

**Fifty-sixth SAGE meeting on Covid-19, 10th September 2020**  
**Held via Zoom**

**Summary**

1. The current situation in the UK is analogous to the one in early February, with rapidly increasing incidence which is concentrated amongst those with most contacts, most notably younger people.
2. It is almost certain that  $R$  is greater than 1 across large parts of England. This suggests that the epidemic is moving from being concentrated in local outbreaks to more widespread transmission.
3. It is highly likely that further national and local measures will be needed to bring  $R$  back below 1 in addition to those already announced. An early and comprehensive response would mean that measures have more effect and may be needed for a shorter duration.
4. As previously advised, preparation for increases in numbers of cases, hospitalisations and deaths will be critical, particularly as winter approaches.
5. Prioritising rapid testing of symptomatic people is likely to have a greater impact on identifying positive cases and reducing transmission than frequent testing of asymptomatic people in an outbreak area. Any Population Case Detection (PCD) programme should not come at the expense of test, trace and isolate systems.

**Situation update**

6. The current situation in the UK is analogous to the one in early February, with rapidly increasing incidence which is concentrated amongst those with most contacts, most notably younger people. There are already indications of increases in hospital admissions in at least some regions.
7. It is almost certain that increases in infections will lead to increases in hospitalisations and deaths as observed recently in other European countries (high confidence).
8. The latest estimate of  $R$  for the UK is 1.0 to 1.2, while the daily growth rate estimate is -1% to +3%. The latest estimate of  $R$  for England is also 1.0 to 1.2, while the daily growth rate estimate is +1% to +4%. As previously noted, these estimates do not fully reflect recent changes such as the reopening of schools in England and SAGE expects growth rate and  $R$  to increase (moderate confidence).
9. Though there remains variability between areas, it is almost certain that  $R$  is greater than 1 across large parts of England (high confidence). This suggests that the epidemic is moving from being concentrated in local outbreaks to more widespread transmission (high confidence). Major cities, excluding London, appear to be experiencing faster increases in transmission than other areas.
10. ONS infection survey data also indicate increasing incidence. Contact studies show large increases in contacts amongst all age groups during August, and in particularly younger age groups.
11. Similar increases in incidence have been seen elsewhere in Europe recently and are closely linked to easing of non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) and the corresponding increases in contact levels. Large-scale returns to workplaces have been associated with increases in contact levels and transmission in some countries.
12. Different European countries have followed different trajectories following initial increases, depending on the speed and effectiveness of action taken. An earlier and more comprehensive response means that measures have more effect and may be needed for a shorter duration.
13. The effect of schools, colleges and universities across the UK starting new academic years is yet to be seen, though is expected to further increase  $R$  and incidence (high