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Speech

Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 9 September 2020

Prime Minister Boris Johnson made a statement at the coronavirus press conference.

From:

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Coronavirus press conference (9 September 20...



Good afternoon,

Welcome back to Downing Street for an update on coronavirus as we enter autumn and approach winter.

I will first hand over to Chris to take us through the latest data before I set out how we are responding to it.

Thank you Chris. It is clear from that very powerful graphic that we must act.

The most important thing every one of us must do is remember the basics.

First, wash your hands, regularly and for 20 seconds. Don't get back into old habits, it is so vital.

Second, wear a face covering over your mouth and nose if you are in an enclosed space and in close contact with people you don't normally meet. I know wearing a face covering feels odd to some people and I understand that. But face coverings do make it harder for the virus to spread – so please, wear one to protect others.

Third, make space. Always stay 2 metres away from people you don't live with – or 1 metre with extra precautions, like extra ventilation, screens, or face coverings.

Fourth, if you have COVID symptoms, get a test and self-isolate. We are now processing 1.2 million tests a week. To date we have carried out 15.4 million antigen tests – that's more than any other country in Europe, and more per head than other European countries like Germany and Spain.

We are increasing our testing capacity further to meet rising demand. You can help by only booking a test if you have a fever, a new continuous cough, or you've lost your sense of taste or smell – if you don't have those symptoms and haven't been asked to book a test, please don't.

So those are the basics – hands, face, space – and get a test if you have COVID symptoms.

Since the pandemic began, we have asked you to reduce your social contact and limit your interactions with friends and family.

I know that, over time, the rules have become quite complicated and confusing. We have spoken to police officers about what they need for an effective enforcement regime and of course, listened to the feedback from you, the public.

In response, we are simplifying and strengthening the rules – making them easier for you to understand and for the police to enforce.

I should stress that if we are to beat the virus then everyone, at all times, should limit social contact as much as possible and minimise interactions with other households. It is safer to meet outdoors and you should keep your distance from anyone you don't live with, even if they are close friends or family.

So in England, from Monday, we are introducing the rule of 6. You must not meet socially in groups of more than 6 – and if you do, you will be breaking the law.

This will apply in any setting, indoors or outdoors, at home or in the pub.

The ban will be set out in law and it will be enforced by the police – anyone breaking the rules risks being dispersed, fined and possibly arrested.

This single measure replaces both the existing ban on gatherings of more than 30 and the current guidance on allowing 2 households to meet indoors. Now you only

need to remember the rule of 6.

There will be some limited exemptions. For example, if a single household or support bubble is larger than 6, they can still gather.

COVID Secure venues like places of worship, gyms, restaurants and hospitality venues can still hold more than 6 people in total. Within those venues however, there must not be individual groups larger than 6, and groups must not mix socially or form larger groups.

Education and work settings are unaffected, COVID Secure weddings and funerals can go ahead, up to a limit of 30 people, and organised sport will still be able to proceed.

As we have found on previous occasions, this rule of 6 will of course throw up difficult cases. For example, two whole households will no longer be able to meet if they would together exceed the limit of 6 people.

I am sorry about that and I wish that we did not have to take this step. But, as your Prime Minister, I must do what is necessary to stop the spread of the virus and to save lives.

We will of course keep the rule of 6 under constant review and only keep it in place as long as it's necessary.

I also want to see – and the public wants to see – stronger enforcement of the rules which are already in place. So I've have tasked the Cabinet with increasing enforcement and I would like to thank the police, as always, and other authorities for the work they are doing to keep us all safe.

In future:

- Premises and venues where people meet socially will be legally required to request the contact details of a member of every party, record and retain these details for 21 days, and provide them to NHS Test & Trace without delay when required.
- We will support local authorities to make further and faster use of their powers to close venues that are breaking the rules and pose a risk to public health.
- Fines will be levied against hospitality venues that fail to ensure their premises remain COVID Secure.
- We will boost the enforcement capacity of local authorities by introducing COVID Secure Marshalls to help ensure social distancing in town and city centres, and by setting up a register of Environmental Health Officers that local authorities can draw upon for support.
- We will simplify the Passenger Locator Form needed for travelling to the UK, and take measures to ensure these are completed and checked before departure.
- Border Force will step up enforcement efforts at the border to ensure arrivals are complying with the quarantine rules.
- We will also restrict the opening hours of premises, initially in some local areas.

At the present time we must also, I'm afraid, revise plans to pilot larger audiences in venues later this month and review our intention to return audiences to stadiums and conference centres from 1 October. That doesn't mean we're going to scrap the programme entirely it just means we are going to review and abridge it, and the Culture Secretary will say more shortly.

Let me be clear – these measures are not a second national lockdown – the whole point of them is to avoid a second national lockdown.

By bearing down on social contact and improving enforcement, we can keep schools and businesses open, in the knowledge they are COVID Secure.

I have always said schools and colleges should only ever be shut again as a very, very last resort. As the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Adviser have said, the long term risks to children's life chances of not going to school are significant and far greater than the health risks of going back to school.

Indeed it's been fantastic to see so many children back in school this term and I want, once again, to thank all our teachers, and to reassure parents and pupils that schools are safe.

University terms will also begin soon. Opening universities is critical, again, for students' life chances and, again, the health risks to individuals are low.

Of course, many university students are in the age bracket where we have seen the infection rates rise recently as Chris was just explaining. My message to students is simple. Please, for the sake of your education and your parents' and your grandparents' health: wash your hands, cover your face, make space, and don't socially gather in groups of more than 6, now and when term starts.

Today the Department for Education is publishing updated guidance for universities on how they can operate in a COVID Secure way, including a clear request not to send students home in the event of an outbreak, so as to avoid spreading the virus across the country. I am very grateful to universities for their continued cooperation and planning for the return of students.

The measures I have set out today will help us control the virus but won't, on their own, be enough to allow a more significant return to normality.

Patrick is going to set out in a moment where we are on vaccines and treatments in a moment, but we are not there yet and there are no guarantees.

So over the summer, we have therefore been working up an alternative plan which could allow life to return closer to normality. And that plan is based on mass testing.

Up to now, we have used testing primarily to identify people who are positive – so we can isolate them from the community and protect high risk groups. And that will continue to be our priority. We are working hard to increase our testing capacity to 500,000 tests a day by the end of October.

But in future, in the near future, we want to start using testing to identify people who are negative – who don't have coronavirus and who are not infectious - so we

can allow them to behave in a more normal way, in the knowledge they cannot infect anyone else with the virus.

And we think, we hope, we believe that new types of test which are simple, quick and scalable will become available. They use swabs or saliva and can turn round results in 90 or even 20 minutes. Crucially, it should be possible to deploy these tests on a far bigger scale than any country has yet achieved – literally millions of tests processed every single day.

That level of testing would allow people to lead more normal lives, without the need for social distancing:

Theatres and sports venues could test all audience members on the day and let in those with a negative result, all those who are not infectious. Workplaces could be opened up to all those who test negative that morning and allow them to behave in a way that was normal before COVID. Those isolating because they are a contact, or quarantining after travelling abroad, could after a period be tested and released. Now that is an ambitious agenda, but we are going to pilot this approach in Salford from next month, with audiences in indoor and outdoor venues. And then we hope to go nationwide.

There are a number of challenges. We need the technology to work. We need to source the necessary materials to manufacture so many tests. We need to put in place an efficient distribution network. And we need to work through the numerous logistical challenges.

And as I say, we are not there yet, and I should repeat that, as we manage this period of high demand, it is especially important that if individuals don't have symptoms, and have not been specifically advised to take a test, they should not be coming forward for a test - because they could be taking a test away from someone who really needs it.

Our plan – this moonshot that I am describing – will require a giant, collaborative effort from government, business, public health professionals, scientists, logistics experts and many, many more.

Work is underway – and we will get on at pace until we get there, round the clock.

We are hopeful this approach will be widespread by the spring and, if everything comes together, it may be possible even for challenging sectors like theatres to have life much closer to normal before Christmas.

But as I have said before, all this progress is contingent on continued scientific advances and though we're hopeful, I cannot 100% guarantee that those advances will be made.

That is why it is so important that we take these tough measures now.

I believe we will continue to drive this virus down and that we will beat this virus before too long.

So let's work together and follow the rules: meet in groups of no more than six. Wash your hands, cover your face, and make space.

I will now hand over to Patrick to set out the latest on vaccines and treatments, and then we'll go to questions from the public and the media.

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