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Speech

Health and Social Care Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 3 April 2020

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock gave the 3 April 2020 daily press briefing on the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

From:

[Department of Health and Social Care \(/government/organisations/department-of-health-and-social-care\)](#) and [The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP \(/government/people/matthew-hancock\)](#)

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Coronavirus press conference (3 April 2020)



Good afternoon and welcome back to Downing Street for today's coronavirus press briefing. I'm joined by our Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Professor Jonathan Van Tam, and by the Chief Nurse, Ruth May.

Our plan is to save as many lives as possible by protecting the NHS and preventing it from being overwhelmed. And we're doing this in 2 ways.

One, by slowing the spread of the virus, and that's why it is so important that people stay at home. And that's true for everyone who's watching – how important it is that we stay at home.

And two, by boosting the capacity of the NHS to care for those who fall sick. That means more beds, more staff, more life-saving equipment and more effective treatments – we'll come on to that.

Coronavirus continues its grim march. I can report that, through the government's ongoing monitoring and testing programme, according to the latest figures as of this morning:

- a total of 173,784 people have been tested, of whom 38,168 have tested positive
- 3,605 people have sadly died

We are reminded again today that, for the NHS, this is truly the frontline. In the last 24 hours, 2 nurses and 2 healthcare assistants have tragically died fighting coronavirus. Every life lost to this dreadful disease makes me more determined than ever to push for victory.

Today, I want to update you with the latest on what we're doing to boost NHS capacity, so the capacity we have to care is always above the need for that care.

First, we're delivering more critical care beds. This morning, I attended the opening of the new Nightingale Hospital in East London, with Ruth and many others. It was planned, constructed and fully staffed in just 9 days. That is an outstanding achievement and I pay tribute to Ruth and all who have been involved in its construction.

It shows what's possible when we come together as one team, in one national effort. I pay tribute to the extraordinary work of everyone. The NHS, the military, the construction industry who both donated supplies and of course their expertise, the engineers, the electricians, the plumbers, the caterers and others, all playing their part to build a place of hope and a place of healing. It was really inspiring to go and see the sheer scale of it and the teamwork going on there.

And lastly, I want to thank you. I want to thank everyone who is at home, because you are giving the NHS the time to expand so that it can save lives. By staying at home, you are saving lives.

We have more Nightingale hospitals planned on the way in Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow. And today we've announced that we will begin the work on 2 further Nightingale hospitals in Bristol and Harrogate. The Bristol Nightingale will have a capacity of up to 1,000 beds, and in Harrogate a capacity of up to 500.

The Nightingale hospitals are not the only expansion we've seen across the NHS. Since the start of this crisis, we've boosted the number of critical care beds to care for coronavirus by over 2,500 – that's before the addition we'll get from the Nightingale hospitals.

And the result of this extraordinary work is that, in every hospital in the country, we have managed to expand capacity and, as we stand today, over 2,000 critical care beds are free and available and are ready should they be needed, and that's before the Nightingale hospitals come on stream.

And of course we are working round the clock to deliver essential deliveries of PPE across the whole NHS, social care, key public services, and in all 4 nations of the UK. Yesterday, more than 26 million PPE products were delivered to 281 different organisations, and I have agreed with the Northern Ireland Executive that we will immediately be providing more PPE to Northern Ireland to meet their needs. Over 5 million items, including goggles, aprons and masks.

Over 7,000 NHS staff have now been tested. And next, alongside testing, we're intensively researching drugs and treatments. Right since the start of this crisis, we've been clear that all our plans are based on the best possible science. And that science gets better every day, but there is still a lot that we don't know about how to treat and potentially prevent COVID-19.

So, research about treatments is absolutely central to our plan. The UK of course has a long tradition that we are very proud of, of being the best in the world in this sort of science and we are a world leader in clinical trials. We are putting this to use right now, bringing together some of the finest research minds in the country to design new trials and we are delivering them at record pace.

We've established 3 national clinical trials covering each major stage of the disease: primary care, hospital care and critical care for the most seriously ill. And, just like the Nightingale, one of these trials was in fact put together in just 9 days, which is breath-taking speed. These trials are looking at the effect of existing drugs and steroids, repurposed for treatment of COVID-19.

One of the trials – called 'Recovery', which deals in hospital care – is the largest of its kind in the world, with 926 patients enrolled. We've also set up an expert Therapeutics Task Force to search for and shortlist other candidate medicines for trials. And I'm advised on that work by my brilliant colleague Jonathan Van Tam the Deputy Chief Medical Officer – who is one of the finest research scientists of his generation, and Jonathan will say a bit more about this in a few minutes.

We need more patients to volunteer to be part of these trials, because the bigger the trials, the better the data, and the faster we can roll out the treatments if – and only if – it's proven to work.

These treatments will help us as the science develops, but, for now, the only way to protect yourself and your family from this disease is to stay at home.

And of course, while this is a national effort to find these treatments, it's also an international effort. In the same way that we have donated more money to the global search for a vaccine than any other country, so too we will lead the world in this science of treatments and whatever we learn, we will share, because we are all on the same side in this war.

Earlier today, I spoke to my counterparts in the G7 to co-ordinate our research efforts over this and other things. And whether it's treatments, or equipment, or NHS capacity, we will strain every sinew. We will move whatever mountains need to be moved. We need everyone to keep playing their part, and that includes you. The only way to protect yourselves and others now is to stay at home.

And the one final thing I want to say is this. We are set for a warm weekend in some parts of the country, but the disease is still spreading, and we absolutely cannot afford to relax the social distancing measures that we have in place. We cannot relax our discipline now. If we do, people will die.

So, I end with the advice we all know. This advice is not a request. It is an instruction. Stay at home, protect lives, and then you will be doing your part.

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