

The Christmas break

As the Prime Minister says,, the virus will not know it's Christmas. He tells us to be jolly careful.

Nonetheless the government proposes a five day period when we are free to make more of our own decisions about social contacts in our homes with family. Some families will decide they do not wish to run any risk of infecting elderly or vulnerable people, and will not use the new freedoms to have a crowded house and table over the festive season. Others will decide that the risk is low for them of catching the disease at all or for getting a bad version of it, and will go ahead and use the freedoms the state permits.

Some elderly people will want the warmth and friendship of a family occasion and will assess their own risks accordingly.

This has itself created a further debate. A few have contacted me to say the relaxation is too generous, as they fear some will make bad judgements. More contact me to say if we can be trusted to make these decisions for five days, why cannot this be extended or why can't there be a more general relaxation of rules? People after all do not wish to pass on a bad disease to loved ones and can make their own decisions about risk.

Where the government can help and reassure is to see what can be done about train travel. Now the railway is fully under state control for the time being the state has a duty of care to passengers. What actions have been taken or are being taken to ensure safer airflows in carriages? What evidence is there about spread rates for the virus at different levels of seat occupancy?

The railway is examining fare structures to avoid an incentive for more people to want to travel on an off peak train. Over a holiday period and in an era of homeworking off peak is a less clear idea anyway. They also need to renew the guidance about safe use of the railway and tell us what they think the risks are to inform people making those difficult judgements about family reunions over the five days of Christmas allotted.