

Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 20 October 2020

Good afternoon,

Across the world, the countries most successful in their fight against coronavirus are adopting regional and local measures to protect their populations.

That is why last week we launched the three Local COVID Alert Levels for England, with interventions based on the prevalence of the virus in local areas.

Since then we have been undertaking discussions with local leaders in those parts of the country which are currently bearing the brunt of the second wave of this epidemic.

Before I update you on those discussions, I will ask Jonathan Van-Tam to brief us on the latest data nationally and in Greater Manchester.

Thank you very much JVT.

That presentation you've just seen shows you clearly why we must act.

Now I don't want anyone to think their actions or efforts have been in vain.

Our collective action, across the country, has brought the R number well below its natural rate of about 3.

As a result, the virus is not spreading as quickly as it did in February and March.

However, while the R is below its natural level, it does remain above 1, meaning the virus continues to spread.

So, we need to take action to reduce the R and control the virus, especially in those parts of the country, as you've just seen, where the virus is most prevalent.

This evening, informed by the data we have just seen, I can announce that Greater Manchester will move to the Very High alert level.

This means that:

- Pubs and bars must close, unless they are serving substantial meals.
- Households can't mix indoors or in most outdoor settings.
- In some public outdoor spaces, groups must be limited to the rule of six.

- And we strongly advise against travel into and out of the area.

In line with the additional measures taken in Lancashire, casinos, bingo halls, betting shops, adult gaming centres and soft play areas must also close.

Regulations will be laid in Parliament on Thursday and come into force just after midnight.

I know that these restrictions are tough, both on businesses and individuals. And believe me no one wants to be putting these things into effect. But that is why we are putting in place a comprehensive package of support:

- The Job Support Scheme ensures those affected by business closures are still paid. And once you top that up with Universal Credit, those on low incomes will receive at least 80% of their normal income.
- We have made available up to £465 million to help local authorities implement and enforce restrictions. Greater Manchester will receive £22 million of this.
- And that's on top of the extra £1 billion of extra funding we are providing for all local authorities across the country.
- We will work with local authorities to allocate testing and introduce local contact tracing.

Over the last 10 days, we have sought to agree an approach with local leaders in Greater Manchester. Unfortunately, agreement wasn't been reached.

And I do regret this. As I said last week, we would have a better chance of defeating the virus if we work together.

In addition I must say, to the support outlined above, we made a generous and extensive offer to support Manchester's businesses. This offer was proportionate to the support we have given Merseyside and Lancashire, but the Mayor didn't accept this unfortunately.

And given the public health situation, I must now proceed with moving Greater Manchester, as I say, to the Very High alert level.

Because not to act would put Manchester's NHS, and the lives of many of Manchester's residents, at risk.

Despite the failure to reach an agreement, I hope the Mayor and council leaders in Greater Manchester will now work with us to implement these measures.

Elsewhere, discussions on moving to the Very High alert level continue with local leaders in South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and the North East.

I hope and expect central and local government will continue to work closely together, as we are seeing in Merseyside, Lancashire, London and many other parts of the country.

Because – ultimately – all of us want to protect the NHS, and in doing so to save lives.