

PM statement on coronavirus: 9 March 2020

This morning I chaired a meeting of the government's COBR emergency committee on the Coronavirus outbreak.

The First Ministers of Scotland and Wales and the First Minister and deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland also attended and we agreed to continue to work closely in the weeks and months ahead.

We received a detailed briefing from the Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Scientific Advisor. And again I repeat my gratitude to both Chris and to Patrick.

There have now been four deaths from coronavirus in the UK, and our deepest sympathies are obviously with their friends and families.

Our action plan as you know sets out the four phases of our approach to tackling the virus: Contain, Delay, Research, and Mitigate.

We remain in the Contain phase of the outbreak, but watching what is happening around the world, our scientists think containment is extremely unlikely to work on its own, and that is why we are making extensive preparations for a move to the delay phase.

We are preparing various actions to slow the spread of this disease in order to reduce the strain it places on the NHS. The more we can delay the peak of the spread to the summer, the better the NHS will be able to manage.

Patrick and Chris will give you some more detailed information on the latest advice we are giving the public today – and how we expect that advice to change as the outbreak develops.

As things stand I'm afraid it bears repeating that the best thing we can all do is wash our hands for 20 seconds with soap and water. We will also take questions, because I know there are lots of things the public want to hear from our advisors about.

But before that I want to stress the following things:

First, we are doing everything we can to combat this outbreak, based on the very latest scientific and medical advice.

Second, we have a truly brilliant NHS, where staff have responded with all the determination, compassion and skill that makes their service so revered across the world. And they will continue to have this government's full support, my support, in tackling this virus on the frontline.

Third, we will set out further steps in the days and weeks ahead to help people protect themselves, their family and in particular the elderly and

vulnerable.

And finally, while it is absolutely critical, it's absolutely critical in managing the spread of this virus that we take the right decisions at the right time, based on the latest and best evidence. So we must not do things which have no or limited medical benefit, nor things which could turn out to be counterproductive.

There is no hiding from the fact that the coronavirus outbreak will present significant challenges for the UK, just as it does in other countries.

But if we continue to look out for one another, to pull together in a united and national effort, I have no doubt that we can and will rise to that challenge. And I'm now going to ask Patrick and then Chris to give their own perspective on where we are.