science and data, we will look to adjust the measures to make them as effective as possible in protecting public health, while allowing some economic and social activity to resume.

We will only do it, when the evidence demonstrates that is safe to do it.

It could involve relaxing measures in some areas, while strengthening measures in other areas.

But in formulating the right balance we will be at all times guided by the scientific advice and the evidence.

I should add at this point that we recognise all the economic and social impact the current measures are having.

That is why we put in place an unprecedented package of support for jobs and businesses, as well as for hospices and charities who are doing so much to support the most vulnerable in our society.

And, I know that many people would like to hear more detail, some people are calling for exact dates, on what will happen next, and when.

We are as being as open as we responsibly can at this stage.

And it would not be responsible to pre-judge the evidence that SAGE will have and review in just a few weeks' time.

I know some people will look at other countries, and ask why the UK isn't doing what they're doing.

I can reassure people that we carefully follow what is happening in other countries.

We will always look to learn any lessons in how they are approaching their response.

And I'm talking to Foreign Ministers on a daily basis, I know Chris and Patrick are doing the same with their opposite numbers around the world. Ultimately, we have to do what is right for the British people, based on the advice of our experts, Grounded in the conditions here in the UK, and we will make those decisions at the right time for this country.

That's what we have done so far.

That's what we will continue to do.

I appreciate the impact of these measures is considerable on people and businesses across the country. The costs being shouldered.

The sacrifices people are making.

Being isolated from friends and family.

Whole Households, cooped up inside, all week long.

Parents having difficult conversations with their young children, who just don't understand why they can't visit grandparents or go outside and meet up with friends as they normally do.

Families struggling managing home-schooling, and balancing that with working from home.

I know there are people very concerned about their household finances.

Uncertain about their jobs.

Worried for their small businesses that remain closed. We get it.

We know it's rough going at this time

Every time I come to this lectern, and I read out the grim toll of people who have so sadly passed away.

I walk away from here, and I think about what their sons and their daughters must be going through right now.

Their brothers and sisters.

Their grandchildren.

All the loved ones left with their unbearable, long-term, grief.

It makes me and it makes this government focus even harder on what we must do.

And, I know that, together, united, we must keep up this national effort for a while longer.

We've just come too far, we've lost too many loved ones, we've already sacrificed far too much to ease up now, especially when we're beginning to see the evidence that our efforts are starting to pay off.

And your efforts are paying off.

There is light at the end of the tunnel.

But, we're now at both a delicate and dangerous stage of this pandemic.

If we rush to relax the measures in place, we would risk wasting all the sacrifices and all the progress we have made. And that would risk a quick return to another lockdown.

With all the threat to life a second peak of the virus would bring, and all the economic damage a second lockdown would carry.

So we need to be patient a while longer.

So please please stay home, save lives and protect the NHS.

So we can safely return to life as close to normal as possible, as soon as possible.

It's been an incredible national team effort.

Now is not the moment to give the coronavirus a second chance. Let's stick together, let's see this through.

And let's defeat the coronavirus for good.

Further information

[**A letter from Rishi Sunak to Sir David Norgrove on the Retail Prices Index**](#)

consultation

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

A ceasefire and cooperation with the UN political process is the best defense against the devastating effects of Covid-19 in Yemen.

Thank you to Martin and Mark of course for their briefings but I think more importantly, for their unceasing work on this file and for that of their teams. The very last thing that Yemen needs is a major outbreak of COVID-19, as Mark set out the impact that could have through the communities there.

The UK is providing \$930 million to support the response of COVID-19 globally, and we're assessing how we can support Yemen directly to prepare and respond to an outbreak of COVID-19. I'll just note that the UK gave \$300 million in the last financial year and \$1 billion since the conflict began.

As we face COVID-19 in Yemen, we encourage the Government and the Houthis to continue engaging with the UN bodies and agencies, including the World Health Organization and OCHA, who were leading the response – and in particular, of course, with Lise Grande on the ground. 24 million people are currently in need of some form of humanitarian and permanent assistance in Yemen and this will help the WHO to identify requirements, procure equipment and ensure supplies, reach those in need.

I think there are three important steps that the parties must take to mitigate the worst effects of the COVID-19 outbreak. Firstly, to agree to a ceasefire. Secondly, to engage with the UN-led political process. And thirdly, to improve humanitarian access.

Now, a ceasefire and cooperation with the UN political process is the best defense we have against the most devastating effects of COVID-19. Martin, you were clear in your statement about the urgency that the Yemeni people, from

wherever they come, feel for their leaders to come and make peace. The Saudi ceasefire announcement following the Secretary-General's call on 25th of March is a rare opportunity to deliver peace in Yemen. And as we endorse that global call by the Secretary-General, we need as a Security Council to apply it in specific country contexts. And in that respect, I call on all parties to seize this opportunity. This ceasefire needs to be made permanent so that the UN-led political process can resume and we can achieve a political solution to this terrible conflict.

I welcome the Government of Yemen's positive response to Saudi Arabia's declaration and their willingness to engage in peace talks to achieve a nationwide ceasefire. And I know, too, that the Houthis responded positively to UN Secretary-General Guterres's call for a nationwide ceasefire in Yemen, but it is disappointing that they have not yet seized the opportunity to make this a reality. So I urge the Houthis to show the international community and more importantly, show their own people that they, too, are serious about ending this conflict by immediately ceasing hostilities, engaging constructively with Martin Griffith's proposals, including on confidence building measures, of course, for more parties, committing publicly to attending a meeting of the Yemen parties under UN auspices as soon as possible.

We need to be clear as an international community that any refusal to engage with the Special Envoy's proposals or any attempt to undermine his efforts through military action is an attempt to frustrate the UN's efforts to end this awful conflict, and will be viewed internationally as such.

On the humanitarian side, I think Mark's message was clear. COVID-19 could have a huge and devastating impact on Yemen. The equation is simple. The more food, the better fed the people. The more medicine, the fewer infections and the fewer deaths. So we just have to get humanitarian access and supplies in. It's deeply disturbing to hear Mark used words like "non-permissive environment" in this circumstance. The Houthis must now deliver on the minimum operational requirements that the international community has clearly set out. They include allowing independent needs assessments, signing principal and sub-agreements, and allowing humanitarian agencies to operate independently and freely. And that last point is vital. That will ensure aid gets to the right people. And I know that the World Food Programme has already been forced to alternate monthly food distributions in the north because it could not implement biometric registration beneficiaries. And if these minimal operating requirements are not met then assistance will be scaled back elsewhere. And let me at the same time, picking up on what Mark said, call on the Government of Yemen to grant the necessary approvals and complete the necessary bureaucratic requirements, as Mark set out elsewhere.

I've raised a significant risk posed by the SAFER oil tanker a number of times before. A substantial oil leak from the SAFER tanker would have a devastating effect on Yemen in the Red Sea. And whilst negotiations are underway to find a diplomatic way forward, I urge the Houthis to allow either the removal of the oil or a repair mission to proceed. Their continued inaction on this issue is reckless. Huge environmental and humanitarian damage must be avoided.

And we remain extremely concerned that the Central Bank of Yemen will run out of foreign currency reserves in the next few weeks, posing a major economic collapse with humanitarian and political consequences. Significant external assistance to the Central Bank is urgently needed to keep imports coming in. We call on the Government of Yemen to urgently come up with a credible and transparent plan that reassures potential donors of their investments to the Yemeni people. And let me, like Mark, echo my gratitude for the announced contribution by Saudi Arabia.

Colleagues, I conclude by noting that in this Council we have said for some time now that it is self-evident that no one party can win a military victory in Yemen. Over the years, we've called for political talks and the peace process to have effect, most recently in our press statement on the 10th of April. Now is that moment and we should all send a strong message of support from this Council to Martin and his team for their efforts and to the parties to get behind those and to seize this opportunity for the sake of the people of Yemen.

Thank you, Mr President.

3/2020: Council Tax information letter **– 16 April 2020**

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Businesses to save up to £300 million **annually thanks to Climate Change** **Agreement scheme extension**

- Extension of Climate Change Agreement scheme set to secure up to £300 million of annual savings for companies
- government consultation will allow new energy intensive businesses to

sign up and make vital savings from January 2021

- scheme prevents an estimated 700,000 tonnes of CO2 from being emitted each year – equivalent to taking 350,000 cars off the road

Businesses across the UK are set to save up to £300 million a year, as the government today (16 April 2020) launched a consultation on the terms of an extension to the Climate Change Agreement scheme (CCA).

CCAs work by setting targets for reducing businesses' energy use in return for discounts on the climate change levy on their energy bills. The consultation will enable new targets to be put in place from January 2021, allowing the extension of the scheme beyond its current March 2023 end date to March 2025.

The 2-year extension, announced by the Chancellor during the Spring Budget, will give eligible companies extra financial support and security by guaranteeing access to savings worth up to £300 million a year until 2025.

Energy Minister Kwasi Kwarteng said:

Extending the Climate Change Agreement scheme will give businesses greater clarity and security at a time when they need it most.

This extension will save businesses money while cutting emissions – a key element of our work to combat climate change in the months and years ahead.

In addition to extending the CCA for thousands of companies currently in the scheme, the consultation will also allow new businesses to apply to join and gain vital access to savings as of January 2021. Under the current rules, businesses have not been able to join the scheme since October 2018.

By joining the scheme businesses will also be helping the fight against climate change. Since the CCA was introduced in 2013, it is estimated to have helped companies reduce energy use by up to 2.3 terawatt hours a year – enough energy to power 140,000 homes.

Andrew Large, Director General of the Confederation of Paper Industries, said:

CCAs successfully focus attention onto energy efficiency at production sites. For papermaking, these agreements have helped reduce the energy to make each tonne of paper by a third since the programme started.

We're grateful to ministers for listening to feedback and extending the CCA end date and discussing a successor scheme. In the current crisis, this removes one element of uncertainty and helps companies plan for the future with confidence in the knowledge that the government is committed to supporting UK industry.

Phillip Law, Director General of the British Plastics Federation, said:

The British Plastics Federation (BPF) welcomes the 2-year extension of the Climate Change Agreement (CCA) scheme.

As an organisation that manages the CCA for the plastics industry, we know this scheme is highly valued and has helped to significantly reduce energy use. Reopening the scheme to new entrants is vitally important to UK businesses as it will help drive improvements to energy efficiency as well as reduce costs.

1. The consultation runs from 16 April to 11 June.
2. It proposes targets, to be agreed with businesses, which will be put in place from January 2021 to enable the scheme's extension to March 2025.
3. New eligible firms wishing to join the CCA can submit applications until September 2020.
4. The consultation is also seeking views from industry on a potential future CCA Scheme beyond March 2025.
5. An [evaluation of the scheme containing the above estimates](#) has also been published today.