

Oliver Dowden's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 20 May 2020

Coronavirus press conference (20 May 2020)

Good afternoon, and welcome to today's briefing. I'm pleased to be joined by Steve Powis – the National Medical Director at NHS England.

First, I want to update you on the latest data on the coronavirus response.

- 2,962,227 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including 177,216 tests carried out yesterday;
- 248,293 people have tested positive, that's an increase of 2,472 cases since yesterday;
- 9,953 people are currently in hospital with coronavirus, down 13 % from 11,443 this time last week.

And sadly, of those who have tested positive for coronavirus, across all settings, 35,704 have now sadly died. That's an increase of 363 fatalities since yesterday. Of course, my thoughts are with everyone of the families of those people who have been affected by this.

Before we begin questions from the public and from the media I just want to remind people of the details of the next phase of our fight against Coronavirus.

First, in order to monitor our progress, we are establishing a new COVID Alert Level System, with five levels, each relating to the level of threat posed by the virus.

The alert level will be based primarily on the R value and the number of coronavirus cases.

And in turn that alert level will determine the level of social distancing measures in place.

The lower the level the fewer the measures; the higher the level the stricter the measures.

Throughout the period of lockdown which started on March 23rd we have been at Level 4.

Thanks to the hard work and sacrifices of the British people in this lockdown, we have helped to bring the R level down and we are now in a position to begin moving to Level 3, in careful steps.

We have set out the first of three steps we will take to carefully modify the measures, gradually ease the lockdown, and begin to allow people to return to their normal way of life – but crucially while avoiding what would be a disastrous second peak which overwhelms the NHS.

After after each step we will closely monitor the impact of that step on the R and the number of infections, and all the available data, and we will only take the next step when we are satisfied that it is safe to do so.

Step 1 – as the PM announced this week:

- Those who cannot work from home should now speak to their employer about going back to work.
- You can now spend time outdoors and exercise as often as you like.
- You can meet one person outside of your household in an outdoor, public place provided that you stay 2 metres apart.

Having taken the first step in carefully adjusting some of the measures and our advice to people on what to do, we have also updated what we are asking people to do, which is to Stay Alert, Control the Virus and Save Lives.

Yes – staying alert, for the vast majority of people, still means staying at home as much as possible. But there are a range of other actions we're advising people to take.

People should Stay Alert, by:

- working from home if you can;
- limiting contact with other people;
- keeping distance if you go out – 2 metres apart where possible;
- washing your hands regularly;
- wearing a face covering when you are in enclosed spaces where it's difficult to be socially distant – for example in some shops and on public transport;
- and if you or anyone in your household has symptoms, you all need to self-isolate.

Because if everyone stays alert and follows the rules, we can control coronavirus by keeping the R down and reducing the number of infections.

This is how we can continue to save lives, and livelihoods, as we begin as a nation to recover from coronavirus.

Over the past months, we've all naturally been focused on the huge, life-or-death health implications of this pandemic.

But I'd now like to provide an update on some of the crucial work taking place behind the scenes to support and protect the things that give our lives added meaning – such as sport, art, tourism and our charities, music and theatre.

And when we look back on coronavirus, one of the things we'll remember is the incredible contribution made by so many people.

As a way of showing our national gratitude to these everyday COVID heroes, we are announcing today that we are delaying Her Majesty The Queen's Birthday honours list until the Autumn so that they can be recognised and celebrated.

And as the Prime Minister said today, I'm delighted that Her Majesty The Queen has approved a knighthood for Captain Tom Moore, in recognition of his outstanding achievement in raising nearly £33 million for NHS charities.

Captain Tom set a marker for generosity, and the public have matched it.

Incredibly, it looks as if British people and businesses have now contributed over £800 million – just through national fundraising campaigns alone – and a great deal more has obviously been raised at a local level.

As the British people have generously given both their time and money, the government has sought to back them every step of the way. We promised to match every penny raised by the BBC's Big Night In campaign and, after a fantastic public response, I'm delighted to announce today that over £70 million is now being distributed by Comic Relief, Children In Need and the National Emergencies Trust to charities on the frontline.

This comes on top of the hundreds of millions of pounds we've already announced for charities doing vital work to support those suffering with poor mental health, to help victims of domestic abuse, and to make sure hospices can continue to care for families in these most difficult circumstances.

And today, I am pleased to confirm that the Government's dedicated support scheme for small and medium sized charities – the [Coronavirus Community Support Fund](#) – will open for applications this week.

Initially there will be a £200 million tranche of government funding and this will be administered by the National Lottery Community Fund and will focus on those charities we may not know nationally, but are a lifeline to communities at a local level.

On top of that I can also announce that we are releasing £150 million from dormant accounts to help social enterprises get affordable credit to people who are financially vulnerable and support charities tackling youth unemployment.

Our charities, both large and small, have really been at the forefront of the national effort to defeat the coronavirus. And together this all amounts to a multi-billion pound boost for Britain's charities.

I know people are also eager for news on the return of live sports and arts. The last few months have felt odd without them, and our calendars strangely bare.

Finding creative, crowd-free ways to navigate coronavirus is the biggest challenge for our recreation and leisure sectors right now.

So this week I am setting up a [renewal taskforce](#) which will help them bounce back. It will be made up of the brightest and the best from the creative,

tech and sporting worlds. These are experts in their fields and they'll be advising me on how to find new and different ways to get their industries back up and running. They include:

Alex Scott, a former Lioness and Olympian, and now an award winning broadcaster. She will help us think through how we can get sport back safely in a way that works for clubs, players and supporters alike.

Similarly Lord Grade, a former Chairman of both the BBC and ITV, will provide an insight into how we can get our creative and media industries back up and flourishing again.

Tamara Rojo, the English National Ballet's Artistic Director, will give us ideas for how we start to get our arts scene back up and running.

And Martha Lane Fox, well-known as the founder of lastminute.com, will advise on how tech can power the recovery of all these sectors, but particularly in tourism, as part of the much wider role it will play in driving our economy forward, as it has done already.

Meanwhile, bit by bit, we are developing guidance that is helping some of the lighter bits of our economy return to a new normal.

So we have supported the safe return of TV production, meaning our broadcasters are able to keep some of our favourite shows on the TV screens, whether that's Corry or Eastenders.

We've helped to reopen the country's tennis and basketball courts, and guided elite athletes back into training safely – and that in turn will pave the way for the return of live sports behind closed doors in the near future.

Normal life as we have known it is still a long way off, and the path to get there is a narrow one.

But these things will return, when it is safe for them to do so, thanks to the same drive and creativity that makes a great performance or a great piece of art.

And I really think that when they do, and when we have overcome this crisis together, we will appreciate them that much more.