

Extended measures to protect more areas of England from coronavirus

Mr Speaker, with permission, I would like to make a statement about the work to tackle coronavirus.

This virus continues to spread.

Yesterday, there were 7,108 new cases.

However, there are also early signs that the actions that we've collectively taken over the past month are starting to have a positive impact.

Today's REACT study, from Imperial College, suggests that whilst the R number remains above 1, there are early signs that it may be falling.

We must not let up, but people everywhere can take some small hope that our efforts together may be beginning to work.

I put it no stronger than that. Cases are still rising.

However, as the Chief Medical Officer set out yesterday, this second peak is highly localised.

And in some parts of the country the virus is spreading fast.

Our strategy is to suppress the virus, protecting the economy, education, and the NHS, until a vaccine can make us safe.

Earlier this week Mr Speaker, we brought in further measures in the North East.

However, in parts of Teesside, and the North West of England, cases continue to rise fast.

In Liverpool, the number of cases are 268 per 100,000 population.

So together, we need to act.

Working with council leaders and the mayors, I am today extending these measures that have been in place in the North East since the start of this week to the Liverpool City region, Warrington, Hartlepool and Middlesbrough.

We will provide £7 million of funding to local authorities in these areas to support them with their vital work.

The rules across the Liverpool City region, Warrington, Hartlepool and Middlesbrough will be as follows.

We recommend against all social mixing between people in different households.

We will bring in regulations, as we have in the North East, to prevent, in law, social mixing between people in different households in all settings except outdoor public spaces, like parks and outdoor hospitality.

We also recommend that people should not attend professional or amateur sporting events as spectators in the areas that are affected.

We recommend that people only visit care homes in exceptional circumstances.

And there will be guidance against all but essential travel – essential travel of course includes going to work or school.

Mr Speaker, I understand how much of an imposition this is.

I want rules like this to stay in place for as short a time as possible. I am sure we all do.

The study published today shows us hope that, together, we can crack this.

And the more people follow the rules and reduce their social contact, the quicker we can get Liverpool, and the North East, back on their feet.

We are also aligning the measures in Bolton with the rest of Greater Manchester.

And I'd like to pay tribute to David Greenhalgh, the leader of Bolton Council, for his constructive support.

And the Bolton MPs for all they've done in support of Bolton.

There are no changes to measures in West Yorkshire, West Midlands, Leicester, Lancashire or the rest of Greater Manchester.

It is critical that the whole country acts, together, now, to control the spread of this virus.

So please, for your loved ones, for your community, and for your country.

Follow these rules and do your bit to keep this virus under control.

Hospitality

Mr Speaker, by its nature this virus spreads through social contact.

And so it's had a terrible impact on the hospitality sector, who, in good times, exist to encourage that very social contact that we all enjoy.

So, we have had to take difficult but necessary decisions to suppress the virus.

The only alternative to suppressing the virus is to let it rip and I will not do that.

So whilst I know that many of the individual rules are challenging, they are

necessary, and there are those early signs that they are working.

In the measures we have introduced, including the 10pm restriction, we are seeking to strike a balance.

Allowing people to continue to socialise safely, where that's possible, while reducing the social contact that the virus thrives upon.

Elsewhere in the world, they've introduced an evening restriction, and then seen their case numbers fall.

And we know that later at night, people are less likely to follow social distancing.

Now of course, we keep all of our measures under review, and we will closely monitor the impact of this policy as with all the others, while continuing our unprecedented support for hospitality businesses.

Like cutting VAT, supporting the pay of staff, offering rates relief for businesses and giving billions of pounds of tax deferrals and loans.

Mr Speaker, our hospitality industry provides so much colour and life in this country.

And we will do whatever we can to support them – while acting fast to keep this virus under control.

Conclusion

I know that these measures are hard.

And that they are yet another sacrifice, after a year of so many sacrifices already.

But there are some signs that what we are doing together, to respond to these awful circumstances, is starting to work.

So don't let up.

Let's, all of us, keep doing our bit.

And one day, over this virus, we will prevail.