

Environment Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 8 May 2020

[This transcript is for the coronavirus statement delivered on 8 May 2020:](#)

Good afternoon, and welcome to today's Downing Street Press Conference. I'm pleased to be joined today by Steve Powis the medical director of NHS England.

Before we give an update on the latest figures on the Coronavirus and also our work to help support the vulnerable get access to food.

Today is of course the 75th anniversary of VE day and although many of the lockdown measures and the social distancing measures that are in place mean that many of the planned events have been unable to take place as originally envisaged, today is an important day to pause and remember and 75 years ago people poured into the streets of our scarred cities to celebrate the end of that most difficult conflict.

Our soldiers fought around the world, there were countless acts of bravery, 450,000 British people sadly lost their lives and it was a moment when our whole country pulled together.

As Defra secretary I would like to take this opportunity to record the efforts of those who also contributed in a non-military way, in particular our farmers who stepped up to ensure the nation was fed and the many women who responded to the call to join the Women's Land Army.

In a moment I am going to give an update on our work to support the vulnerable get access to food, but firstly let me give you an update on the latest data from the COBR coronavirus data file. I can report through the governments ongoing monitoring and testing programme as of today:

- 1,631,561 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including 97,029 tests carried out yesterday;
- 211,364 people have tested positive, that's an increase of 4,649 cases since yesterday;
- 11,788 people are currently in hospital with coronavirus, down from 12,688 the previous day.

And sadly, of those tested positive for coronavirus, across all settings, 31,241 have now died. That's an increase of 626 fatalities since yesterday. This new figure includes deaths in all settings not just in hospitals.

We express our deepest condolences to the families and friends of these victims.

Turning now to our work to help the vulnerable get access to food, firstly for the so called shielded cohort. That's those who are clinically vulnerable.

Over a million food parcels have now been delivered to these households and in addition, all those in the shielded cohort have been added to a list giving them priority access to supermarket delivery slots. So far around 400,000 people have been offered priority delivery slots by supermarkets and around 1 million orders have been placed ensuring that people can shop normally and purchase the goods that they want to buy.

There is of course a wider vulnerable group, those who perhaps have disabilities or who are elderly and perhaps don't have neighbours or relatives close by to help them. Or indeed those with other conditions that don't put them in the clinically shielded group but nevertheless make them vulnerable and we have been working with local authorities, and some of the leading charities such as Age UK to put together a package of support to help these people get access to food.

And many local authorities and charities have also been accessing the Good Samaritan app as part of the NHS responder volunteer programme and so far 79,000 shopping runs have been carried out by volunteers engaged in that programme.

In addition we are continuing to work with supermarkets to make available additional priority slots for those in this group. But we also recognise that the economic impacts of coronavirus means that vulnerability is not about physical access to food, for some there is also financial vulnerability, so today we are announcing a new £16 million fund to support frontline food charities. The fund will be used by Fareshare and WRAP to continue and support and increase the food redistribution work that they already do and will significantly expand their sourcing capacity. They will be delivering food to around 5,000 frontline charities and these include refuges, homeless shelters and rehabilitation centres.

Finally I am conscious that there is a great deal of speculation about what the Prime Minister might say on Sunday when he outlines the roadmap for the future and how we will evolve the current restrictions. The Prime Minister will outline any changes to the guidance on Sunday but in the meantime in spite of the sunny bank holiday it is vitally important that we continue to abide by the current restrictions, stay at home to protect the NHS and save lives.

Concluding the press conference the Environment Secretary said:

I would also as I have done before like to conclude by recording my thanks to all those working in the food industry; from supermarkets and food

manufacturers right through to farmers, there has really been quite an extraordinary effort over the last couple of months to ensure that we keep food on our supermarket shelves.

Thank you all very much.