

PM Mother's Day words: 22 March 2020

Today is Mother's Day. It is a day when we celebrate the sacrifice and the effort of those who gave us life, and across the country I know that millions of people will have been preparing to do something special; not just a card, not just flowers. I know that everyone's strongest instinct is to go and see their mothers in person, to have a meal together, to show them how much you love them.

But I am afraid that this Mothering Sunday the single best present that we can give – we who owe our mothers so much – is to spare them the risk of catching a very dangerous disease. The sad news is that means staying away. This time the best thing is to ring her, video call her, Skype her, but to avoid any unnecessary physical contact or proximity. And why? Because if your mother is elderly or vulnerable, then I am afraid all the statistics show that she is much more likely to die from coronavirus, or Covid-19. We cannot disguise or sugar coat the threat.

The numbers are very stark, and they are accelerating. We are only a matter of weeks – two or three – behind Italy. The Italians have a superb health care system. And yet their doctors and nurses have been completely overwhelmed by the demand. The Italian death toll is already in the thousands and climbing. Unless we act together, unless we make the heroic and collective national effort to slow the spread – then it is all too likely that our own NHS will be similarly overwhelmed. That is why this country has taken the steps that it has, in imposing restrictions never seen before either in peace or war.

We have closed the schools, the pubs, the bars, the restaurants, the gyms, and we are asking people to stay and work at home if they possibly can. In order to help businesses and workers through the crisis, we have come up with unprecedented packages of support. All of this is putting our country, and our society, under enormous strain. But already this crisis is also bringing out the best in us all – in the army of volunteers that has sprung up to help the vulnerable, in the millions of acts of kindness; in the work of all the people who are continuing to provide essential services, from transport workers to supermarket staff to health and social care workers.

Yes, this disease is forcing us apart – at least physically. But this epidemic is also the crucible in which we are already forging new bonds of togetherness and altruism and sharing. This country will be changed by coronavirus, but there is every reason to think we will come through it stronger and better than ever before. And the more effectively we follow the medical advice, the faster we will bounce back to health – medically and economically.

So this Mothering Sunday let's all do everything we can to show our respect and love to those who gave us life – and minimise the risk to their own lives. Bit by bit, day by day, we are all helping to delay the spread of the disease, and to give our amazing NHS staff the time to prepare for the peak.

So let's follow the advice, stay home this Mothering Sunday. Send her your love by phone or skype.

Let's stay at home, protect our NHS, and together we will save literally thousands of lives.