

Communities Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 2 May 2020

Good afternoon,

Welcome to the Coronavirus press conference from Downing Street.

I'm joined by Dr Jenny Harries, Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England.

Today's data shows that:

- 1,129,907 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including 105,937 tests carried out yesterday.
- 182,260 people have tested positive, that's an increase of 4,806 cases since yesterday.
- 14,695 people are currently in hospital with coronavirus, down 15,111 from the previous day.
- And sadly, of those tested positive for coronavirus, across all settings, 28,131 have now died. That's an increase of 621 fatalities since yesterday.

These are heart-breaking losses for every family affected, and our thoughts and prayers are with their families and their friends.

Jenny will provide an update on the latest data on Coronavirus.

But first, as Communities Secretary, I want to update on the steps we are taking to protect some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

As the Prime Minister set out this week, we have now passed the peak of this virus.

And he will provide more details on how we will address the second phase of this battle next week.

We all know that the restrictive measures – as necessary and as lifesaving as they are – are difficult for everyone.

All of you watching at home this afternoon have made sacrifices big and small, and I want to thank you once again for all that you are doing.

You are helping us as a country to turn the tide on coronavirus.

But for some in our society these measures involve sacrifices that none of us would wish anyone to bear.

For victims of domestic abuse, it means being trapped in a nightmare.

The true evil of domestic abuse is that it leaves vulnerable people, including children, living in fear in the very place where they should feel most safe and secure – inside their own home.

Though domestic violence can leave physical marks, the true extent of the inflicted pain is much deeper than those marks – it can be invisible, these are emotional scars.

Scars that may never heal and which can even pass to the next generation, whose young eyes see things that they never should.

And hear things that none of us would wish our children to witness.

As a father of three girls, I cannot even imagine women and young children being put in this situation.

But they are, and we must be alive to the reality of what is happening on all too many homes across the country.

I want us to defend the rights of those women and children wherever we can, and that is what we are going to do.

And this is not a crime inflicted solely on women: it affects men too.

This Government has already prioritised tackling domestic abuse.

The Domestic Abuse Bill, which had its second reading in Parliament last week, is a landmark piece of legislation which will create the first ever legal definition of domestic abuse.

And this is important because it holds those responsible to account and gives those suffering at the hands of others more confidence that action will be taken and perpetrators brought to justice.

Today, I can confirm that through the Domestic Abuse Bill, the government will also be ensuring that victims of domestic violence get the 'priority need' status they need to access local housing services much more easily.

This is a fully funded commitment which will mean that no victim of domestic violence has to make the unbearable choice between staying somewhere where they know is unsafe or becoming homeless.

This Government has been clear that we are determined to break the silence that surrounds victims, to stamp out the stigma and strengthen our support for survivors.

We have already announced an extra £15 million to strengthen our support, and an extra £16 million is going directly to refuge services.

But we recognise that the extra pressures that are being created due to COVID-19 and that necessitates more support.

While the necessary social distancing measures remain in place, it is harder than before for victims of domestic abuse to reach out to their friends, to their family, to colleagues, and neighbours for the support that they urgently need.

Today I can announce a package of over £76 million in new funding to support the most vulnerable in society during the pandemic.

This funding will help charities support survivors of domestic and sexual abuse, it will support vulnerable children and their families and victims of modern slavery.

This additional support will ensure more safe spaces and accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse and their children and the recruitment of additional counsellors for victims of sexual violence.

And this funding will also help front line charities to be able to offer different ways of supporting those in need, including through virtual or phone based services.

We know that some refuges have had to reduce or even to cancel their services they would want to provide during this pandemic.

This funding will help them to meet the challenges posed in this national emergency and to continue to help those that desperately need support.

I'd like to say a word of thanks to domestic abuse charities who are doing so much at this time to help so many people.

The Women's Aid refuge in my constituency is one example.

I'd like to thank Marlene and her amazing team in Newark. People like that do incredible work and deserve all our thanks and gratitude now more than ever before.

Where refuges don't have enough capacity to support those in need during the pandemic, some have asked if they could use hotels or other accommodation nearby on a temporary basis.

For example, as move-on accommodation, where they judge it to be safe and appropriate to do so. We will work with refuges to make this option available to them, if they judge it to be the right one where it's necessary.

And thank you also to pharmacies, such as Boots, who are providing a safe space for victims of domestic abuse in some of their shops, and are training more of their staff to be able to support those people when they come into the stores, so they can safely provide support and contact services for help and advice.

For any victims of domestic abuse watching at home this afternoon, let me say

once again that you are not alone.

You do not have to stay at home. You can and should leave the home if you are in danger.

Victims should call 999 if in an emergency or if you are in danger and unable to talk call 999 then press 55.

Our outstanding police will be there for you. They will help you.

And if you need support please call the national domestic abuse helpline on 0808 2000 247 at any time.

Secondly, we have also been working with councils and charities to protect those sleeping who have been sleeping on our streets; a group particularly vulnerable to COVID19.

We set out to bring people in from the streets.

So far, more than 5,400 rough sleepers known to councils have been offered safe accommodation in just under a month – ensuring some of the most vulnerable people can stay safe during the pandemic.

This means that over 90% of rough sleepers known to councils have been offered accommodation where they can self-isolate during the crisis.

This country is viewed around the world as having taken one of the most intensive and successful approaches to protecting rough sleepers during the pandemic.

This was the right thing to do.

By working with charities, local council, churches, faith groups and volunteers, we have helped to protect thousands of lives.

I am extremely grateful to everyone who has been involved in this phenomenal national effort.

Today I am announcing that Dame Louise Casey, who is already leading a review into rough sleeping and advising the Government on ending it within this Parliament, has been appointed by the Prime Minister and I to spearhead this new Government initiative and she will lead a new taskforce.

In this role, she will oversee our national effort to ensure that thousands of rough sleepers now in safer accommodation continue to receive the physical and mental health support they need, while they self-isolate during the pandemic.

And she will work hand-in-hand with councils and with other groups across the country to plan how we can ensure as many people as possible can move into long-term, sustainable and safe accommodation they deserve once the pandemic is over.

We are determined that as few people as possible return to life on the streets, and I can think of nobody better than Louise to help us to achieve this.

This is a major challenge and I don't pretend that this second phase will be easy or that we will succeed in every case.

But we will apply the same energy and commitment and determination to this national effort as we did to the first.

And I am certain that the charities, the councils and the volunteers the people across the length and breadth of the country that have achieved so much in the last month will do the same job again.

Thirdly, and in closing, I'd like to update you on our shielding programme.

For those who have been identified by the NHS as being extremely clinically vulnerable due to underlying health conditions, that's now 1.8 million people in England alone.

They have been asked to stay at home with no face-to-face contact outside their household, except for their carers, for those people in the shielding group who don't have family or friends to support them, we've offered to provide a basic weekly package of food and essentials.

I'm delighted to say today that we expect that the 1 millionth shielding package will be delivered in the next few days.

This service is entirely without precedent – nothing on this scale has been attempted in this country at least since the Second World War.

I am incredibly proud of the team who helped us deliver it.

I have loved reading the emails I have received from people who have got the boxes and seeing the photos that have posted on social media.

I said at the start of this process that there are many people who we are asking to be at home for a prolonged period of time as a result of the virus.

Not least in the shielded category but that we as a Government and as a country that they may be alone at home but that they shouldn't feel that that they are on their own.

You are not, and never will be.