

Message

From: Whitty, Chris [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=0B3EE62E0CA04E978730B14F9B416A1E-WHITTY, CHR]
Sent: 02/10/2020 22:45:07
To: P.Vallance1@go-science.gov.uk; Simon Case - Cabinet Office - (OFFICIAL) [simon.case@cabinetoffice.gov.uk]; CWP [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=cee9a69716524ddfaeb750f9cd118b8c-Wormald, Ch]
CC: Dominic Cummings [DCummings@no10.gov.uk]; Swinson, Clara [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=2c57f68b7aca4c7696d33cdcb66b1d40-CSwinson]; Clare.Lombardelli@hmtreasury.gov.uk; Williams, David [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=84cdb0891dd344d8acdba5689e6d81ba-dwilliamsx]; Lee Cain [LCain@no10.gov.uk]
Subject: The path to spring

Dear Simon, Patrick, Chris (cc others for info)

Getting the tone right over the next 6 months is not going to be easy but is key to getting the least bad outcome. My current working assumption is that the period of greatest pressure will be the conventional 'flu season (see data on all UK 'flu seasons since 1988 below) as the risks will be similar. This is a new virus so this may be wrong but it seems the way to bet at this stage. If so my view is there will be three stages til we get to spring, with many possible variants. Interested in whether you think this sounds right.

1) The Gathering Storm. Oct to mid December.

Cases will be going up overall, with a complex balance of surges and local measures meaning there are peaks and apparent troughs, both over-interpreted in the media. Because the worst is almost certainly in the future it will be difficult not to have a pretty sombre tone; anything else will get caught out by events. Only if the outlook looks consistently a lot better in continental Europe implying this is a non-seasonal peak will it be possible to deviate from a downbeat tone, and even then it's a risk. Point to spring as the chance to be optimistic as this is both realistic, and unlikely to be caught out by events but will feel a long way off to the population and business. Til then head down into the driving rain.

2) In the Bleak Midwinter. Mid Dec to mid Feb.

Peak flu season as a proxy for peak COVID. In other news Christmas, New Year, dry (and possibly fire-broke) Jan. The peak of cases, but possibly not deaths, may occur in this timeframe. NHS under winter pressures. At the same time we should realistically have much better testing capacity, probably lateral flow tests in actual use albeit initially fairly low volumes, could have the first doses of vaccine(s), may have some additional slightly effective drugs in the locker. So both bad and good news. Tone can be a bit less resolutely downbeat.

3) Things Can Only Get Better. Mid Feb to mid April.

Worst peak passed, even if we get a third wave (possible, but likely to be smaller if so) with still significant transmission, but falling. Probability of much better testing capacity allowing for a much more effective test-and-trace for the rest of the year with demand falling and supply still rising. Probability of lateral flow saliva tests in pretty high numbers quite high (not 100%). Good weather will accelerate downswing of virus. A reasonably good chance of at least some moderately effective vaccines present, and possibly some additional drugs with small but incremental improvement in mortality. Can give some confidence to business, population, NHS, that the worst COVID-19 winter is behind us and whilst it is not going to disappear it now becomes a known entity, and a much more manageable risk with science now delivering multiple products through to winter 2021 making winter 2020/21 the nadir. Cautiously optimistic tone likely cheer rather than jar. CMO and CSA let off all press conferences for at least 9 months.

4) Spring.

Data below. ILI= influenza-like illness. Includes other significant respiratory viruses (eg adenovirus).

Chris

When does the season start?
GP ILI consultation activity in England and Wales

