

Message

From: Whitty, Chris [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=0B3EE62E0CA04E978730B14F9B416A1E-WHITTY, CHR]
Sent: 03/09/2020 08:43:27
To: Simon Case [scase@no10.gov.uk]
CC: P.Vallance1@go-science.gov.uk; CWP [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=cee9a69716524ddfaeb750f9cd118b8c-Wormald, Ch]
Subject: Structured firebreak

Dear Simon

The PM has stated his strong desire to avoid a national lockdown (I am sure shared by the rest of the population) and to protect the Christmas/New Year festive season as much as possible.

I think there are broadly three scenarios over winter.

- a) The residual covid secure opening, behaviours, local lockdowns, test-and-trace etc keep the national R at or below 1 through to spring, and with a bit of a squeeze and vigorous local action we get through without a major national intervention. Clearly this is the preferred option, but probability well below 100%.
- b) The other extreme; we return to rapid national exponential growth, with a clear risk of a surge in mortality and/or the NHS becoming overwhelmed at a time of year it is under greater pressure than it was this April/May. We have no choice on timing and have to go for a national intervention at speed, albeit probably a bit more targeted than the last one (eg protecting schools).
- c) It is clear we are going to need a national intervention because the exponential growth is national (or at least over wide regions), but we have a bit of flexibility on when because doubling time is in weeks rather than days. A 2-3 week partial or full lockdown, especially after a high risk event, would act as a fire break, and a return from a doubling to a halving of the virus. I think we should be considering this scenario quite seriously, as I think it as likely as the other two. There will be weeks of the year between now and Easter which would be least/most damaging economically and socially to have a lockdown of some sort, and we should identify those and plan to have them as structured firebreaks if needed. This would reduce the negative effects.

There was a signal that some of the surge in cases seen in the Pakistani British population followed the two Eid celebrations, and the Christmas celebrations are likely to be much wider in scope even if current social distancing is in place.

I hope this makes sense. Happy to discuss if useful.

Chris