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**From:** [REDACTED] PD [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=0EC6DD97AFD94CA7954617810D162314] [REDACTED] PD  
**Sent:** 27/02/2020 17:46:48  
**To:** Van Tam, Jonathan [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=d29c846fc8fa4678b419c6f0dc3836f3-JVanTam]; Fowler, Aidan [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=b1153bf5f6d34a1dab23cf34073eaa9e-AFowler5]  
**Subject:** Rugby cancellation discussion with DCMS SOS

Hi JVT,

With thanks to Aidan, please see below my notes from the call earlier today with DCMS SoS. Do let me know if you are happy for me to send to DCMS, also please note that I have included the comments from academics/modellers but not sure how happy they will be that their *assumption heavy* views will be shared but have caveated that their opinions are not based on data.

**Attendees:**

- Rt Hon Oliver Dowden
- Jonathan van Tam
- Aidan Fowler
- [REDACTED] PD Private Secretary to SoS
- [REDACTED] PD Private Secretary to CMO
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**Notes from the call**

- Spoke to SoS DCMS re: interest in Parliament re: sporting event
- Asking for perspective re: where are we now and what should we start considering as we move to RWCS what guidance should we share
- JVT
  - If this becomes a pandemic then NHS would be under immense pressure, in such a scenario we would need to flatten the curve.
  - We would consider under SAGE guidance social distancing measures, cancellation of mass gatherings is in the mix. Evidence base for cancellation of mass gathering is extremely poor.
  - Gatherings in pubs rather than the actual game might be worse
- SoS
  - Do you think we will get to a point of cancelling mass gatherings?
- JVT
  - If we want to take draconian measures to flatten curve it could lead to cancellation of mass gatherings
  - Whilst its far more likely that we would first lean on school closure, family quarantining - can't guarantee we wouldn't look to cancel mass gatherings
  - As some modellers believe, see below, it is possible that UK is already experiencing community transmission
  - From a public health perspective - JVT not of the view that we should cancel, epidemiological advice does not support this approach
  - There is an additional risk that a large cohort returning from Rome might put pressure on 111 and other health services related to their anxiety rather than actual disease
  - However, important to note that presentationally it would not look good - if we get community transmission in the UK around the same time as people return from the rugby. Nor if a traveller who attended the rugby tests positive on their return. There would be public scrutiny for not cancelling, irrespective of whether community transmission in the UK is started by returnees from the rugby.
- Aidan Fowler
  - Those going to the rugby are a small proportion of those travelling to Italy/Rome, although not insignificant
- SoS

- If we cancel the game, then why are we not cancelling flights to Italy?
- When should we make this decision?
- JVT
  - Before the 14th of March we expect to have community transmission
- SoS
  - Feels that from the advice it's too early to cancel, it would have unintended consequences also the government needs to have a coherent message. If you cancel the rugby shouldn't you tell people not to travel to Italy to be consistent.
- JVT
  - It is best that SoS continues to keep this decision under review, and for Aidan to have contact with Name Redacted from SoS's PO twice weekly or so on this topic.

**Comments from modellers - *please note that there are no data to support the following***

**Professor John Edmunds – London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine**

- The actual matches aren't a big risk factor. Yes, there are 60,000 people in the stadium, but each fan will only actually be in close contact with about 4 or 5 of them. The viral concentration in the air around a case would be so tiny that it is likely unmeasurable.
- The riskiest setting is likely to be in the pubs and bars around the games, where there could be a high density of people in an enclosed space. They would not be traceable. Measures to reduce the risk of fomite transmission would be:
  - Close the pubs and bars, but allow the game to go ahead.
  - Put hand sanitisers at the ticket gates and bars (inside and outside the ground).
  - Ensure the security guards (who check bags) are warned not to touch their face, etc.
- We ABSOLUTELY make sure that anyone with any kind of respiratory illness does not travel to the game.

**Professor Neil Ferguson - Imperial College**

- The question to ask is how much will the 6 Nations matches increase travel to the UK from Europe. I suspect not by much, given the large daily volumes of travellers anyway. In which case the impact on importation risk of cancelling will be fairly marginal.
- I don't think there is any evidence that mass gatherings like rugby matches increase transmission. Transmission is likely via close contact for an extended period of time— even if someone attends a match, there are a limited number of people they are close to for an extended period – their immediate neighbours in the seating area. This view has some support from analysis of transmission on planes. Going to the pub to watch the match likely poses as much if not more risk.

**Dr Jonathan Read – Lancaster University**

- The stadium's capacity is ~73k - maybe 40% (29k) of that would be English fans? While it's in Rome, it is unclear what the scale infection currently is in that population. It is not unreasonable to suggest it could be circulating. My hunch is that allowing the event to take place could result in importation into the UK, but I think it's very hard to say how much. I would say it's not a great idea, epidemiologically, but I'm no sports fan either.

**Dr Name Redacted – Public Health England**

- I think the unintended consequence of a large number of people travelling, returning, and then having symptomatic illnesses that are not due to Covid-19 that needs investigating, could have a significant impact on PHE's ability to maintain contact tracing and isolation management for true Covid-19 disease.
- It is likely that this will be happening at a time where we are likely to be stretched with other importation events including North Italy travel not-associated with the Rugby.

Many thanks,

PD



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