

Has Lock down worked?

On 23 rd March the UK was put into lockdown to reduce the number of Covid 19 cases, to reduce pressure on the NHS and to limit the deaths from the disease.

As the proposers of the policy thought, admissions to hospital with severe forms of the disease peaked 9 days later at 3121 cases on April 2nd. Peak use of NHS ventilator beds was hit a week later on April 10, which was also the day of peak deaths. I have taken these figures from the latest Downing Street briefing graphs. The method of counting has changed over the period, increasing the number of deaths recorded as time passed.

This implies limiting contact was the way to slow the progress of the virus, and did lead to an important reduction in serious cases and deaths. So far so good.

What does need more examination is why it has taken so long to secure faster and more dramatic declines in serious cases and deaths after success in changing the trend in early April. You would have expected the figures to come down quite quickly to low levels. After all we are advised that a person with the disease is clear after seven days, and a person getting it before symptoms show should be clear in 14 days. Thus we would expect a sharp fall off after the 14 day point from lockdown.

As we enter the test and trace era, it would be good to hear from the medical and scientific advisers why they think the diseases has lingered at relatively high levels for so long during lock down. Are all the cases now concentrated amongst the small proportion of the population that go to a physical place of work? Are hospitals and care homes now a main source of spreading the disease? Or is the disease somehow still spreading – at a slower rate – through the population that are staying at home? If so, how is it being transmitted?

These become important issues so that we know who to isolate and consider what other measures to take in the Test and Trace phase. Do we need better infection control in those health and care settings that do get the disease? Are there issues with deliveries to households? What more can be done to rid items and surfaces of the disease? Has the UK investigated the use of UV light machines to destroy the virus on surfaces? I will pursue these questions with the government.