

Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 22 October 2020

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I am very glad to be joined today not just by Sir Patrick Vallance but by the Chancellor Rishi Sunak who is going to tell us more in a moment about our latest package to help this country in its battle with Covid.

And I want to thank Rishi for measures that will protect people's livelihoods and protect jobs and which will help us to deliver our overwhelming objective of getting the virus under control while keeping pupils in education and keeping the UK economy moving forward.

I know that there are some people who will say that this economic objective is so important that we should stop all measures to control the virus and stop restrictions of any kind on our social lives or on the way we run our businesses.

We can't do that because alas the maths is inescapable. We would face many thousands more deaths.

And no, to answer one commonly posed question, we would not be able to insulate the elderly and the vulnerable. Not in a society with so many multigenerational households. No country has been able to do that.

And an uncontrolled expansion in the number of Covid patients would mean that the NHS would have even less capacity to treat heart patients and cancer patients and to deal with all our other medical needs.

So that's why we reject that extreme laissez-faire approach.

And then there are others who say on the contrary that we need now to lock the whole place down from John O' Groats to Lands' End.

Turn the lights out, shut up shop. Close schools and universities and go back to the same kind of lockdown we had in March and April and May.

And I have to say I don't believe that is the right course now. Not when the psychological cost of lockdown is well known to us and the economic cost.

Not when it is being suggested that we might have to perform the same brutal lockdown again and again in the months ahead.

And not when there is such obvious variation – unlike last time – between different parts of the country.

So that's why we are going for a balanced approach.

A middle course between the Scylla of another national lockdown and the Charybdis of an uncontrolled virus.

A regional and local approach – the same approach that is now being followed by some of the countries that are the most successful in their fights against the virus.

And so to all those who are enduring these restrictions, and who have been enduring them for so long in all parts of the country.

I want to repeat my thanks, for your bravery, for your patience and your public spiritedness.

And I repeat – there are clear signs that our collective actions are working.

Yes the R is above one, but thanks to the efforts of people of all ages in following the guidance and the rules the R is about half its natural rate.

And if we follow the guidance together and follow the rules then we can get it down.

And it is precisely because these measures are burdensome that from the beginning this government has provided unprecedented support to everyone in this country – support worth £200bn to look after jobs and livelihoods and business.

And as we adjust our campaign to fight the virus it is right that we should now produce a new package of support across the country in addition to the specific agreements we have reached with Lancashire, Merseyside and others.

And because it is far, far better to keep business going now rather than to let those jobs go forever in a new national lockdown.

We will win this fight against Covid.

Because we can see that treatments are getting better, and medicines are getting better and testing technologies are getting better.

And we have shown before that we can drive the R down.

And in the meantime we need to protect jobs, protect livelihoods, and put the UK in strongest position for an economic recovery.

I am now going to hand over to the Chancellor Rishi Sunak.