

PM statement at coronavirus press conference: 23 March 2021

Good afternoon everybody, thank you for joining us,

When I asked you to go into lockdown exactly a year ago

it seemed incredible that in the 21st Century

this was the only way to fight a new respiratory disease –

to stay at home

to avoid human contact

to shun so many of the patterns of behaviour that are most natural and obvious to all of us.

But we did it together

to protect the NHS

to save lives.

And for the entire British people it has been an epic of endurance and privation,

of children's birthday parties cancelled

of weddings postponed

of family gatherings of all kinds simply deleted from the diary.

And worst of all in that time

We've suffered so many losses

and for so many people

our grief has been made more acute

because we have not been able to see our loved ones in their final days

to hold their hands

or even to mourn them together.

And at the right moment, we will come together as a country to build a fitting and a permanent memorial to the loved ones we have lost

and to commemorate this whole period.

For month after month our collective fight against Coronavirus was like fighting in the dark against a callous and invisible enemy,

until science helped us to turn the lights on and to gain the upper hand.

And I want to renew my thanks to everyone responsible for the astounding vaccine roll-out

which has enabled us to protect more than 28 million people across the whole of the United Kingdom with a first jab

and administer more than 30 million doses in total.

And I want to thank everybody for their courage, your courage, discipline and patience.

When people come to describe this epidemic to future generations,

we'll tell the story of the heroes of the NHS and social care

of pharmacists, teachers, armed service personnel, shop workers, transport workers, the police and so many others.

But in the end this was unlike any other struggle in my lifetime, in that our entire population has been engaged,

and it's thanks to all of you therefore that we can continue on our roadmap to freedom.

We will meet our targets, offering a first dose to everyone over 50 by the middle of next month, as well as those under 50 who are clinically vulnerable,

and offering a first dose of the vaccine to every adult by the end of July.

And cautiously but irreversibly, step by step, jab by jab,

this country is on the path to reclaiming our freedoms.