Call for Ghostbusters-style home testing for Covid-19

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- Doctors call for Ghostbusters-style mobile teams of health workers in full personal protective equipment to administer home tests
- Call for Health Secretary Matt Hancock to listen to medics working on the frontline as well as backroom advisers
- Testing availability is ramping up, potentially enabling a pilot followed by rapid rollout, in line with WHO advice to "test, test, test".

Green Party co-leader Sian Berry has joined with children's doctor Alex Armitage to call for mobile teams to deliver home tests for Covid19.

The virus is set to "overwhelm" the NHS, Dr Armitage warned this week in a video for the BBC's Panorama, with cases rising at an alarming rate and each day's number of deaths higher than the last.

With growing levels of NHS staff absence, Dr Armitage has already made an urgent call for tests for healthcare workers, to show clearly whether they have the virus and need to self-isolate or if they can get back to work.

Huge numbers of new tests are starting to become available, so Dr Armitage said the UK could finally start to follow World Health Organisation advice to 'test, test, test' in the wider population.

He and Ms Berry hope to see community health workers testing people for the virus at home in Ghostbusters-style teams wearing full personal protective equipment.

The scheme was developed by Edinburgh GP Dr Sam Watt, who had the idea while watching Ghostbusters with his son after a shift at work.

Dr Armitage said: "The first priority must be to protect our doctors, nurses and health staff from this highly infectious disease and we can't do that if infectious people are coming into hospitals and GP surgeries for a test.

"If we're to save as many lives as possible, we need our heroic health workers to get out there in full protective gear and start collecting samples

from people in their own home, so we have a true picture of the problem.

"We want people to know who they're gonna call – an NHS home testing hotline – to get help from our Ghostbusters-testing team.

"They will then visit you at home, perform a test, and set up remote monitoring so health workers can review your progress – and they will get you to hospital if needed."

Dr Watt's "Edinburgh Method" could be trialled as a pilot scheme before an accelerated roll-out across the country.

The Edinburgh Method is aimed at catching the virus in the very early stages, when evidence shows isolation can be most effective. It also has the potential to significantly ease pressure on NHS inpatient beds, a vital commodity in the struggle against the virus.

Once people have tested positive, they can stay at home and be remotely monitored by health workers in a "virtual hospital ward" using existing telemedicine technology. If patients deteriorate, they can be brought to hospital for intensive care.

Dr Armitage urged Health Secretary Matt Hancock to listen to frontline NHS doctors, working in a rapidly developing situation.

He said: "Coronavirus has created a situation that no one in Britain has had to deal with in living memory.

"We need new ideas in order to get through this.

"Innovation shouldn't just happen in the government's back offices, it needs to come from medics like Dr Watt, who are on the front line of the pandemic."

Sian Berry said she is looking for solutions to lead Britain out of the pandemic, minimising the deaths and lasting lung damage caused by the disease, and thinks mobile testing units are a "necessary and vital" idea.

She said: "Knowing who does and does not have the virus is essential for stopping the spread, which is currently happening so fast our NHS will not be able to hold back the tide at current rates.

"The belated decision to lock down Britain is welcome but we can still do more to protect our key workers from infection.

"We need people to stay at home and follow NHS advice – and developing a plan now for now mobile testing units will work in the community could be one more way of holding back the spread."

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