

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 3 May 2020

Coronavirus press conference 3 May 2020

Good afternoon and welcome to this No10 press conference on our progress in the fight against COVID 19.

I am joined today by Professor Steve Powis, the National Medical Director at NHS England.

In a moment or two I will hand over to Steve to take us through the slide updates from the Cabinet Office briefing room.

But first I want to set out the latest coronavirus data.

1,206,405 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including 76,496 yesterday.

Overall, 186,599 people have tested positive. That's an increase of 4,339 cases since yesterday.

14,248 people are currently being treated in hospital for coronavirus, compared to 14,695 yesterday.

Sadly, of those who have tested positive for coronavirus across all settings, 28,446 have died.

Behind the numbers there has been an increase of 315 deaths since yesterday across all settings.

This pandemic has claimed more than 28,000 lives, and each one of them is precious, each one valued, each one irreplaceable.

The pain of bereavement and heartbreak is deeply personal.

But as a society, we are showing care and compassion across boundaries, offering support and a chance to talk through grief together.

For those experiencing the first Ramadan without a loved one, this will be a particularly painful time. I send my sincere condolences to all families who are grieving.

As with Christians who could not celebrate Easter together in church, and the Jewish community whose Passover rituals were affected by social distancing, our thoughts are with Muslim neighbours who cannot break their fast together and must adapt their religious and cultural practices because of the crisis.

We have all learned to adapt, and we must carry on doing so after the Prime Minister sets out how we will get back to work later this week. His comprehensive plan will explain how we can get our economy moving, how we can get our children back to school, how we can travel to work more safely and how we can make life in the workplace safer.

But before we can ease the existing restrictions we must ensure the government's five tests are met – that the number of cases are falling, that death rates are declining, that the NHS has what it needs and that measures are in place to stop a second peak overwhelming the NHS.

I am particularly conscious that those in the frontline of our public services will need clear guidance on safe working, they'll need the right personal protective equipment and appropriate access to testing if we are to make all the progress that we want in the weeks ahead.

We are consulting with employers and unions, professionals and public health experts, to establish how we can ensure that we have the safest possible working environments and the Prime Minister will be saying more later next week.

On personal protective equipment for key workers, we are increasing the spread of distribution and supply.

From February 25 to May 2 we have delivered over 1.08 billion items of PPE across the health and social care system within England – and tens of millions more have been distributed by our colleagues in the Devolved Administrations.

This overall figure includes:

- 149 million masks
- 173 million aprons
- 2 million gowns
- 614 million gloves

On 2 May alone, we delivered an additional 20 million items of PPE within England.

But there is much more to do and the work led by Lord Deighton to improve domestic production of PPE is vital to our efforts.

And on testing, thanks to the hard work of so many across the NHS, Public Health England, our pharmaceutical sector and our universities, we have tested over 200,000 key workers and their families, allowing those who don't have the virus to go back to work, and protecting those who do.

We have now, of course, extended the criteria for testing beyond key workers to anyone over 65 displaying symptoms, and anyone who has to travel to get to work.

And this week we will be piloting new test, track and trace procedures on the Isle of Wight with a view to having them in place more widely later this

month.

All of these steps will help us to get more people back to work and help to support the delivery of our public services.

And I want to thank those who have done so much to maintain the provision of critical public services during this crisis.

Our teachers have worked incredibly hard to provide educational support to millions.

And the government has committed £100m to boost remote learning for those who need it most. Our newly-launched Oak National Academy is supplementing all the work going on by schools and teachers by providing 180 video lessons each week.

We are particularly keen to help vulnerable and disadvantaged children carry on with their education during the pandemic. Schools continue to receive additional funding in the form of the pupil premium, for those pupils who most deserve it – worth around £2.4 billion annually.

We have ordered laptops to help disadvantaged young people who will be sitting key exams next year. We are also providing laptops and tablets for those children with social workers and care leavers, to help them stay in touch with the services they need, keeping them safe and supporting home learning.

And if disadvantaged secondary school pupils and care leavers who are preparing for exams do not have internet access, we will provide free routers to get them connected while schools are closed.

Over the Easter holidays, we were able to ensure that more than 60 percent of schools were open every day, with places for both vulnerable children and those of critical workers.

And the Free School Meal Voucher Scheme ensured that children who needed it can continue to access food despite school closures. So far, 15,500 schools have placed orders for vouchers, of which over £35 million has been redeemed.

The latest available data shows that around 49,000 of the children in attendance on April 24 were classed by schools as vulnerable – more than double the figure from a week earlier.

While this is going in the right direction, we estimate this still represents only around one in ten of all children and young people classified as vulnerable. We want to see this figure go up further, and we're working with local authorities, schools and colleges to provide improved support to vulnerable young people.

Support for local authorities/military

All this additional support of course takes time, puts pressure on existing staff and costs money.

That is why we have pledged an additional £1.6bn to councils across England to support their essential frontline services including adult social care. This sum takes the funding given to councils to over £3.2billion, to help communities through the crisis.

We have also deployed military support to assist the public sector. The Covid Support Force mobilised by the MoD is now 20,000-strong.

Today, over 3,600 personnel are deployed in support of 86 separate projects in which military aid is being given to civil authorities.

On a national level, they are helping the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Department of Health and Social Care and also the NHS, with planning and logistics in England, Scotland and Wales.

On the ground, they are helping to build and to staff temporary Nightingale hospitals, and to operate both Regional Testing Centres for coronavirus, of which there are now 49 around the country. And also the Mobile Testing Units that we are rolling out: to date there are 77 of them.

Across the country, 156 military planners are embedded at grass-roots level with our existing Local Resilience Forums – partnerships of emergency services, local authorities, the NHS, the Environment Agency and others. They are helping to coordinate and protect our vital local services and supplies, with the additional support of senior Whitehall officials.

In addition, we have to thank local government for their energetic work, because since the end of March, 90 percent of rough sleepers known to councils have been made an offer of accommodation, reassuring them about their safety.

The government, more widely, is also working hard to support those who have not been identified as 'shielded' but are still vulnerable. In the coming days, we will be delivering our one millionth parcel of essential food to those at highest risk across the country.

Up to 200,000 telephone calls a day are being made to the shielded, and councils are helping to support them in other ways – including organising regular calls from volunteers to those who are isolated.

In our communities, the support put in place by many local organisations has been inspirational as people step up to help friends and neighbours.

The government has helped to mobilise another important lifeline through the NHS Volunteers Responders programme.

Over 600,000 people have had their ID verified and are helping with the daily errands that make such a significant difference – collecting shopping, making contact as a human voice on the end of a telephone, transporting patients and supplies for the NHS.

And, of course, we are all working with supermarkets to ensure that a greater number of online delivery slots are made available to those most in need.

Importance of working as a team across the UK

In every one of these areas, the government in Westminster has been working with ministers from the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. This has helped us to monitor and react to the path of the virus across the nations, enabling us to intervene wherever people are in need.

At each of these daily press conferences, we have paid tribute to the compassion and dedication of our key public-sector workers.

I recognise how much we all owe to their stoicism and steadfastness. Nurses, doctors, porters, cleaners, paramedics, pharmacists, care home staff, prison and police officers, teachers, social workers, those preparing and delivering food, collecting our refuse and administering our welfare system. They deserve our gratitude, they deserve our support, they are in all our minds. They are the very best of us.

We owe them so much – and we in government will do everything we can to support them during the next phases of our pandemic response.

I will now hand over to Professor Steve Powis to take us through the latest developments on the pandemic.