

# Health and Social Care Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 18 June 2020

Good afternoon, and welcome to the Downing Street daily coronavirus briefing.

I'm joined today by Baroness Dido Harding, the Executive Chair of NHS Test and Trace.

Before we start, I want to recognise the sad loss of Dame Vera Lynn. She united us in the worst crisis that this country faced. Ever since, she's inspired us all with the words she will always be associated with: 'we will meet again'.

We send our condolences to her family and we will all remember her warmly.

First things first, I'd like to take you through the latest data, then talk about NHS Test and Trace and vaccines.

First slide please.

The first slide shows that yesterday there were 136,516 tests, taking the total to 7-and-a-quarter million tests in total. There were 1,218 positive test results.

If we go to the next slide, this slide shows the estimated number of people who had COVID-19 in England according to ONS's (Office for National Statistics) survey. As you can see, the number has been coming down over time. And this same survey implies around 4.5 thousand new cases per day.

Data from hospitals also shows that broad downward direction. There 490 admissions with COVID-19 on 15 June and, as we can see, the number of people on mechanical ventilator beds is 360.

The number of people in hospital continues to come down in almost every region. You can see a very small up-tick in the east of England. But, as you can see from the charts, there is some movement in the variation in each of the lines.

Overall movement continues to be down. Overall, 5,193 down from 5,863 this time last week.

Final slide of this group. When it comes to the number of people who have sadly died from coronavirus, yesterday the number of deaths reported was 135, bringing the total to 42,288. Again, we can see the downward trajectory, thankfully, of that number.

The number of 135 is lower than this time last week, but there's still some way to go.

There's one additional report that's worth looking at.

Today's weekly surveillance report from Public Health England shows that last week, for the first week since mid-March, the number of people who died in this country, in total, from coronavirus or anything else, was no higher than is normal at this time of year. So that demonstrates that the number of deaths is coming right down

But the battle against this virus is not over.

And it's a battle with many fronts. And there are 2 areas that I want to update you about today.

## **Vaccines**

The first is vaccines.

Before I talk about coronavirus vaccines, I just want to mention a very important reminder about other routine vaccines that are there to protect you.

Throughout the crisis we've tried to keep the vaccination programme for children going. That has been largely successful.

But if you, or your child, is invited for a vaccination, like MMR, please make sure you attend. It's very important we don't fall behind on vaccinations for other diseases because of this crisis.

During this pandemic, we have put stringent measures in place to protect people who are getting vaccinations.

And, in the long run, the best way to defeat this virus is, of course, the discovery of a vaccine. And, since the start, we have been supporting the most promising projects.

As of this week, the Imperial vaccine is now in the first phase of human clinical trials and AstraZeneca has struck a deal for the manufacture of the Oxford vaccine.

They're starting manufacturing now, even ahead of approval, so we can build up a stockpile and be ready, should it be clinically approved. Just like with dexamethasone, the treatment which we stockpiled before we had the proof it was clinically effective. So we are starting the manufacture of the Oxford vaccine now so that it will be ready should the science come off.

Today, we have published the way in which we propose to prioritise people for access to a vaccine, as soon as one comes available.

Just as we did for testing, we will be guided by the clinical science, prioritising those in most need.

I am very grateful to the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, which has published its interim advice today.

They recommend priority vaccination for 2 groups: frontline health and social care workers, and those at increased risk of serious disease and death from coronavirus, including, for example, adults over the age of 50 and those with heart and kidney disease.

As we learn more about the virus, we will continue to take into account which groups may be particularly vulnerable, including for example those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

So we can protect the most at risk first should a vaccine become available and get this country back on her feet as soon as we possibly can.

## **Test and Trace**

Our approach on vaccines is to throw everything at it, as fast as we can, and rigorously to test and make sure they are safe before deployment.

This is our approach across the board, including for Test and Trace too. That's the second area I want to focus on today.

Baroness Harding will talk through the latest figures from our NHS Test and Trace programme shortly.

Today's data shows a system that is working well and constantly improving. And, remember, each one of the thousands of people who are now isolating because of the NHS Test and Trace programme and all the work of those involved is someone who would have been innocently going about their daily lives not knowing that they were a risk to their community.

And, as you may remember, our plan is to complement this human contact tracing with a contact tracing app. Like other governments around the world, we have been working hard on this, and I want to be up-front and open about the challenges that we, and other countries, are facing.

Over the past few weeks, we have rigorously tested our prototype app in the Isle of Wight, and in field trials – and I want to thank everyone who has been involved and all the islanders of the Isle of Wight: the council, who have been brilliant, the local NHS, and Bob Seely, the local MP, who has played a real leadership role.

Because of this testing, we discovered a technical barrier, that every other country building their own app is also now hitting. We have found that our app works well on Android devices, but Apple's software prevents iPhones being used effectively for contact tracing, unless you use Apple's own technology.

After we started work on our app, Google and Apple then started work on their own product, and as soon as they did this, we began working on both. We kept our options open, in the same way as we do with other areas

And I feel, personally, in this fight, more than any other, we must leave no stone unturned. So I asked Dido and the NHS expert Test and Trace team to

make sure they worked on both products.

Of course, we have been testing Google and Apple's product too. And as we did this, we have found that it does not estimate distance well enough. Measuring distance is mission critical to any contact tracing app.

So, as it stands, our app won't work, because Apple won't change their system. But it can measure distance.

And their app can't measure distance well enough to a standard we are satisfied with. Throughout this, for me, what matters is what works. Because what works will save lives.

And I will work with anyone, public or private sector, here or overseas, to gain any inch of ground against this disease. So we have agreed to join forces with Google and Apple, to bring the best bits of both systems together.

We will share our algorithm and the work we have done on distance calculation and combine that with their work, to deliver a new solution.

I have always been optimistic about the contribution technology can make in this battle against coronavirus. Coming together in this way will bring together some of the best minds to find a solution to this global challenge and help to save lives.

In the meantime, the NHS Test and Trace system, based on good, old fashioned human contact tracing, is working well identifying local outbreaks and helping us to control this virus.

And so I want to ask you all once more: if you get a call or message from NHS Test and Trace, the most important thing is please do your bit to protect your community, to protect your loved ones and to protect the NHS by following their instructions.

Now I'd like to hand over to Baroness Harding, to take you through the Test and Trace statistics.