

Making the decision to relax some controls

Everyone agrees it is a big call. Most agree it has to be made by the Cabinet, preferably with the PM present and guiding.

Some say it should be left to the scientists. They have given us some criteria to do with death rates, cases in hospital rates, and capacity of the NHS. They think we should not lift any controls until these figures show a decent decline in deaths as well as in new serious cases, and plenty of surplus NHS capacity. They also often add they wish to see a capacity to test on a large scale, to resume the original policy of test and trace as the controls are relaxed.

If we leave it to the current scientists closely advising the government it appears we will be locked down in whole or part for a long time. They do not wish to take risks with the virus and do not have to weigh the dangers of not lifting on everything else. The easiest call for a scientist with the sole preoccupation of reducing the virus spread is to keep as many people at home as possible for as long as possible, pending development of a vaccination.

Most think it should be a decision made by the government with a heavy emphasis on the scientific advice. The Cabinet also has to weigh up the enormous economic damage being done by the current dislocation of around half the economy. It should be made with suitable critical examination of the science and the figures.

The Cabinet should insist on the death figures in hospitals being attributed to the correct days. There does seem to have been some attempt to improve the figures, as they are often reported with deaths from varying days reported together on a particular day. They also need to be checked for double counting, given the different points at which deaths seem to be reported. A death should not be both reported near the time of occurrence at hospital and again when it is registered.

If deaths outside hospital are going to be considered it does need to be taken into account that many death certificates were made out by doctors who did not have a test result for Covid 19 and who may not have been much engaged with the patient in their final weeks. There seems to have been a growing awareness of the need to put possible Covid 19 onto death certificates as the pandemic mounted.

The Cabinet also needs to review the models which aim to predict the path of virus cases on varying assumptions. It will find that there is professional disagreement amongst epidemiologists, and quite a wide range of forecasts of outcomes.

There are some who think the Cabinet needs to put more weight than so far on

the impact the current policy is having on everyone else. They argue that we have to recognise there is no vaccine nor cure for the time being, but mercifully there are many groups who are unlikely to get a serious version of the disease. They favour getting on with relaxing controls.

I have never thought there is a hard choice, health or the economy. Government has to promote the better health of the greatest number, and the economic wellbeing of the many at the same time. The decision should revolve around the conditions to be imposed on people and businesses to allow them to resume more of their normal life, whilst taking precautions to continue to limit the spread of the disease.