COVID STRATEGY

30 October 2020

1. **Incidence rates are growing and the NHS is under increasing pressure**. The ONS now estimate that an average of 568,100 people, or 1 in 100 people (1.04% of the population) in England have Covid-19, compared to 1 in 2,300 in July and 1 in 200 at the beginning of October. On our current trajectory, SPI-M have assessed that the NHS will, on 4/12/20, surpass fixed and surge bed capacity, even after electives are cancelled.[1] Even if doubling times slow, so long as R is above 1 we will breach capacity limits.

2. **The growth is national.** While prevalence is worse in parts of the North, R is above 1 everywhere. And it is growing as, if not more, quickly in those areas which have lower incidence rates; the South East's doubling time is now faster than the North West and the East and West Midlands have the fastest doubling times in the country.[2] The South West could be where the North West is today by 27 November.[3]

3. This note sets out the proposed response. The aim of this approach is threefold: **1) protect the NHS; 2) get R decisively below 1, to curtail the exponential growth in hospitalisations and deaths; 3) act now to allow better choices for Christmas.**

Proposal

4. **We would introduce a national intervention, with a regional approach to de-escalation**. The intervention would comprise:
    a. **Keeping schools and universities open**.
    b. **Encouraging people to continue to go to work** where they cannot work from home and where their workplace is not closed (as set out below). This would keep industries such as construction and manufacturing open. Elite sport would be permitted to continue.
    c. **Restrictions on hospitality, leisure and personal care.** Hospitality would be limited to takeaway and delivery. Indoor and outdoor leisure, entertainment and the personal care sectors would be closed.
    d. **'Stay at home' legislation.** No indoor or outdoor household mixing would be permitted (apart from exemptions like support bubbles) but

[1] SPI-M forecasts indicate that we will exceed fixed and surge bed capacity by this date. Surge capacity includes re-allocated resource and Nightingale resource.
[2] Based on most recent ONS infection survey.
[3] Based on SPI-M forecast.

unlimited outdoor personal exercise would be allowed. People would be told that they should leave the house if required for work purposes.

e. **Closure of non-essential retail.** Given that we will be telling people to generally stay at home, we would close non-essential retail.
f. **Guidance against non-essential travel in private or public transport**. Exemptions from this rule, for 'essential' travel, would include, but not be limited to, work, hospital appointments and essential shopping.

5. This package is similar to the response announced in France which, like the UK, has regional variation in the spread of the epidemic.

6. **The intervention would apply nationally for four weeks.** We would exit the intervention on a regional basis.

7. **It will be important to protect the vulnerable.** We are designing a specific policy package for the vulnerable, which could include: introducing stricter national guidance for the clinically extremely vulnerable group and advising the clinically vulnerable (including all over 70s) to follow more restrictive social contact guidance when we exit national restrictions.

8. **We will also agree changes to the self-isolation period.** A review is currently being conducted by the C-19 Taskforce.

9. **This package would have a significant impact on jobs and the economy.** As a sense of scale and speed, in the March lockdown, overall output fell by 25% between February and April; 640,000 UC claims were made in the first two weeks of April; and average working hours fell by 17% by April compared to March. The short-term impacts may be mitigated compared to the March lockdown as schools will remain open, clearer communications will avoid the 'stay at home' message leading to inadvertent closure of manufacturing and construction, as occurred in March. Longer-term impacts will continue to be felt for a significant period after – for example, 3.3m jobs remained furloughed as of 31 August. Given the greater distress in the labour market and the corporate balance sheet, we should not assume that the recovery from this intervention would be as quick as from the March lockdown; and stop/start costs are likely to be significant in many sectors, such as retail.

Next steps

10. **This proposal would be announced in the coming days, following collective agreement and Parliamentary engagement.** We would expect regulations to be laid, debated and come into force during the week.