

Home Secretary outlines support for domestic abuse victims

Good afternoon, welcome to Downing Street for the Government's daily press conference on coronavirus.

I am joined today by Martin Hewitt, Chair of the National Police Chiefs Council, and by Professor Stephen Powis.

I would like to update you on the Government's plan to fight this pandemic.

Our priority is to slow the spread of coronavirus, so that fewer people are sick at any one time, and our brilliant NHS continues to remain able to cope.

To do this we are following expert scientific and medical advice and taking the right steps at the right moment in time.

And that is why we are instructing people to stay home, to protect the NHS and save lives.

I can report that, through the Government's ongoing monitoring and testing programme, as of 9am today:

- There have been 334,974 tests carried out across the UK, excluding Northern Ireland.
- Of these, 78,991 have tested positive.
- 20,101 patients are currently in hospital who have already tested positive.
- Sadly, 9,875 people have now died – an increase of 917 of yesterday.

As this virus continues to devastate families across our nation, my thoughts, prayers and heartfelt condolences are with their friends, their families and loved ones.

To everyone suffering from this horrific virus, whether you are at home or receiving care from our brilliant NHS in hospital – you are in all of our thoughts at this devastating time.

And I am very pleased to say that the Prime Minister continues to make good progress.

But these stark figures highlight the gravity of this national emergency.

The devastating impact of this virus, and the unprecedented but necessary action we are taking to tackle it, is affecting every aspect of our daily lives.

This virus is also changing the nature of the threat we face from crime.

Martin and myself will today update you on the emerging crime picture and the extra work the Government – along with law enforcement partners – is undertaking to better protect victims.

As Martin will set out, total crime has dropped as people follow the necessary advice to stay at home.

But, while the guidelines are helping to keep the majority of us safe – we think they could also amplify danger for others – leaving people feeling isolated, vulnerable and exposed.

Because criminality continues to adapt.

Fraudsters are exploiting coronavirus as a hook for new acquisitive crimes – with losses to victims already exceeding £1.8million.

Perpetrators of sickening online child sexual abuse are seeking to exploit the fact that more young people and children are at home and are online.

And in the last week alone, the National Domestic Abuse Helpline reported a 120% rise in the number of calls it received in one 24-hour period.

Now while we have not yet seen a sustained rise in reports of domestic abuse to the police, the increase in those seeking help for this hidden crime is extremely concerning. And be in no doubt, there will be absolutely no let-up in our operational response.

For the victims of these crimes, home is not the safe-haven it should be.

That is why I have been working with law enforcement, charities, schools, businesses and local councils to address this changing threat picture.

Our incredible police officers and firefighters are out in their communities – yes fighting crime, but also protecting victims.

I want to emphasise that anyone who is a victim of these crimes can still get help.

Anyone in immediate danger should call 999 – and press 55 on a mobile if you are unable to talk.

Our outstanding police will, absolutely, still be there for you.

The National Crime Agency are also bearing down on offenders and raising awareness to protect victims of fraud, cyber-crime and online child abuse.

But, we must all do more to protect our neighbours, friends and family members by sharing information about the support that is available.

The Chancellor this week announced a £750million boost for charities, including those providing services for victims of domestic abuse and their families.

And today, I can announce that we will go even further to provide support for those in danger of domestic abuse.

And I am launching a new national communications campaign to reach out to those who are at risk from abuse, highlighting that they can still leave home – to get the support that they need.

It will signpost to victims how they can access help and but also to reassure them that they can access support services and the police are still on hand.

And, importantly, it will tell them that they are not alone.

Coronavirus has opened Britain's enormous heart and shown our love and compassion for one another as we come together to help those most in need.

And I am now asking this nation to use that amazing compassion and community spirit to embrace those trapped in the horrific cycle of abuse.

And to help us all look out for those who need help, we have created a new campaign and we have created symbol of hope – a handprint with a heart on – so that people can easily show that we will not tolerate abuse as a society, and that we stand in solidarity with victims of domestic abuse.

I ask you and I would urge everyone to share it on social media or in the windows of your home, alongside a link to the support available, to demonstrate just how much this country cares.

And to show victims of domestic abuse, that they are not on their own.

I am also providing up to £2 million to enhance online support services and helplines for domestic abuse, so that anybody who needs that help and support can access that help and support.

These services will be boosted from new IT provided by the business, and in order to boost these services, we have secured support from Fujitsu to provide IT expertise to smaller domestic abuse charities to enable their specialist trained support workers to provide their crucial services remotely.

We also know there are concerns about the capacity of refuges to provide enough accommodation during this challenging time.

I'm clear about this – perpetrators should be the ones who have to leave the family home, not the supposed loved ones whom they torment and abuse.

Our priority is to get abusers out, but, sadly, this is not always possible.

So where a victim, and their children, do need to leave, we will ensure they have a safe place to go.

That's why we are looking at alternative accommodation to best support the work of refuges and ensure that there are enough places for those in need at this difficult time.

Fighting coronavirus requires an extraordinary national effort, and I would like to reiterate my personal thanks to everyone across all aspects of society playing their part.

I am immensely grateful to everyone who is heeding the instruction to stay at home.

This remains crucial over the bank holiday weekend and especially as the weather improves.

But we have given the police powers to enforce the necessary measures we have put in place, including through the enforcement of fines.

I'd like to thank them – our police officers and staff who are working tirelessly to keep us safe, for engaging with the public so constructively, to encourage everyone to do the right thing and avoid the need to use these powers.

The overwhelming majority of the people are listening, making their own sacrifices to support our amazing police officers and staff, as they protect our under-pressure hospitals, and safeguard the most vulnerable.

But my message to anyone still refusing to do the right thing is clear.

If you don't play your part, our selfless police – who are out there risking their own lives to save others – will be unafraid to act.

Their work is helping our doctors, nurses and health professionals to fight this virus and to save lives.

If you do not follow the guidance, you will be endangering the lives of your own friends, families and loved ones.

To protect those you care about – and the capacity of our police and hospitals to protect us all – there is just one simple thing you must do.

Stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives.