

Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 23 November 2020

It seems that almost every week we learn of some new scientific breakthrough to help us beat Covid

last week it was good news about the vaccine from Pfizer BioNTech

and then Moderna

This morning we heard the fantastic news that the Oxford Astra Zeneca vaccine has been highly effective in clinical trials

there are more tests to be done, but the signs are that this vaccine

- financed partly by British taxpayers, working in partnership with a great British company –

This vaccine could be both affordable and easy to use and highly effective

We have ordered 100m doses

and thanks to the work of the Vaccines Task Force we have secured more than 350m doses of potential vaccines of all kinds

but we are not out of the woods yet

we can hear the drumming hooves of the cavalry coming over the brow of the hill

but they are not here yet

Even if all three vaccines are approved, even if the production timetables are met and vaccines notoriously fall behind in their production timetables

it will be months before we can be sure that we have inoculated everyone that needs a vaccine

and those months will be hard

they will be cold

they include January and February when the NHS is under its greatest pressure

and that is why when we come out of lockdown next week we must not just throw away the gains we have all made

So today we have published our Covid Winter Plan which sets out a clear strategy to take the country through to the end of March

We will continue to bear down hard on this virus

we will use tough tiering – in some ways tougher than the pre-lockdown measures and details of those tiers are on the gov.uk website later this week when we have the most up to date and we will be sharing details of which tier your area is going to be in

I should warn you now that many more places will be in higher tiers than alas was previously the case

and we will simultaneously be using the new and exciting possibilities of community testing – as they have done in Liverpool

and there will be a clear incentive for everyone in areas where the virus prevalence is high to get a test, to get one of these rapid turnaround lateral flow tests and do your best for the community

get a test to help to squeeze the disease and reduce the restrictions that your town or city or area has endured

and that way – through tough tiering and mass community testing

we hope to let people see a little more of their family and friends over Christmas

Now I know that many of us want and need Christmas with our families

we feel after this year we deserve it

but this is not the moment to let the virus rip for the sake of Christmas parties

tis the season to be jolly but tis also the season to be jolly careful

especially with elderly relatives

and working with the Devolved Administrations we will set out shortly how we want to get the balance right for Christmas and we will be setting this out later this week

Christmas this year will be different and we want to remain prudent through Christmas and beyond into the new year

but we will use the three tools that I have described to squeeze the virus in the weeks and months ahead

tiering, testing and the roll-out of vaccines

employing all three techniques together so as to drive down R and drive down the infection rate

and I really am now assured things really will look and feel very different indeed after Easter

and that idea of an end goal or date is important because at last – if the promise of the vaccines is fulfilled – we do have something to work for a timescale, a goal around which businesses can begin tentatively to plan and with luck and with hard work we will be seeing improvements before then but for now the problem is not a shortage of hope or a lack of optimism

not with the amazing news that we are getting from the laboratories in this country

the challenge now as we face this difficult winter ahead is to fight down any over-optimism to master any tendency to premature celebration of success that success will come all the faster if we work together to follow the guidance

maintain the basic disciplines as people have done so heroically over the last few months

hands, face, space and get a test if you have symptoms

because that is the way we will beat it together