

PM statement at coronavirus press conference: 20 April 2021

Thank you very much for joining us. I'm joined today by Dr Nikki Kanani.

There is no doubt at all that this country is continuing to make progress in the fight against Covid.

We are proceeding with our roadmap

and I want to thank everybody for continuing to follow the guidance

and to thank parents and families for the incredible work you are doing to help test pupils through the Easter holidays

and to encourage you to keep testing them twice a week as schools return. And above all I want to thank everybody involved in the outstanding vaccine roll-out

especially those of you coming forwards in huge numbers as you are.

19 out of 20 of those who've had a first dose are coming forward for a second meaning that almost 1 in 5 of all adults have now had a second dose.

And on first jabs we've now vaccinated 33 million people

including 60 per cent of the 45-49 year olds.

And we know that this vaccination programme is making a big difference.

We know that it's helping to reduce suffering and save lives

potentially on a very big scale.

But we don't yet know the full extent of the protection that we are building up

the exact strength of our defences –

and as we look at what is happening in other countries with cases now at record numbers around the world, we cannot delude ourselves that Covid has gone away.

I see nothing in the data now that makes me think we are going to have to deviate in any way from the roadmap cautious but irreversible that we have set out.

But the majority of scientific opinion in this country is still firmly of the view that there will be another wave of covid at some stage this year

and so we must – as far as possible – learn to live with this disease, as we live with other diseases.

We will be bolstering our defences with booster jabs this Autumn,
we'll be continuing with testing,

and today I want to announce what we hope will be a further line of medical defence.

The United Kingdom was the first country in the world to pioneer dexamethasone, which has saved a million lives globally.

And today we are creating a new Antivirals Task Force

to search for the most promising new medicines and support their development through clinical trials

with the aim of making them safely and rapidly available as early as the Autumn.

This means, for example, that if you test positive there might be a tablet you could take at home to stop the virus in its tracks and significantly reduce the chance of infection turning into more severe disease. Or if you're living with someone who has tested positive, there might be a pill you could take for a few days to stop you getting the disease yourself.

And by focussing on these antivirals we hope to lengthen the UK's lead in life sciences

and to give ever greater confidence to the people of this country that we can continue on our path towards freedom.

We have taken a big step again this month, reopening significant parts of our country again,

and for many people this last week has brought the first glimmerings of a return to normality

having a pint, having a haircut, making that trip to the shops.

Every day science is helping us to get back towards normality

and I believe that antiviral treatments can play an important part.

And if we keep going, follow the rules

remember hands, face, space, fresh air –

then we can keep each other safe and see through our roadmap to reclaim our lives in full.