

Item 1: Current Situation Update

a: Situation Report

1. The CHAIR invited the Deputy Chief Medical Officer (DCMO) to update on the current global situation. The DCMO said that official data from China showed that case numbers continued to increase. Internationally case numbers in South Korea, Iran and Italy highlighted clear person to person transmission and the following areas of concern:
 - The connectivity of Iran, particularly with other countries in the Middle East.
 - Sustained human to human transmission in Italy - which receives a high number of travellers to and from the UK.
 - Two further serious cases and Germany.
 - It was still difficult to predict when or if case numbers would increase in the UK.
2. The DIRECTOR FOR THE GOVERNMENT OFFICE FOR SCIENCE (GO SCIENCE) said that the meetings of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) that took place on 25 February, endorsed Public Health England (PHE) surveillance regimes and confirmed that the Reasonable Worst Case Scenario remained as previously stated.

b Health advice for travellers and schools

3. The CHAIR said that the fact schools were closing, against advice to the contrary, remained a live issue and that the Department for Education had issued advice to education settings earlier in that day.
4. In discussion the following points were made:
 - Further public health advice was being prepared for schools.
 - The Welsh Government had issued updated advice to schools and educational institutions and similar advice to community level sporting clubs, signposting them to advice from Public Health Wales.
 - The Scottish Government had issued general advice and that health protection Scotland would update the advice tomorrow, advising against school closure.
5. Summing up the CHAIR said that schools with international planned trips should follow travel advice from Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The advice could not be different for schools as compared with the general public. The CHAIR said that schools should not close unless they had a case confirmed by a positive test and in cases where someone in the household was self-isolating children should still go to school.
6. The CHAIR invited the DCMO to give an update on medical advice to individuals arriving in the UK from impacted international regions. The DCMO said that current medical advice was that:
 - Iran, specific areas of Northern Italy and South Korea (as designated by their respective Governments), and the Hubei province - anyone travelling from these areas was advised to self-isolate regardless of whether they have symptoms on arrival in the UK.
 - For further countries or areas, including Northern Italy, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand - anyone travelling from these areas was advised to self-isolate if symptoms present.
7. In discussion the following points were made:
 - International posts were prepared to deal with queries.

- In Tenerife there were 168 UK nationals staying at a hotel where an Italian family had tested positive. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office were in touch with 113 of the UK nationals and were trying to reach the rest. UK nationals had been advised to follow instructions from the Spanish Health Authorities. There were approximately 30 elderly, high risk, individuals at the hotel.
 - That all major and regional airports, including in Scotland, had the advice they needed to share with individuals disembarking from flights but that communications materials at airports and ports could be improved to ensure the maximum amount of exposure to the public.
8. The CHAIR invited the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport for an update on mass gatherings. The PARLIAMENTARY UNDER SECRETARY FOR SPORT, TOURISM AND HERITAGE AT THE DEPARTMENT FOR DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT, said that there was considerable anxiety around mass gatherings and no concrete advice as of yet. That there was a strong need to speak with sports bodies, particularly around the upcoming rugby matches and the marathon. That unless companies felt that they would be compensated they would not risk cancelling events.

c: International response

9. The CHAIR invited the Department for International Development to give an update on the UK's international response. The SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT said that they were moving to support the World Health Organisation response, including offering £35 million to supporting research and aid organisations such as the Red Cross and UNICEF. There were already issues arising for example the lack of diagnostic tests in vulnerable countries. They were looking at how the UK could offer more support, including offering NHS experts.
10. Summing up the CHAIR said that it was vital that we did not rush to offer NHS staff abroad if it was detrimental to the service at home.

d: HMG preparedness

11. The CHAIR said that the reasonable worst case planning assumptions looked close to becoming the reasonable planning assumptions as cases in Italy demonstrated the need for heightened alertness in most sectors. This should include progressing COVID-19 legislation, updating formal 2011 pandemic influenza plans, and ensuring good public communications. The CHAIR said all departments should step up preparations and think about all sectors that could be affected. In discussion the following points were made:
- COVID-19 legislation policy proposals should be expedited.
 - The basic principle of the Civil Contingencies Act was that if you can foresee the emergency then you should take forward other legislation, therefore an emergency COVID-19 Bill was the appropriate legislative vehicle.
 - The pandemic influenza excess deaths planning assumption (800,000 deaths) greatly exceeded ordinary capacity and would have significant cost and logistical implications.
 - Publication of guidance on excess death management was highly likely to spark public and media interest.
 - There was a huge variation in local plans to manage excess deaths and significant work needed to be done to properly audit local plans.
 - Economically COVID-19 would have a severe effect on growth, in effect eliminating all growth for 2020.