

SPI-M-O: Comments on Social Distancing Measures

Date: 22 June 2020

1. The following comments are provided to SAGE for their meeting on 23 June, to form part of the response to a commission received from Cabinet Office on 18 June. They have been signed off by the SPI-M co-chairs following work by, and discussion with a subgroup of SPI-M-O members. Paragraphs 2-8 give a view on what could be done on reintroduction of measures at a national level in response to question. Paragraphs 9 onwards provide some input into question 5 in the commission.

QUESTION 4: SAGE is asked to provide a view on which measures would have the biggest impact on reducing the rate of infection, and should therefore be considered for reintroducing first at a national level?

2. The choice of which measures to reintroduce in order to reduce transmission depends on which interventions have been relaxed, and the subsequent behavioural response to this. As such, monitoring and collecting data on behaviour as measures are relaxed is critical. SPI-M-O suggest that such data are reviewed and gathered in one place for easier analysis.
3. Contact tracing and outbreak investigation are likely to be the best source of information on where and when transmission is occurring and within which groups, providing that all relevant data/fields are collected. This will be more informative than further modelling at this point. Although we believe that questions about occupation have been added to the contact tracing data, SPI-M-O have not been granted access to the necessary detailed line list data as yet. Data about history of location of the cases in the previous 5-8 days could also be very informative.
4. Rather than focusing on re-introduction or relaxation of individual measures in isolation, it is necessary to consider a package of interventions as a whole and what implications one measure may have for the choices in other areas. This could include the use of “ready reckoners” that explore the impact on transmission from one intervention to be weighed against other impacts – for example, closing schools may have a similar impact to closing retail at that point, and a choice between two very unappealing options may be necessary.
5. SPI-M-O do not believe it is possible to return to a “pre-COVID” normality, without levels of contact tracing and COVID security effectiveness that would be difficult to achieve, without some sort of additional increase in immunity, either through vaccination or