

Forty-seventh SAGE meeting on COVID-19, 16 July 2020.

Held via Video Teleconference.

Summary

1. Mixing between age groups presents challenges for any policy which relies on separating people based on a specific age threshold, particularly if it affects significant numbers of parents and people of working age. Any age-related variation in advice would also need to consider risks to those below the age threshold who are vulnerable for other reasons, as well as the potential longer-term impacts on those affected.
2. There will be co-infection with influenza over winter (high confidence). During co-circulation of influenza and COVID-19, there are likely to be logistical challenges around cohorting of patients and PPE usage (high confidence).
3. SAGE reiterated the importance of optimising and maximising the flu vaccination programme this year to protect at-risk groups.

Situation update

4. SAGE agreed that the notion of 'COVID security' is complex and hard to quantify. Development of a 'COVID-secure' mark of approval is not straightforward. It is theoretically possible to quantify relative risk for particular settings/environments, but this may not be meaningful given the complex and varied interactions and activities of people in those settings. The new transmission consortium study may help to clarify what is feasible and develop a stronger evidence base in this area, but this will take time.
5. The latest estimate of R for the UK is 0.7 to 0.9. The daily growth rate estimate is -5% to -1%. In England, R is estimated at 0.8 to 1.0, with a daily growth rate of -4% to 0%. As previously, SPI-M does not have confidence that regional R estimates are sufficiently robust to inform decisions, since they are based on low case numbers and/or are dominated by clustered outbreaks.
6. CoMix data suggest no change in R for Scotland and Wales — but small increases in some parts of England (the North and the South West), possibly above one and likely linked to recent lifting of measures in England. The data do not indicate significant changes in behaviour, though greater change among younger people; overall, the public appears to be remaining cautious.
7. SPI-M short-term forecasts are to be limited to deaths while their utility is reviewed.

Actions:

- SAGE secretariat to circulate 'COVID-secure' paper to HSE, PHE and BEIS; HSE and PHE to identify relevant additional research questions by 17 July
- HSE to invite SPI-M chair into consortium developing studies for 'COVID-secure' assessment work by 17 July
- JBC, Devolved Administrations and NHS Medical Director to confirm utility of SPI-M short-term forecasts and how these can be improved to cover more local approaches by 23 July
- SAGE secretariat to ascertain veracity of Reasonable Worst-Case Scenario for deaths potentially being used in COVID-19 planning by 16 July