

**FOR INFORMATION**

**OPTIONS FOR CHANGING SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES**

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**SUMMARY**

1. Following our discussion yesterday and in advance of the discussion with Foreign Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, CDL and the Health Secretary this afternoon, we thought it would be helpful to set out the issues that we need to work through next week and provide some context for the key decisions.

**TIMING**

2. We are aiming to set out the Government's approach to the next phase of our Covid strategy at the end of next week. Annex A presents a framework for a potential announcement. The Government has a statutory obligation to review the current law on social distancing measures before midnight on 7 May to ensure they are still necessary for public health purposes. Whatever we say late next week about the roadmap beyond May, we need to discharge that legal commitment.
3. You have been clear that any decision to depart from current arrangements must be informed by the most up to date data and scientific assessment. Annex B sets out the schedule on which we will receive new information next week. All of this data - including the new ONS survey - should be used to inform the final decision on changes to measures as well as the road ahead. The ONS data on the level of R will only be available on Thursday itself. You may therefore decide to formally conclude the review of the current measures before midnight on 7 May, making no changes to the measures; but decide subsequently to make changes to the current rules on the basis of the new ONS data, with that data also providing the basis for the Government's announcement on its approach to the next phase. We will provide you with formal advice to take the decision, and you have advice from the Cabinet Secretary suggesting how you might approach Cabinet on Tuesday and engagement with the Opposition.
4. There is also a judgement to make on whether the Government has met the five tests it set as a prerequisite for changing the social distancing measures:
  - a. **The NHS must be able to cope**; we must be confident that we are able to provide sufficient critical care and specialist treatment right across the UK.
  - b. **a sustained and consistent fall in the daily death rates** from coronavirus so we are confident that we have moved beyond the peak.
  - c. **reliable data from SAGE showing that the rate of infection is decreasing to manageable levels** across the board.
  - d. to be confident that the range of operational challenges, including testing capacity and PPE, are in hand, with **supply able to meet future demand**.
  - e. to be **confident that any adjustments to the current measures will not risk a second peak** of infections that overwhelm the NHS.
5. We will provide formal advice on the degree to which each has been met next week. In broad terms, the latest data suggests the first three tests have been met: NHS capacity has improved (with 46% of critical care beds and 55% of mechanical ventilation beds

available), the death rate is falling (739 on Friday, compared to 935 at the point of the last review) and the rate of infections is falling. SAGE's current estimate for R in the community is between 0.6 and 0.85, although the new ONS data will give us a firmer estimate later next week. The fourth test is more challenging: you are familiar with the difficulty in matching supply and demand for PPE and TTC. We are seeking SAGE's view now on whether the proposed changes will meet the fifth test, with an acceptably small risk of a second peak that would overwhelm the NHS. As the Chief Medical Officer made clear on Friday, this risk cannot be ruled out entirely.

## **PRINCIPLES AND OVERALL APPROACH**

6. The options we discussed yesterday begin to set out a roadmap for how we could go about lifting measures, should you conclude we have sufficiently met the tests. This is set out in the attached slide. This is not a firm final proposition: it is for discussion with other Ministers and, as above, we are continuing to test it with SAGE. There are limits on our ability to accurately predict the impacts that the specific measures may have on the spread of infection - we will necessarily need to make decisions on the basis of imperfect information, and build monitoring capacity over the coming weeks. It is possible that we will make an initial round of changes and then be unable to make further changes at the pace proposed in the roadmap, depending on the impact of the changes on R.
7. We have put together the draft roadmap on the basis of the following principles, which were set out in the slide deck you saw yesterday and which you will want to be satisfied with. They are based on a cautious approach:
  - a. we will **change measures in phases, leaving sufficient gaps to monitor and assess impact**. We will only move to the next set of changes if we are satisfied with the level of the R number;
  - b. we will start by **easing measures first that pose the lowest risk relative to their reward** in terms of wider health, economic and societal impact. In this context we will prioritise opening spaces or enabling activities that are easiest to make safe and secure;
  - c. we will **gradually move from general to targeted measures**, with a close attention to fairness and so with mitigations where appropriate;
  - d. we will **seek to communicate changes in advance of making them** to give people time to plan, but being clear this is always subject to the data saying it is safe from a Covid perspective and the R number to do so; and
  - e. we will **only make changes that are practical**: where something is law, it must be practically enforceable or the public will lose confidence in the measure. In the end, it is the behaviour and choices of individuals which will determine whether or not the intended level of activity is achieved.
8. Based on these principles, the roadmap sets out the following broad approach for the main blocks of measures we have introduced, phased gradually so we can assess impact on R and on overall incidence as things progress:
  - a. **Getting people back to work and reopening business**: Encouraging people to return to work in the sectors that are open - such as manufacturing and construction - in May, gradually open retail from June, and opening further businesses and indoor recreation over the summer. Those working from home should be told to keep doing so, but when we relax this will be a key decision (HMT favour June). This will be subject to these workplaces being 'safe', in line with the guidance being developed by HMT and BEIS. The underlying logic here

is that businesses that can most easily implement social distancing open first, the ones for whom it is harder because their business is inherently about social contact will have to come later. There are choices on how to frame the messaging and produce the guidance, and the options as to how to encourage employees back to work. The Chancellor and BEIS SoS should provide further advice on these options on the basis of the work they are doing and discussions they are having with business.

- b. **Opening up more public places:** Enabling outdoor sports that facilitate social distancing from June, with other outdoor activities opening in July; opening key community buildings from July (community centres, libraries, youth clubs), with other spaces opening later in the year (museums, galleries, theatres). The same underlying logic as for businesses applies here.
  - c. **Getting children back into education and childcare:** Starting with either younger children (primary/early years) or those in key transition years in June, before opening secondary schools later in the year. A rota system could be part of the plan.
  - d. **Letting people see each other:** Enabling two households to mix from late May or from June (an expanded social “bubble”), while also allowing slightly larger public gatherings - scaling up further over time. Also enabling small weddings and larger funerals from May, with small religious services in places of worship from July.
  - e. **Increasing controls and segmentation to mitigate risks in key areas:** including requiring all those arriving into the UK (subject to exceptions including maintaining the flow of critical goods) to self-isolate for a period of 14 days from end May (see separate parallel advice on this), and also increasing protections for the most ‘at risk’ by advising them to be more cautious about changing behaviour as we change measures.
9. The roadmap assumes the underlying enablers, some covered by the 5 tests - NHS capacity, availability of PPE, and the safer spaces programme etc. - are in place.
10. The critical additional enabler is a robust **monitoring and alert system** which can collect and analyse granular, local data to identify and flag any outbreaks and linked to an alert mechanism ( I&S ) to give a consistent and clearly communicated assessment of risk. This needs to be accompanied by a process for taking swift localised action if needed. DHSC and ONS are currently working this up. This will need to be accompanied by a clear plan as to how measures would be reimposed, potentially at a local level, in the event that R increases or outbreaks occur. This sits alongside **testing and tracing (TT)** those with symptoms and their contacts at scale in order to support containment of the virus. This is being developed by DHSC and NHSx. By 18 May, we should have the ability to trace and test c.25,000 people with Covid symptoms each day, isolating them and their contacts to prevent further spread and control the infection rate. This includes the planned introduction of a bluetooth app which will enhance our ability to effectively trace and isolate all contacts. We need assurance from DHSC that the system can meet the anticipated case numbers once these are provided by SAGE. Part of the logic behind waiting until 1 June to make significant changes to measures is to give some buffer to TT being ready.

11. A question to resolve over the coming weeks is **how far to relax the current measures ahead of the Summer**. We need to proceed with caution, but if significant changes are deferred until September, there will not be time for them to bed in before winter and the spike in pressure on the NHS. Summer is also an important firebreak for measures given holidays mean no schools and less work. Summer trade is also particularly important to some parts of the economy, principally the hospitality sector.
12. Alongside this, we will need to decide how we alter the support the Government is giving to business. The current schemes broadly stop at the end of June, and the generosity of the scheme will, to some degree, act as a brake on businesses returning. Equally, for sectors that will find it hardest to reopen with social distancing - restaurants, bars, cinemas etc - we will need to decide how long and how much support to give. HMT are working on this and the Chancellor should discuss this with you bilaterally.
13. **The approach to making changes will have different impacts on different groups**. The roadmap seeks to deliver changes in a fair way, easing some of measures that are having the most significant impact on people, while noting this is inherently hard to balance with the need to manage social distancing. For example: reopening non-essential retail will particularly benefit women and low income people who are disproportionately represented in these sectors; reopening schools will obviously have a broad benefit, but will particularly help lower income people, often single parent households, who find it most difficult to balance work and childcare, as well as vulnerable children; expanding people's social "bubble" will particularly benefit those who live on their own and are most lonely. But this is a difficult balancing act, especially against the need to be constantly vigilant to the level of social contact and risk this may pose to the R number.
14. In this context, the measures that we have in place to protect the most vulnerable are critical. The roadmap assumes that shielding continues, but also **an effective response to the spread of the virus in care homes**. That matters, of course, because of the vulnerability of people in residential care settings and the need for us to protect them as far as we can; but also because movement in and out (e.g. by staff) can impact on R in the community, undermining wider attempts to control the spread. We have commissioned SAGE for advice on this. However, all these protective measures will mean that the most vulnerable feel the benefit of easing measures least. Ahead of announcing the next phase we need to do more work on how we might mitigate this - for example, requesting reopening shops to provide dedicated time for older people, or prioritising some testing for the families of the shielded and isolated.

### **SEQUENCING OF MEASURES - POLICY CHOICES**

15. While the road map poses choices across the piece, as set out in the red boxes marked on it, we think there are three particularly important ones because of the increased level of contact but also economic and social benefit they imply:
  - a. **When and how fast to reopen non-essential retail**. This is a significant portion of the economy both in terms of demand and supply, accounting for around 1.3m jobs, and the example of the supermarkets has shown how it can be done relatively safely. Equally reopening this sector will inevitably involve significant increased social contact. The roadmap sets out an option to do this on 1 June, allowing some more time to assess R and give business notice. This would mean making two changes (along with schools) simultaneously. So it

also sets out the option to phase this during May, which is HMT's preference; but a more cautious approach would be to phase later.

As we discussed yesterday, **transport is a particularly difficult issue for the small proportion of people who use public transport to commute**. We therefore need to ensure that the return to work is phased so that it is practical and safe for commuters, and - as per your steer - encourage people to cycle and walk. We are asking DfT and HMT to consider what a package on this could look like, and you have a specific session on transport on Tuesday.

- b. **When and how to reopen schools.** The roadmap sets out the option to reopen primary schools from 1 June (after half-term), which was one option discussed with the Education Secretary yesterday. The alternative is his department's proposal to focus on key transition years (Reception, years 6, 10 and 12) in the first instance, with more opening in September if the science allows. Whichever option we choose there is a significant operational challenge for schools to adjust and also to ensure children who aren't in school have some face-to-face contact. As the CMO pointed out yesterday, the summer holiday will provide a natural firebreak in any reopening plan - although not of course if we decide to use the summer holiday for school provision, which is also being considered. You are getting further options from DfE on this at the start of the week.
- c. **When and how to start letting people see more of each other - expanding their social "bubble".** Seeing family and friends came first and second respectively in a YouGov poll which asked what was most missed most during lockdown. Allowing more social contact would have significant societal benefit, alleviating loneliness for those that are not working or living alone, and providing support or respite for those that are otherwise vulnerable at home. However, this has been at the core of the 'stay at home' guidance, and once we start relaxing it it may be hard both to limit and enforce.

The current assumption is that we will do this on 1 June, but this is a choice, as reflected on the roadmap, of whether to do it earlier. There are also different ways of going about this:

- i. **Allowing two households to link, forming an exclusive "bubble"**, allowing members within the bubble to interact as if they were a single household, coming and going between each other's houses or outdoors; and/or
- ii. **Allow people to leave the house for the purpose of meeting members of one other household**, initially outdoors. The current rules is not gatherings of more than 2; this could be scaled up to, for example, four adults with children (or a group of up to four under-18s). This option would also mean allowing people to leave their house more generally (e.g. to sunbathe or picnic) even if they were not seeing friends or family.

## **COMMUNICATING APPROACH**

- 16. The roadmap as set out is for planning purposes, it is not intended to be a published document. We will need to consider carefully what we say publicly next week. The

proposal is that this announcement would be accompanied by the publication of a comprehensive roadmap setting out the Government's approach. Annex A sets out a proposed framework for the announcement. Reflecting the above and taking a cautious but transparent approach, the key messages that you might want to deliver next week are:

- a. We say **we are moving now into the next phase, where we should stay alert**. In terms of immediate steps, this would involve from the day we make the announcement: encouraging a return to work for those that cannot work from home; saying that children of key workers and vulnerable children should return to school; and changing guidance to permit more than one period of outdoor exercise per day. The first two of these are already permitted within the guidance regulation, so this is about using the messaging to seek to encourage people.
- b. we say we are supporting this and **building public confidence with a new "safer spaces" programme** through engagement with business, unions and the wider public to reduce the risk of transmission in work, schools, public places, recreational settings and transport. The intention would be to announce new guidelines to people on safer distancing (including on 2m and masks, etc) and then sector by sector guidance, underpinned by dialogue between business, unions and local government.
- c. we signal that, if the data on the R number and the five tests (and successful implementation of the Safer Spaces programme) support it, **at the start of June we intend to begin easing the formal measures, starting with opening non-essential retail and bringing primary schools back**.
- d. we say that **we will then move through further measures (such as further retail, public places, gatherings and pubs) over the weeks and months after that**, again always guided by the data. The five tests (and the legal test) will continue to guide our decisions, and that as part of the safer spaces programme we will work with business, unions and others on preparing these sectors.
- e. we stress that as we go through these changes, **we seek to be fair and always seek to protect the vulnerable** - including through continued shielding and specific advice for people in high risk groups.
- f. to underpin all of the above, we announce **we are putting in place a new national and local monitoring and surveillance system** to support these decisions to dial measures down - but be clear that it is possible that we would need to reimpose some measures, perhaps at a local level, if the data demands it.

### **NEXT STEPS**

17. Annex B sets out the timings for the coming week. We will provide formal advice next week, once the scientific advice from SAGE on the potential impact of the package and the updated R data have been received, as well as papers for consideration by Cabinet.



**ANNEX A: FRAMEWORK OF ANNOUNCEMENT FOR 7/8 MAY ON SOCIAL DISTANCING**

1. **We are past the peak, but must tread carefully.** [Choice: What stats do we use to demonstrate that we are past the peak?]
2. **[We have met five tests.]**
3. **Now we can move to the next phase - stay alert:** the Government will proceed carefully and cautiously. It will be guided by the evidence.
4. **Proceeding with renewed vigilance:** there will be a new monitoring function and alert system in Government that provides a scientific-based assessment of the risk in local areas over time.
5. **And rolling out new testing and tracing capacity:** with [the capacity to test and trace 25,000 people by 18 May] date so that new infections can be quickly identified and isolated, keeping communities safe.
6. **Quarantine:** we will be requiring all those arriving into the UK (subject to exceptions including for those involved in maintaining the flow of critical goods) to self-isolate for a period of 14 days.
7. **Continue to protect the NHS.**
8. **We have a plan:** with these foundations in place, we are announcing today our roadmap for adjusting measures; this will be over time and today's announcement is a proposed roadmap for our way back to normal life and we will do this against a clear set of principles.
9. **We will proceed slowly and with caution:** this will not be a quick process as we will need to continue careful monitoring and only make changes when we know it's safe. This means we will introduce changes on a 3-4 week cycle.
10. **Take immediate steps:** [Advise people to stay alert]. Announce from 11th May:
  - a. You [can/should] go back to work (if you cannot work from home) in sectors that have not been actively closed, for example construction, tv and film production, manufacturing. Hospitality and non-essential retail will remain closed.
  - b. Key workers, and those with vulnerable children, should send children to school.
  - c. You can do outdoor exercise more than once a day.
11. **Changes will be underpinned by a comprehensive plan to make workplaces and schools safer:** we have worked with business and unions to develop revised guidance to make work spaces safer.
12. **And by new measures supporting transport:** we have worked with businesses and providers on new guidance for transport (including advice on face masks) and [are

announcing a new package to enable alternative modes of transport, including revolutionising this nation's approach to cycling.]

13. **Intended changes at start of June subject to R:** we will review every week whether we are continuing to meet the 5 tests and managing the virus. If we stay on course at the beginning of June we will:
  - a. Begin to open retail: which we will do gradually, and based on reassurances that businesses have implemented the latest scientific guidance to make their premises safe. [May phase this]
  - b. Begin to return children to school: [starting with early years/primary]
  - c. Begin to broaden our social circles [if not done in May]: we will look for safe ways to allow people to spend time with their loved ones and friends. This will not be a complete return to normal; we need to tread carefully. But we should take sensible steps to allow households and families to spend time together.
  
14. **Ambition for changes from July onwards:** week by week and month by month we will reopen remaining businesses and public spaces subject to the R number. We will start with those where it is easier to maintain your distance from others. We will work with business owners and corporations to develop guidance to make businesses safer.
  
15. **We must all support each other with this plan.** Where you can continue to work from home, you should. This is crucial for us to keep transport and other public places from overcrowding, keeping them safe for everyone that needs to use them to get our economy and education sectors working again.
  
16. **We will update the Government's guidance to reflect these changes:** [note: but the underlying regulations will largely remain in force].
  
17. **Fairness:** we will do all we can to address the unequal way this virus impacts on certain parts of the population:
  - a. We will continue to shield and help alleviate the burden of that with [a new mental health initiative and a package for children in shielded households to continue their education.]
  - b. We will put in place further steps to protect vulnerable people living in care homes.
  - c. As we learn from the science we may issue different advice for people who are higher risk e.g. older people to stay home more, people with risky underlying conditions to work from home for longer.

## ANNEX B: TIMELINE FOR DECISIONS ON SOCIAL DISTANCING

### Scientific and data inputs

1. **This weekend**, you will receive the first set of data from the ONS's new population-sample survey. This will provide an assessment of prevalence of the virus in the community, including a breakdown by broad age groups. This will repeat every week.
2. On **Tuesday 5th May** SAGE will provide an updated modelled version of R, drawing on the first set of ONS data. This is likely to be similar to modelled estimates in recent weeks.
3. On **Tuesday 5th May**, SAGE will also provide a formal view on the proposed package of measures to be announced later in the week.
4. The second round of ONS data will be provided in the afternoon of **Thursday 7th May**. From this, SAGE will be able to provide an updated estimate of R late in the afternoon/early evening, based on real data rather than modelling.

### Social Distancing review: legal requirements

LPP/LAP

6. Given the timing challenges in taking a decision on Thursday 7th May on the basis of the updated R data, a formal decision could be taken ahead of 23:59 on Thursday to maintain the restrictions for the time being, on the basis of Tuesday's modelled R. This decision needs to be taken formally by the SoS for Health and Social Care. Following this, once the updated data has been received on Thursday afternoon, a further decision to make changes can be made, collectively agreed - and then announced sometime between **Friday 8 and Monday 11 May**.