

PM statement on coronavirus: 19 March 2020

I want to begin by thanking everyone, by thanking you, in the media, and also thanking everyone for the huge efforts that the country is making to comply with the advice that we've been given

And we're asking such a huge amount,

asking students to put their education on hold,

we're asking people not to socialise in the normal way

And already we can see the impact that this is having on the UK economy and on business, on great, great companies

And so it's vital that we in Government stand behind them when what we are asking everyone to do is so crucial for saving literally thousands of lives by defeating this virus

And I am conscious as the days have gone by that people will want to know how long we are expecting them to keep it up

And I wanted to try to say something today about how I see the timescale of this campaign and where we're going and what we need to do

I do think, looking at it all, that we can turn the tide within the next 12 weeks

And I am absolutely confident that we can send coronavirus packing in this country but only if we take the steps, we all take the steps we have outlined,

And that is vital because that is how we are going to reduce the peak

and once we've achieved that, and I think that we will, if take the steps that I have said,

then the scientific progress that we're making will really start to come into play and I wanted to discuss a little bit of that this afternoon with you

because we are rapidly becoming so much better at understanding the genomics at the heart of this virus, a lot of that is going on in this country,

we're getting better at understanding the medicines that may treat and cure it

And today we have put the first British corona patient into a randomised trial for drugs that may treat the disease

UK experts and scientists expect to start trials for the first vaccine within

a month

And above all we are getting better at testing

This crisis is so difficult because the enemy is invisible

And the answer is to remove the cloak of invisibility

And to identify the virus, and to be able to know which of us, is carrying it or who has actually had it and now got over it

And to give you an idea of what is coming down the track

We are in negotiations today to buy a so called antibody test

As simple as a pregnancy test

That could tell whether you have had the disease

And it's early days, but if it works as its proponents claim then we will buy literally hundreds of thousands of these kits as soon as practicable because obviously it has the potential to be a total gamechanger

Because once you know that you have had it, you know that you are likely to be less vulnerable, you're less likely to pass it on, and you can go back to work

And of course by the same token we are massively increasing the testing to see whether you have it now

And ramping up daily testing from 5000 a day to 10,000 to 25,000 and then up to 250,000

And that knowledge of where the virus is, will make a huge difference to our management of the disease and our ability to reduce disruption and economic difficulties

And I wanted to set that out because this is rapidly coming down the track as I say, but it will take time to come on stream

And that is why in the meantime, to get back to a theme that you know I'm going to repeat, it is absolutely vital that we follow the advice that we've been hearing over the last few days,

The announcements we've already made about staying at home if you have the symptoms, if your family has the symptoms,

about avoiding unnecessary contact

Avoiding gatherings where you may pick up the disease

pubs, bars, restaurants

Please, please follow all that advice scrupulously

Work from home if you possibly can

Wash your hands, wash your hands

And it's by this combination of ruthless, determined, collective action and scientific progress that we're already seeing that we will succeed

And I know how difficult it may be, or it may seem right now, but if we do this together we will save, as I say, many many thousands of lives

and to everybody in the UK, business world, everybody who is worried about their jobs, and everybody who faces difficulties because of the advice that we are giving,

I say to business, stand by your employees, stand by your workers because we will stand by you

And you'll be hearing more about that in the course of the next day or so

And that is how, by a mixture of determined, collective action and scientific progress, I have absolutely no doubt that we will turn the tide of this disease and beat it together.