

RT HON SAJID JAVID MP, HEALTH SECRETARY

MEETING Step 4 briefing meeting and PM quad	PS: NR	DATE: 30/06/2021
SUBJECT: Step 4 of the Roadmap		
OBJECTIVE To discuss the approach to policy decisions for Step 4, including rationale for remaining Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs), considerations for removing restrictions and the impact of measures in education settings.		
ATTENDEES For quad: Prime Minister Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Chancellor of the Exchequer Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Plus officials		
BACKGROUND <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • England has been subject to Step 3 measures under the Roadmap since 17 May (with a decision to remain in Step 3 made on 14 June). • Step 3 has restrictions set out in both regulations and guidance which include business closures and gatherings limits. The regulations require businesses to follow the guidance which sets out how they can operate in a way which minimises transmission risk – Covid- Secure guidance. • Further restrictions are recommended through guidance, particularly to limit social contact and observe social distancing. A list of the NPIs addressed in the Steps Regulations and in guidance, the rationale for, and impact of, these can be found at Annex A. • There are also a number of related regulations which impose further restrictions but are not written into the Steps Regulations (which implement the roadmap), including in some circumstances legal requirements to wear face coverings and self-isolate. Please see Annex A for a list of these and the rationale for and impact of these NPIs. • These restrictions form part of a broader package which includes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Test, Trace and Isolate ○ Therapeutics, ○ Vaccines, ○ International travel restrictions, ○ social distancing in healthcare settings and ○ measures in education settings. • The Steps Regulations sunset at 23:55 on 18 July in line with the expectation of a move to Step 4 on 19 July. However there remain questions about which NPIs in the broader package (legislative or guidance) should remain in place or be amended to mitigate the impact of lifting the social distancing restrictions. • It is difficult to define quantitatively the individual contribution of each NPI to reducing transmission, therefore the setting and context of each NPI will determine the level of risk it is mitigating and its effectiveness. Limiting social contact (through restrictions or isolation) has been a very important NPI for managing transmission. With the roll out of the vaccination programme and the key objective of Step 4 being the removal of social contact restrictions, Ministers will need to decide what should remain in place: issues include face coverings on public transport and other public places, including shops; isolation requirements; and guidance to people on managing their own risk and that of others. . 		

KEY POINTS TO RAISE

STEP 4 PACKAGE

- **If the four tests are met to enable a move to Step 4 on 19th July, there are key public health risks which remain and provide context for decisions about a baseline set of NPIs which could be set out in guidance.** These risks include:
 - o the large proportion of the adult population who are not yet fully vaccinated,
 - o the high rates of transmission in younger adults, who will not be fully vaccinated in the short-term, as well as in 12-17 year olds who as yet will remain unvaccinated,
 - o the unknown long-term effect of the Delta Variant on individuals (i.e. long-Covid),
 - o the management of settings with a high-risk profile due to the activities within that setting (eg singing, large numbers of people, crowds in close contact) or the vulnerability of the people within the setting (prisons, homeless shelters, children's social care)
 - o future VoCs.
- **The lifting of measures should not be considered in isolation.** Each measure contributes to the cumulative effectiveness of the broader package of measures and therefore decisions made on individual measures should take into account the overall impact.
- **Decisions remain to be made on a post-Roadmap decision-making process and contingency measures.** The epidemiological picture continues to evolve and there remains the risk of a harmful outbreak of either the dominant variant or a VOC.
- **The transition from rules and restrictions to individual choice and risk at Step 4 will require careful and consistent communication** to ensure that the public and businesses understand the risks and the actions they can take to mitigate those risks.

EDUCATION

- **So far, our aim has been to protect children, students, staff and local communities from COVID-19 transmission and minimise the impact on their access to education.** It is only right as we approach the next phase of our response that we review the policies we have in place in educational settings to ensure they continue to strike this balance effectively.
- **From the end of summer term, DfE is proposing the removal and amendment of a number of key systems of control within educational settings.** This includes the removal of school bubbles and guidance to maintain consistent groups in and out of school settings (e.g. brownies), and the removal of the cap of 30 for residential visits.
- **To mitigate against the increased risk of transmission with the potential removal of these NPIs, officials are working with DfE and PHE to strengthen the remaining guidance.** The systems of controls retained in schools is dependent on advice from PHE. Guidance on enhanced cleaning and ventilation should be retained, in addition to specific guidance for residential visits which pose higher transmission risks. Officials will also be undertaking work with DfE over the course of the next few weeks to understand their plans for the safe return of Higher Education students to campuses in the autumn in relation to NPIs.
- **Planning is underway for education testing strategy across settings for the start of the next academic year.** The asymptomatic education testing programme has been recognised as the foundation for education settings returning as part of Step 1 of the roadmap. Testing across the education sector reaches a potential quarter of the population of England which in-turn reaches wider communities. This includes two LFD tests on return by asymptomatic test site (ATS) for all secondary schools and college students. This is based on public health advice from Dr Susan Hopkins on the clinical accuracy of initial ATS testing and the expected significant increase in uptake when testing is supervised on site. ATS testing at secondary schools and colleges would be followed by twice-weekly asymptomatic testing for all students. Testing would continue until further public health advice and potential vaccination uptake for this age group.
 - o Initial planning for ATS testing on return and twice-weekly testing has been agreed with the DfE SoS.
 - o This agreement has not factored in the potential burden of initial testing by ATS for daily contact testing.

- As both testing strategies involve ATS there would likely need to be a decision to follow on whether education testing from September involves testing on return or daily contact testing. Public health advice should be commissioned, and recent steer from HMT at Official level has been that only one of these testing approaches should be explored.
- **The Education Secretary is concerned about the likely administrative burden on secondary schools for onsite testing. This will be exacerbated if daily testing is introduced in lieu of self-isolation.** Onsite testing requires space and a workforce, and takes time away from learning. Retaining onsite testing to do DCT will mean larger ATS sites for longer in schools, increasing the administrative burden for schools and the financial burden for the Department where we fund workforce.
 - The outcome of the clinical trial will help to inform how DCT is to be deployed in schools if it is recommended as an option
 - We are working to provide the evidence the CMO and MHRA require to enable lateral flow tests for DCT to be conducted outside the assisted test model.
 - We will be sending you, SoS, separate advice on vaccination uptake and suggested testing plans which includes recommendations for testing in all education settings in the next academic year.
- **You may wish to make the following points on next steps:**
 - Subject to the results of the clinical trials underway, from September secondary school children and colleges may be able to opt into daily testing where they are a confirmed contact of a positive case rather than self-isolating. This could therefore play an important part in minimising the classroom time lost.
 - We need to await initial data from the studies on 7 July, but, subject to what it says, we can make the announcement before the end of the summer term.

LIKELY POINTS RAISED BY OTHER ATTENDEES