

Health and Social Care Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 16 November 2020

Good afternoon and welcome to today's Downing Street coronavirus briefing.

I'm joined today by Professor Jonathan Van Tam, Deputy Chief Medical Officer and Dr Susan Hopkins, the Chief Medical Advisor to NHS Test and Trace.

Before we talk about testing and vaccines, I'd like to update you on the latest coronavirus data.

The average number of new cases each day is now 25,329 up from 22,443 last week.

There are today 14,915 COVID-19 patients in hospital across the UK, compared to 13,025 a week ago.

And, sadly, yesterday 168 deaths were reported.

This means that in the last week we've seen an average of 413 deaths, up from 332 a day a week ago.

My profound sympathies are with everyone who've lost a loved one throughout this pandemic. These numbers make painfully clear, this virus remains a potent threat. And that threat is not just to the oldest and most vulnerable but to anyone, of any age, and of any background.

We have already seen the serious impact that long COVID can have on peoples' quality of life, even the fit and the young. Symptoms like fatigue, breathlessness, muscle pain, and neurological problems long after they first had the virus.

We know that long COVID affects thousands of people, many thousands of people. We have already opened long COVID clinics in many parts of the country. And I am very pleased to be able to confirm that the NHS will have a network of 40 long COVID clinics right across England in place by the end of the month.

They will bring together doctors, nurses, therapists and other NHS staff like physios to help those suffering with the long-term effects of coronavirus. Long COVID shows that this virus can strike us all, and we must all do our bit to strike back by following the rules and denying the virus the connections that it needs to spread.

I know that this has not been easy and that it has meant celebrating Diwali or commemorating the fallen in ways that have been different this year from what we might normally do.

I want to say thank you to everyone for their patience. We must persevere and get this virus under control. Coronavirus is not a short term problem that can easily be fixed. We must focus on the long term solutions, underpinned by the best possible science that can see us through this crisis and also lay firm foundations for the future.

Testing capacity

This includes our ability to test at scale. We're constantly improving our response, to bring the confidence that high-quality testing can provide. We've already built the largest coronavirus testing capacity in Europe.

Up from 2,000 tests a day in March, to our current capacity of more than half a million. But we will not rest, because testing capacity helps keep people safe and can help us get things back more like normal life.

Today I am delighted that we can announce two new mega labs, which will open early in the new year. They will add another 600,000 capacity to our daily capacity, that doubles the current capacity. They will also create 4,000 jobs. Crucially, they will represent a permanent part of the UK's new diagnostics industry.

We didn't enter this crisis with a major diagnostics industry, and so together we have built one. Both to help beat the virus by testing more people and returning results more quickly and to give our country a permanent defence that we need for any future epidemic.

And to improve our care for so many other diseases, like heart disease or cancer or flu.

I am absolutely determined that we must have a massive diagnostics capacity, not just for this pandemic, but long into the future.

More capacity also speeds up turnaround times but speeding up turnaround times isn't just about the test, it is also about the logistics.

So I want to take one moment to thank the Royal Mail, who, from this weekend, will [empty some of their post boxes 7 days a week](#) to speed up home testing. It is a big team effort and I am very grateful for our posties for playing their part to help keep people safe.

This expansion of testing matters because it helps protect people. I just want to touch on some of the reasons why it matters.

It means we can test the most vulnerable, and those who care for the most vulnerable, and we can test them more frequently.

Over the last week, for instance we have delivered more than 3 million tests to NHS staff, to begin their regular bi-weekly testing.

And today I know so many people have been relieved to hear that we have started a pilot for testing visitors in care homes, to use tests to allow

people to visit loved ones in care homes in a way that keeps them safe and bring back some of those magical moments of social contact.

Our expansion of testing also means we can roll out mass testing further.

We are making progress in the city wide testing across Liverpool and we are now rolling out this localised approach to other areas.

83 local authorities have now signed up to receive regular batches of these new lateral flow tests, which can allow for results in minutes.

This is an important step and it combines the local insight of the brilliant Directors of Public Health right across the country with our strong national infrastructure of NHS Test and Trace combining to keep our communities safe.

Vaccines

I also want to turn to vaccines. While we don't yet have a vaccine, we can now have hope.

You may have heard the two promising pieces of news from earlier today.

First, Janssen's Phase 3 clinical trials are beginning today in 17 sites across the country, including Southampton, Dundee, Cardiff and Belfast.

It's the third vaccine to enter clinical trials here and should the trials come good, and that is by no means certain, and it can be proved to be safe and effective. We have 30 million doses on order by the middle of next year.

Finally, you will no doubt have seen the excellent news that Moderna have today announced results from their preliminary trial data, suggesting that their vaccine has an effectiveness of 94.5 per cent. This is another encouraging step forward, although I stress that this is preliminary.

The safety data is limited and their production facilities are not yet at scale.

Should this latest vaccine be approved, the doses would be available from spring next year.

And I can announce that we have today secured an initial agreement for 5 million doses of the Moderna vaccine.

It is a similar RNA technology to Pfizer/BioNTech, of which we have already ordered 40 million doses, which should that be proved to work will come on stream potentially at the end of this year.

Across diagnostics and vaccines, great advances in medical science are coming to the rescue. And while there is much uncertainty, we can see the candle of hope.

And we must do all that we can to nurture its flame but we are not there yet.

Until the science can make us safe, we must remain vigilant and keep following the rules that we know can keep this virus under control.

Now I'd like to hand over to Dr. Hopkins to say more about our work on mass testing.