

INFORMATION

COVID STRATEGY FOR AUTUMN

Date: 28 August 2020

From: Simon Case and Ollie Ilott

Deadline: 1 September

1. Over the last week, you have challenged us on our strategy for tackling COVID in the Autumn. We have reviewed, interrogated and improved our existing plans. We need to give the public, Government and media a vision which provides optimism and hope, and is able to do so because it is credible and realistic. I am especially grateful to Meg, Henry and the COVID Taskforce for working flat out on this over the last 48 hours.

PLAN A: EXIT THE EPIDEMIC IN AUTUMN

2. Plan A is as you have consistently directed: to begin the return to normal in November. The plan relies on deploying an effective vaccine, game-changing therapeutic or Moonshot mass-testing programme in the Autumn. That could enable a significant relaxation of remaining restrictions ahead of Christmas. The efficacy of the vaccine, treatment or testing programme, and the scale at which it can be deployed, will determine how close we can get to 'normal'.
3. This is the plan which we are using to mobilise Whitehall. It is an optimistic vision around which we can organise the resources of Government, our comms narrative and your Ministers. You are aware, however, that the likelihood is low that we will deploy a vaccine or game-changing therapeutic, and that the mass-testing programme needs more work to prove that it is deliverable at scale. We therefore also need a Plan B and a Plan C.

PLAN B: REMOVE SOCIAL DISTANCING BY CHRISTMAS

4. Plan B is an optimistic but credible vision in the event that we cannot deploy a vaccine, game-changing therapeutic or mass-testing programme this Autumn. The central focus is to remove the 1m+ social distancing guidance by Christmas, facilitating a significant return to normality. This would be enabled by the aggressive optimisation of the existing elements of our strategy: clearer communications on behaviour, better test and trace, ferocious local interventions, tougher enforcement and a greater use of facemasks.
5. A key element of this plan is to give people more confidence about the low levels of risk that they face. This means providing the public with detailed information about

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their own susceptibility, a codification of high, medium and low risk environments and easily accessible data about the spread of the infection in their area.

6. Plan B would deliver a Christmas which will look and feel more normal. With the end of 1m+ distancing, theatres could resume normal service and households can gather in a way that is not currently possible.

PLAN C: CONTINGENCY PLANNING

7. Plan C is the scenario that we must plan for as a matter of responsible Government, while putting all of our efforts into making sure that it does not come to pass. A plausible worst-case scenario is that the return of schools triggers a series of small outbreaks, which are managed through the DfE's 'tiered' plan for varying pupil attendance. Universities, however, pose a greater challenge: in this scenario, students do not follow social distancing and there are larger, localised outbreaks, as has been seen in the US. Individual universities panic, and send their student populations home, seeding the infection across the country. Meanwhile, the situation continues to deteriorate in other countries, and so the rate of transmission from abroad increases. The return to work, and a general deterioration in compliance, contributes to higher transmission in the general population. In this scenario, local outbreaks would become increasingly severe through October and, by November, we would need to take a call on a national response. It is unlikely that we would be able to press ahead with the planned return of mass events in October and the proposed end to social distancing at Christmas.
8. We have a plan for managing each of these risks. Your COVID Taskforce is undertaking urgent work with DfE to make sure that there is a reliable plan for universities. We are looking to refresh our borders policy, and could pivot our testing resources to the border if the international situation deteriorates sharply. And our local interventions are becoming smarter and tougher with every passing week. Nevertheless, we need to keep planning for this scenario and keep Whitehall focussed on all of these risks. We are conducting table-top exercises this coming week to prepare for these scenarios.

NEXT STEPS: SETTING DIRECTION

9. Plan A enables us to do three things:
 - a. it communicates a vision of hope and optimism to the public and media;
 - b. it gives clear direction to Government; and
 - c. it provides a framework within which we can schedule comms interventions.
10. As you know, despite our efforts, the odds are against us in delivering Plan A. Plan B therefore provides an alternative, optimistic scenario which focuses on returning a much greater degree of normality by Christmas. Plan C is the contingency planning

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that we must undertake to be ready for the Autumn; as you know, the CMO has advised that our existing response may come under strain as we enter the Winter. Each of these plans is summarised in the attached slides.

11. What you have here is the top level view. I would be grateful for initial reactions, and we will find time to discuss next week. It is essential that we finalise a plan (with contingencies) and stick to it. On the basis of an agreed plan, in which you have ongoing confidence, we can direct government effort and provide a consistent narrative to the country.

PRIME MINISTER'S COMMENTS:

cc: Mark Sedwill
Martin Reynolds
Stuart Glassborow

NR

Imran Shafi

Patrick Curry
James Slack
Ed Lister
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