

US were two of the countries worst affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Two observations follow.

7. First, there is a risk of complacency. The Government could reasonably claim that the UK was well prepared for a pandemic, citing this independent evaluation. It may be that the UK was indeed well prepared for an influenza pandemic (that proposition has yet to be tested) but Covid-19 was not influenza and required a different response (see paragraph 13).
8. Second, though the criteria used by the index as listed above seemed a priori to be sensible, it proved a very poor indicator of outcomes in the face of an actual pandemic (not only for the UK and US). I take this discrepancy to indicate that we should not confuse preparedness (as defined by the index) with vulnerability and that the global health community needs to re-evaluate the relationship between the two. Until that is done, it will be difficult for any government to make an objective assessment of either.
9. As a partial explanation for this discrepancy between preparedness and vulnerability, I share the view among global health colleagues that southeast Asian countries were better positioned to respond to Covid-19 because their pandemic preparedness planning focussed on SARS rather than influenza and placed more emphasis on diagnostics, case finding and self-isolation. The viruses causing SARS and Covid-19 are closely related and their epidemiologies are similar in key respects (see paragraph 13), so those countries' planning was better suited to the crisis at hand.
10. In the event, our go-to response to Covid-19 became lockdown (implemented on multiple occasions in the nations of the UK). Of itself, that highlights a striking deficiency in the UK's pandemic preparedness: we had no plans to implement lockdown at all. On the contrary, the UK's 2011 pandemic influenza strategy document (provided as Exhibit {MW/353 - INQ000149105}) states: "During a pandemic, the Government will encourage those who are well to carry on with their normal daily lives for as long and as far as that is possible, whilst taking basic precautions to protect themselves from infection and lessen the risk of spreading influenza to others. The UK Government does not plan to close borders, stop mass gatherings or impose controls on public transport during any pandemic." Lockdown was an ad hoc public health intervention contrived in real time in the face of a fast-moving public health emergency. We had not planned to introduce lockdown and this had two serious consequences.
11. First, there were no guidelines for when a lockdown should be implemented and no clear expectations as to what it would achieve, so it is no surprise that many governments