

What is the point of a lock down?

The first national lock down was said to be for one main reason – to save the NHS. The NHS was short of Intensive care beds and breathing systems at a time when that was thought to be the only treatment for bad cases of CV 19.

The time of that lockdown was used to procure many more ventilators, to put in four large new Nightingale hospitals and to expand ICU capacity in existing hospitals. More nurses and doctors were hired, and recently retired qualified staff were tempted back to help with the crisis. The peak demand in April was comfortably accommodated by the NHS. Serious cases came down, though some argued the peak had been reached at or before the lock down started. As we went into summer with more Ultra violet light and warmer temperatures which both damage the virus case numbers stayed relatively low.

The lock down also gave the medical and scientific establishments more time to research the virus, to understand more about its transmission and its impact on infected people. As a result we now know than some steroids, anti virals and clot busting drugs can make a difference to serious cases and can save some lives.

Today we are told there needs to be an extensive “circuit breaker”. It’s a strange analogy, because of course a circuit breaker immediately cancels all dangerous power in a system, whereas a lock down does not immediately turn the virus off. When you put a circuit breaker back on full power is restored immediately, but what I assume these scientists want to do is to use a period of lock down to bring virus spread down, before resuming some relaxation which on their analysis will allow some drift back up. How does this help? How much relaxation would they allow and how much extra virus circulation would they find acceptable? Why are we not given measurable targets in advance so we can see what they are trying to achieve?

The advisers rightly warn us there may be no magic bullet or solution early next year in the form of a vaccine which offers full protection. This means the true question to answer is how do we live with this virus? What is the right mix of policy to keep the spread down, to protect the vulnerable, but to allow more jobs and activity than we currently enjoy?

It is no good the government imposing a whole new raft of controls over people’s daily lives if there is insufficient buy in by the public. To work people have to be persuaded it is necessary to follow the rules, and the rules have to be the minimum to keep virus spread down sensibly . What controls do you think are necessary?