

Local lockdown measures to continue in Leicester with modifications

Mr Speaker, with permission, I would like to make a statement on our action against coronavirus and the decisions we've been taking throughout the day today to determine what we need in Leicester.

We continue our determined fight against this invisible killer.

The number of new cases yesterday was 642, lower than when lockdown began.

And according to the latest figures, the number of deaths in all settings is down to 66.

We are successfully turning the tide.

And part of this success lies in our ability to take action locally, whenever we see it flare up.

Often this is on a very small scale – swiftly and quietly – like in an individual farm or a factory.

But when needed, we also act on a broader basis, as we have done in Leicester.

And today I wanted to update the House on the situation in Leicester.

At the end of June we made the decision to close schools and non-essential retail in the city, and not to introduce the relaxations that applied elsewhere from 4 July, like the reopening of pubs.

This was not an easy decision, but it was one that we had to take.

At that point, the 7-day infection rate in Leicester was 135 cases per 100,000 people, which was 3 times higher than the next highest city.

And Leicester was accounting for 10% of all positive cases in the country.

This decision was taken with the agreement of all local leaders.

And I am grateful to the leader and officers of Leicestershire County Council, and to the officers of Leicester City Council, for their support and hard work.

Since then, we've doubled testing.

And through a monumental programme of communications and community engagement, we've been pushing our important messages.

I committed to reviewing the measures in Leicester every 2 weeks.

This morning I chaired a Gold meeting of the Local Action Committee to discuss the latest situation.

And this afternoon, I held a further meeting with local leaders, Public Health England, the JBC, the local resilience forum, and my clinical advisers.

The latest data show that the 7-day infection rate in Leicester is now 119 cases per 100,000 people, and that the percentage of people who have tested positive is now at 4.8%.

These are positive indicators, especially in light of the huge increase in testing in the local area.

But they still remain well above the national average, and the average for surrounding areas.

Thanks to the incredible efforts of people of Leicester, who have followed the lockdown, even while others have had their freedom relaxed, we are now in a position to relax some, but not all, of the restrictions that were in place.

So, from 24 July we'll be removing the restrictions on schools and early years childcare and taking a more targeted approach to the restrictions on non-essential retail.

Replacing the national decision to close non-essential retail with a local power to close them where necessary. This is all part of our more targeted approach.

However, other restrictions, like those for travel and only having social gatherings of up to 6 people, for example, will remain in force.

And measures introduced on 4 July, like re-opening the hospitality sector, will also not yet apply.

The initial definition of the geography covered by the lockdown was a decision I delegated to Leicestershire County Council, and they made and published.

The Leader of Leicestershire County Council, Nicholas Rushton, has advised me, based on the data and the best public health advice, that he recommends these restrictions now apply only to the Oadby and Wigston area of Leicestershire, as well as the City of Leicester itself.

And I have accepted his advice.

Some say that the local lockdown is unnecessary. I wish this were true.

But sadly it remains vital for the health of everyone in Leicester, and the rest of the country, that these restrictions stay in place.

We will review them again in a fortnight.

I hope that this careful easing of restrictions will provide some comfort to people in Leicester and Leicestershire.

And I'd say this directly to the people of Leicester and Leicestershire – I'd like to pay tribute to you all.

Your perseverance and your hard work has brought real and tangible results.

And you have shown respect for one another.

I understand this hasn't been easy.

Strong representations have been made to me by my honourable friends, the members for Charnwood, Harborough and South Leicestershire and for the members opposite who represent the city of Leicester, on behalf of constituents who have been impacted, and constituents who wanted to see the lockdown lifted too.

However, there is still a lot to do. And the public health messages remain critical.

So please get a test if you have symptoms.

Keep following the rules that are in place.

Please do not lose your resolve.

Because the sooner we get this virus under control, the sooner we can restore life in Leicester, and across the country, to normal.

Mr Speaker, this statement also gives me the opportunity to inform the House of an issue relating to testing.

We have identified some swabs that are not up to the usual high standard that we expect, and we will be carrying out further testing of this batch.

As a precautionary measure and while we investigate further, we are requesting that the use of these Randox swab test kits are paused in all settings until further notice.

This problem was brought to my attention yesterday afternoon. We contacted settings using these swabs last night, and published the pause notice immediately.

Clinical advice is that there is no evidence of any harm.

That test results are not affected.

There is no evidence of issues with any of our other tests swabs.

And there is no impact on access to testing.

Mr Speaker, our ability to take action on this local level is the keystone of our plan to defeat coronavirus.

So we can keep this virus on the run and defeat it once and for all.

I'm grateful to you for allowing me to make this statement at this time and I commend this statement to the House.