

COVID-19 Outbreak (M) (5)

CABINET OFFICE BRIEFING ROOMS

COVID-19 (M) (5)

Meeting on Wednesday, 26th February 2020

Irrelevant & Sensitive

70 Whitehall at 15:00

MINUTES

PRESENT

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
In the CHAIR

The Rt Hon Anne Marie-Trevelyan
Secretary of State for International Development

The Rt Hon Simon Hart
Secretary of State for Wales

The Rt Hon Kelly Tolhurst
Parliamentary Undersecretary of State at the
Department for Transport

The Rt Hon Jo Churchill
Minister for Prevention, Public Health
and Primary Care at the Department of
Health and Social Care

The Rt Hon Nigel Adams
Minister of State for Asia at the Foreign and
Commonwealth Office

The Rt Hon Simon Clarke
Minister for Regional Growth and Local
Government at the Ministry of Housing,
Communities and Local Government

The Rt Hon Lucy Frazer
Minister of State at the Ministry of Justice

The Rt Hon Nick Gibb
Minister of State for School Standards at
the Department for Education

The Rt Hon Douglas Ross
Parliamentary Undersecretary of State at the Scotland
Office

The Rt Hon Robin Walker
Parliamentary Undersecretary of State at
the Northern Ireland Office

The Rt Hon Mims Davies
Parliamentary Undersecretary of State at the
Department of Work and Pensions

The Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi
Parliamentary Undersecretary of State at
the Department of Business, Energy and
Industrial Strategy

- 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.