

Coronavirus: Health Secretary's statement to Parliament

Madam Deputy Speaker, with permission, I would like to update the House on the response to the Wuhan coronavirus.

I have laid an instrument before the House to confirm the power we have taken to isolate those at risk of spreading the virus, and if necessary to keep them isolated, as part of our belt and braces approach to protecting the public.

The powers are proportionate and will help us slow down transmission of the virus and make it easier for NHS and public health staff to do their jobs.

The clinical advice about the risk to the public has not changed and remains moderate.

As of today, 8 people in England have tested positive for coronavirus.

All are receiving expert care from the NHS, which is well prepared and equipped to deal with this kind of situation.

Contact tracing of the first 4 cases has been undertaken rapidly and is now complete, while tracing for the latest 4 cases is ongoing.

This contact tracing itself identified 5 of the cases – a tribute to the skill and tenacity of Public Health England staff – as well as finding a further 5 British nationals in France who have also tested positive for the virus.

They are now receiving treatment, and the Foreign Office is following up with consular support.

On Sunday, 105 more British nationals and dependants from Hubei province landed safely at Brize Norton.

They are now in isolation facilities at Kents Hill Park in Milton Keynes and are receiving all necessary of the medical attention. I want to pay tribute to the Foreign Office, the MoD as well as Milton Keynes Council and MK Hospital and my own team for their hard work and efficiency in ensuing this all went smoothly.

And Mr Speaker, this is of course in addition to those now reaching the end of their isolation on the Wirral.

Turning to the efforts to contain the outbreak in China, the Foreign Office is advising against all travel to Hubei province and all but essential travel to mainland China.

Last week we issued new advice to all travellers returning to the UK from

China, Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand.

That advice is clear. If you develop symptoms of cough, fever or shortness of breath you should call NHS 111 and immediately self-isolate for 14 days, even if symptoms are minor.

If you have returned from Hubei you should self-isolate and contact NHS 111, even if you have no symptoms.

My officials discussed the incubation period with the World Health Organization this morning. The current evidence shows that a 14-day incubation period remains appropriate.

We will continue to monitor emerging evidence closely with our international partners.

Mr Speaker, as I said last week, dealing with this disease is a marathon not a sprint.

The situation will get worse before it gets better. We will be guided by the science. Be in no doubt, we will do everything that is effective to tackle this virus and keep people safe.

We are investing £40 million in vaccine research, are working with international efforts on therapeutics, and today I can announce to the House the immediate launch of a capital facility to support any urgent works the NHS needs for the coronavirus response, such as the creation of further isolation areas and other necessary facilities.

Finally Mr Speaker there are actions each and every one of us can take: simple but effective steps like washing hands and using tissues.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we will take all necessary precautions to keep the public safe and I commend this statement to the House.