

Message

From: Whitty, Chris [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=0B3EE62E0CA04E978730B14F9B416A1E-WHITTY, CHR]
Sent: 12/12/2020 4:11:33 PM
To: Price, Natasha [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=2ff9661092c5453aa67b231e819b9653-NPrice4]; 'CWP' [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=cee9a69716524ddfaeb750f9cd118b8c-Wormald, Ch]
Subject: RE: Readout: Call with SoS on latest Epi – 12/12/2020

The PM and Cab Sec called me before I got to call Cab Sec.

I did a slightly watered down version of the conversation below.

Chris

From: Price, Natasha <Natasha.Price@dhsc.gov.uk>
Sent: 12 December 2020 15:48
To: 'Susan Hopkins' <Susan.Hopkins@phe.gov.uk>; Whitty, Chris <Chris.Whitty@dhsc.gov.uk>; Van Tam, Jonathan <Jonathan.VanTam@dhsc.gov.uk>; Harding, Dido <Dido.Harding@dhsc.gov.uk>; Gardiner, Clare <Clare.Gardiner@dhsc.gov.uk>; Williams, David <David.Williams@dhsc.gov.uk>; Permanent Secretary <permanent.secretary@dhsc.gov.uk>; Waite, Thomas <Thomas.Waite@dhsc.gov.uk>; Dunn, Shona <Shona.Dunn@dhsc.gov.uk>; Swinson, Clara <clara.swinson@dhsc.gov.uk>
Subject: Readout: Call with SoS on latest Epi – 12/12/2020

Please treat sensitivity.

Call with SoS on latest Epi – 12/12/2020

Attendees: SoS, Chris Wormald (CW), David Williams (DW), CMO, JVT, Dido Harding, Shona Dunn, Susan Hopkins, Clare Gardiner, Thomas Waite, Clara Swinson.

- SoS thanked the team for the advice on the new variant. Susan noted that this variant is increasing faster than expected but difficult to know whether this is because more samples overall are being sequenced. Susan noted that we will not know about the transmissibility until we have done some more lab work and won't know about the antigenicity until we have grown it. However, Susan noted that in the areas of concern we are seeing growing rates of infection.
- Tom Waite shared some slides with latest data. Tom noted that we have seen particularly high increases in the last 4 days in London, East of England and South East. Tom walked through some examples noting that it is unconfirmed data. Tom noted higher rates in school age students which is relevant with school holidays coming up. Tom noted that population movements over Christmas could lead to further spread. Tom shared the last 4 days of data and noted that the latest data most likely underestimates the likely case count. Tom zoomed in on the data in Basildon and noted that in this area the data would suggest a doubling time of less than 5 days. Tom noted that the increase is not as dramatic in London but still a potential doubling time of less than 5 days. Tom noted that this is right across London, not just in the areas where we have seen growth recently.
- Tom also noted that in the South East there is a possible regional doubling time of around 7 days. Tom noted that in some areas rates have seen a very high increase since the national lockdown ended. Tom noted that some areas have doubled since the end of the national restrictions. Tom also noted that in Kent there is limited evidence of slow down either from end of lockdown or Tier 3. Tom noted that the major issue is the increasing trend and whether we should be making decision before the 16th. Tom also raised whether additional measures over and above Tier 3 are needed in some of these areas. Tom also flagged potential need for additional restriction over the Christmas period.

- Susan noted that the increases in the 'grey zone' are very concerning. Susan noted that if the doubling is 5-7 days it will have doubled before we even get to next week's Tiering decision and ahead of Christmas easements.
- SoS noted that we clearly need to act but that we need to consider timing and the full range of actions, including testing activity. **Shona to note.**
- SoS also noted that there is a clear hypothesis is that this new variant is a cause of the growing case rate. SoS noted that if this is true than the current Tiers are not calibrated for this. SoS noted that his instincts are to go hard and go early. SoS also noted the EU exit interaction given the location.
- CMO noted that it is difficult to tell whether the variant is going up fast because it is more transmissible or if the variant is going up fast because disease is growing in that area regardless. CMO noted that either way this speed of increase will not go away in Tier 2. CMO noted that a lot of the problem in Kent and East could be linked to London.
- CMO advised that as a minimum we need to look at all of the areas that are going up in Tier 2 and move them into Tier 3 and recommended that we look to move before next weekend.
- CMO noted that the biggest worry is the immune response of the new variant and any impact on the vaccine. CMO also noted that this variant does not appear to be more deadly.
- JVT agreed with CMO that you could end up with rates 4 times as high at the point of entering Christmas bubbles. JVT noted an additional concern about mass migration out of London being planned for Christmas which will compound things.
- Dido also noted that any delay in taking a decision over Tier 3 for London is changing behaviours now.
- SoS noted that the key concern is less the variant but more the epi. CMO and JVT agreed – even with the variant the actions are the same. CW noted that there is serious epi curve problem to which this variant may or may not be a problem.
- DW noted that we need to increase compliance (in chat).
- Shona flagged that they have a comprehensive plan to surge testing but the bigger question is on national measures. Shona noted that you may just need to make a decision about Tier 3 now but noted that community testing now is unlikely to make an immediate difference to the current rates.
- Susan agreed and noted (in the chat) that it is essential to find cases but the current case numbers are baked in for the next week – Susan noted that what we need to do is stop them doubling in the following two weeks
- SoS asked whether we need to move into full lockdown in Kent.
- Clare raised possibility of additional travel restrictions in Tier 3 including over the Christmas period. Claire also questioned whether we should go wider on geography as people are leaving Tier 3 to socialise in Tier 2 areas. SoS asked whether we are seeing this in the mobile phone data. Clare noted that they are hearing this anecdotally but can look at mobile phone data. **Action: JBC to review data of travel between Tier 3 and Tier 2 areas.**
- Clare also raised a possible new Year fire break and/or to consider a change to the Christmas easements.
- CW noted that the immediate decision is what geography, what measures and what timing we should implement right now. CW noted that we will need to move quicker than Gold. CW thought we should take this decision as soon as we possibly can.
- SoS asked for a recommendation on geography, measures and timing. SoS felt that we should have a further discussion tomorrow morning. **Action: PO to set up.**
- DW noted (in the chat box) that a renewed stay home, work from home if you can to cut down on commuting into London would be helpful.
- SoS noted that we may need to consider a Tier 4 type response, similar to the national lockdown measures.
- **Action: JBC to provide a clear public health recommendation on 1) geography, 2) types of measures, including possible Tier 4 restrictions and 3) timing for implementation [this needs to factor in timings for drafting any new measures beyond the current Tiers]. This advice should also include recommended next steps (e.g. Gold/Covid-O) and an engagement plan.**
- SoS noted that we will also need to engage with the Mayor of London. SoS also asked about Kevin Fenton views. Susan noted that there is a 5pm London meeting.

- Shona flagged that there is lot of work going on with London on community testing. Shona noted that right now she is not looking at expanding beyond London. SoS agreed.
- **Action: Tom** to share slides with this group and PO to share in confidence with the Cab Sec & James Bowler, plus Susan's submission on the variant. SoS asked that this include more detail on the scale of the problem in London.
- **Action: SoS** to update CDL.

~~Natasha Price~~, Principal Private Secretary

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