

Business Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 9 June 2020

Coronavirus press conference 9 June 2020

Good afternoon and welcome to today's coronavirus briefing. I am here with Sarah Albon, Chief Executive of the Health and Safety Executive.

Today I want to update you on our continuing work to re-open our country's economy.

And I know this matters greatly to everyone.

Before I do so, I want to take you through the latest daily coronavirus data slides.

The first slide shows cases confirmed with a test. 5,870,506 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out or posted out in the UK. This includes 102,930 tests carried out or posted out yesterday. 289,140 people have tested positive, an increase of 1,387 cases since yesterday. The graph shows a steadily falling number of identified cases on a 7-day rolling average, despite the increase in testing.

The second slide shows the latest data from hospitals. 446 people were admitted to hospital with coronavirus in England, Wales and Northern Ireland on 6 June, down from 624 a week earlier, and down from a peak of 3,431 on 1 April. 513 coronavirus patients are currently in mechanical ventilation beds in the UK, down from 653 a week ago, and down from a peak of 3,301 on 12 April.

The third slide shows what is happening in hospitals across the country. There are now 6,348 people in hospital with coronavirus in the UK, down 17% from 7,622 a week ago and down from a peak of 20,698 on 12 April. As the graphs show, while there is some variation, most nations and regions of the UK are broadly following a similar pattern.

The fourth slide shows the daily figures for those who have sadly lost their lives after testing positive for coronavirus. Across all settings, the total number of deaths now stands at 40,883. That's an increase of 286 fatalities since yesterday. When measured by a 7-day rolling average, the daily number of deaths currently stands at 216, down from a peak of 943 on 14 April.

The fifth slide shows the deaths where coronavirus was confirmed or suspected reported by the Office for National Statistics. These figures take slightly longer to compile than the daily figures as they are drawn from death certificates. They include not just deaths confirmed with a positive test for COVID-19, but also those confirmed by a doctor without a test, and those where COVID-19 was suspected but not confirmed.

The first chart shows that up to 29 May, the Office for National Statistics

(ONS) reported a total of 50,107 deaths in the UK where COVID-19 was mentioned on the death certificate. This compares to the figure of 38,593 deaths confirmed with a positive test previously reported by the Department of Health and Social Care over the same period.

The second chart shows deaths by place of occurrence. Since the start of the outbreak, 62% of registered COVID-19 deaths have occurred in hospitals and 31% have occurred in care homes.

At the start of this crisis, we took the necessary step of closing vast numbers of shops – all but those we regarded as essential – to try and stop the spread of coronavirus and protect the public.

That was the right decision, even though there is no escaping the hardships it will have caused for businesses and their staff.

To support those workers, and businesses, we put in place an unprecedented package of support including, small business grants, loans, the job retention scheme, and the self-employed scheme.

Now, thanks to the efforts of the British public in following social distancing rules, we have succeeded in reducing the number of infections and getting the R rate under control.

That is why we can carefully begin to open parts of the economy which were required to be closed, in a phased and careful manner.

On 1 June we allowed car showrooms and outdoor markets to open.

Thanks to the on-going enormous efforts of people across the country, we continue to meet the Five Tests set out in the Prime Minister's roadmap.

And the R-rate continues to stay below 1.

So I can confirm today that retail outlets which have been required to be closed, will be able to open their doors again from Monday 15 June so long as they comply with the COVID-secure guidelines we published on 25 May.

This is the latest step in the careful restarting of our economy and will enable high streets up and down the country to spring back to life.

Of course, many shops have remained open throughout the pandemic ensuring that we are able to buy the essentials we need.

And I would like to thank those workers at supermarkets, pharmacies, post offices and other essential retailers for their dedication during this period.

Many of these businesses rapidly adapted to introduce social distancing early on.

Including special opening hours for vulnerable people, perspex screens at checkouts, floor markings to guide shoppers and limiting the number of

customers allowed inside a store at one time.

In the new normal, we have all got used to shopping with social distancing.

Now is the right time to apply these principles more widely, to more shops, as we continue our cautious re-opening of the economy.

To support this, on 25 May, my department published updated COVID-secure Safer Working guidance for people who work in or run shops or branches in the retail sector.

This has given retail businesses enough time to make sure their premises are COVID-secure, and this will allow workers to return safely back to stores, and welcome back shoppers on Monday.

This guidance was developed in close consultation with both national and independent retailers, business representative groups, trades unions, Public Health England and the Health and Safety Executive.

Shops should re-open once they are able to follow the COVID-secure guidelines, giving confidence to both their staff and customers that they are opening safely.

This means any business that is open must complete a COVID-19 specific risk assessment and take the necessary steps to manage those risks, as is their legal obligation.

As part of the guidance, we have provided a notice that businesses should visibly display in their shop window or outside their door to show their customers they have read and taken steps to follow the guidance.

If a shop reopens without putting in place responsible steps to reduce the transmission of the virus, we can take a range of actions, including issuing enforcement notices. Local authorities and the Health and Safety Executive regularly carry out checks and respond to concerns from the public regarding risks in the workplace.

But of course, there are businesses which still remain closed.

As soon as we can, we will publish further safer working guidance for restaurants, pubs and bars, as well as hairdressers, barbers, nail bars and related services.

These documents will provide practical steps to allow those businesses to re-open in a manner that is as safe as possible for workers and their customers.

I know there has been a lot of speculation about when we might be able to reopen these parts of the economy and I completely understand why we are all so keen to get them back up and running – I absolutely share your enthusiasm.

But we continue to follow the roadmap, which sets out our ambition to reopen these sectors from 4 July at the earliest.

In the meantime, we will continue to protect livelihoods and support businesses, so that they are ready to bounce back, and play their part, in the economic recovery.

And as we consider measures needed to support our economic bounce-back we will be redoubling our efforts to listen to and work with the business community.

We want to build an economy which is fairer, greener, more dynamic, more innovative and which attracts investment from all over the world.

So, starting this week, I am leading 5 new 'recovery roundtables' bringing together businesses, business representative groups and leading academics.

They will consider measures to support economic recovery and ensure we have the right skills and opportunities in place for our workforce.

These sessions will feed directly into the government's work on economic recovery and will help deliver the commitments we made to the British people only last December. These now take on an even greater sense of urgency and importance.

Because while we have a laser-like focus on the immediate public health challenge in front of us, we recognise our debt to businesses which have played such a vital role in combating coronavirus and keeping our economy moving.

And we will work, shoulder to shoulder, with our businesses as we get ready for our economic fight back.

Thank you.