

Fifty-second SAGE meeting on COVID-19, 20 August 2020.

Held via Video Teleconference.

Summary

1. SAGE noted the recent increase in infection rates in Birmingham, predominately amongst the South Asian population, but with a growing proportion of the Black British and White British population affected. SAGE noted that the pattern of spread is rather wide and does not suggest a single point outbreak. SAGE reiterated previous advice that acting early to mitigate further spread is critical.
2. Considering all available data, it is likely that incidence may be increasing slowly, meaning R may be above 1 in England and across the UK.
3. Risk of transmission at any large venue or event will depend on several factors, including prevalence of infection at the time; the design of the venue; indoor environment; and the nature of the event and the audience. Risk assessments and mitigation plans should therefore be specific to each venue and event.
4. Larger gatherings and events, particularly those held indoors, typically pose higher risks of transmission due to increased proximity and mixing of people. The gathering of people on the way to and from events in transport and pubs poses a more significant risk.
5. SAGE noted risks in the timing of reopening large events and venues, particularly when incidence rates are increasing across Europe, and in some parts of North England, which could signal conflicting messages.

Situation update

6. SAGE noted the recent increase in infection rates in Birmingham, predominately amongst the South Asian population, but with a growing proportion of the Black British and White British population affected. SAGE noted that the pattern of spread is rather wide and does not suggest a single point outbreak. SAGE reiterated previous advice that acting early to mitigate further spread is critical.
7. SAGE thanked PHE for the hard work and support to date, on which it relies on for data and information. SAGE will continue to work closely with the new structure and organisation as it evolves.
8. SAGE approved R and growth rate estimates. The latest estimate of R for the UK is 0.9 to 1.1, while the daily growth rate estimate is -3% to +1% (90% confidence interval). As previously, these estimates mask wide regional variation across the country and should be treated as a guide to the general trend.
9. In England, R is estimated at 0.9 - 1.0, with a daily growth rate of -3% to 0%. However, these estimates of R rely on lagged data (for example number of deaths). SPI-M does not have confidence that R is currently below 1 in England.
10. Analysis of pillar 2 testing data suggests a daily growth rate of around +3% over the past 2 weeks in England (90% confidence interval). As previously, this should be treated with caution given changes in the population being tested, particularly in areas of local intervention where testing volumes have increased. Additionally, interpretation of pillar 2 data is difficult as only 11% of tests have a known reason for the test being requested.