

Chancellor's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 29 May 2020

Good evening.

I'm joined here in Downing Street by Professor Steve Powis, Medical Director of NHS England.

Let me begin with the latest figures:

- 4,043,686 tests have been carried out in the UK, including 131,458 tests yesterday
- 271,222 people have tested positive, an increase of 2,095 cases since yesterday
- sadly, of those who tested positive for coronavirus, across all settings, 38,161 people have now died
- that's an increase of 324 fatalities since yesterday

Our thoughts, as always, are with the family and friends of those who have lost their lives.

Today's figures confirm what the PM has said:

We are past the peak. We are flattening the curve. We have protected the NHS and the number of deaths is falling.

Over the coming weeks, we can now take careful but deliberate steps to reopen our economy.

Across the country, office lights will be turned on and windows thrown open.

Work clothes and school uniforms will be pulled out of the wardrobe.

Shops and factories will start to hum with activity.

As we enter this new phase, things will change.

Businesses will need to become Covid secure to protect staff and customers.

We will all need to stay alert as we go about our daily lives.

And, as Britain returns to work, we need to adapt the emergency programmes we put in place to bridge through the crisis.

Because of those programmes, our economic prospects are better than they otherwise would have been.

We have provided:

- tens of billions of pounds of tax cuts, tax deferrals, cash grants and discounted loans for businesses.
- income protection for millions of the self-employed
- a strengthened safety net to protect millions of our most vulnerable people

And our job retention scheme has now supported more than 8 million jobs and over a million businesses.

No British Government, Labour or Conservative, has ever done anything like this.

I believe it has made a real difference.

But as we reopen the economy, there is broad consensus across the political and economic spectrum:

The furlough scheme cannot continue indefinitely.

Two weeks ago, I outlined the principles of my approach:

- the furlough scheme will remain open all the way until October
- we will ask employers to start contributing, as we also introduce flexible furloughing
- and employees will see no change to their level of support

As promised, I can provide more details today.

I believe it is right, in the final phase of this eight-month scheme...

...to ask employers to contribute, alongside the taxpayer, towards the wages of their staff.

But I understand, too, that businesses and employers have been through an incredibly difficult time.

So I have decided to ask employers to pay only a modest contribution, introduced slowly over the coming months.

In June and July, the scheme will continue as before, with no employer contribution at all.

In August, the taxpayer contribution to people's wages will stay at 80%.

Employers will only be asked to pay National Insurance and employer pension contributions...

...which, for the average claim, account for just 5% of total employment costs.

By September, employers will have had the opportunity to make any necessary changes to their workplaces and business practices.

Only then, in the final two months of this eight-month scheme, will we ask employers to start paying towards people's wages.

In September, taxpayers will pay 70% of the furlough grant, with employers contributing 10%.

In October, taxpayers will pay 60%, and employers will contribute 20%.

Then, after eight months of this extraordinary intervention...

...of the government stepping in to help pay people's wages, the scheme will close.

The biggest request I've heard from businesses large and small, right across our country, is to have the flexibility to decide what is right for them.

So, to protect jobs, and help businesses decide how quickly to bring their workforce back, we are introducing a new, more flexible furlough.

This is a critical part of our plan to kickstart the economy.

The financial security of the furlough scheme has been a relief for many, but at the same time people want to work.

No one wants to be at home on furlough. No one wants to feel unable to contribute.

So HMRC and the Treasury have worked hard to put the flexible furlough in place not from August 1st, as originally planned, but from July 1st – one month early.

From July 1st, employers will have the maximum possible flexibility to decide on the right arrangements for them and their furloughed staff.

For instance, if you are watching at home and on furlough, your employer could bring you back two days a week.

They would pay you for those two days as normal, while the furlough scheme will continue to cover you for the other three working days.

To allow us to introduce this new, flexible furlough from July 1st, we will

need to close the old scheme to new entrants on June 30th.

Employers wanting to place new employees on the scheme will need to do so by June 10th...

...to allow them time to complete the minimum furlough period before then.

Alongside the furlough scheme for employees, our economic response has also supported the self-employed:

2.3 million people have now applied for our income support scheme.

I know people have been waiting to hear whether the scheme will be extended;

I understand people have been anxious.

I can confirm today:

The self-employment income scheme will be extended, with applications opening in August for a second and final grant.

The final grant will work in the same way as the first did, paid out in a single installment covering three months' worth of average monthly profits.

To maintain the sense of fairness alongside the job retention scheme...

...the value of the final grant will be 70%, up to a total £6,570.

Otherwise, there will be no changes and no further extensions to the schemes, which continue to be some of the most generous in the world.

Our economic response to coronavirus was designed to keep people in work, protect people's incomes, and support businesses.

All to give us the best chance of recovering quickly as the economy reopens.

These measures have been on a scale unmatched by any government in recent history.

But I do want to acknowledge that we haven't been able to support everyone in the exact way they would want.

I understand some people have felt frustrated. But you were not and have not been forgotten.

Even if you don't qualify for the furlough or self-employment schemes, we've provided a wide range of support...

...from discounted loans, to tax cuts, mortgage holidays and enhanced welfare.

Now, our thoughts, our energies, our resources must turn to looking forward, to planning for the recovery.

And we will need the dynamism of our whole economy as we fight our way back

to prosperity.

Not everything will look the same as before.

It won't be the case that we can simply put the key in the lock, open the door, and step into the world as it was in January.

We will develop new measures to grow the economy, to back business, to boost skills, and to help people thrive in the new post-Covid world.

Today, a new national collective effort begins: to reopen our country and kickstart our economy.

Thank you.

[New flight from Jamaica to bring home British travellers](#)

Press release

Around 310 more British travellers will be able to return home from Jamaica on a second charter flight organised by the Government.



This follows the support the FC0 has already provided to get people back on special flights from the Bahamas, Cuba, and Guyana, as well as a flight from Jamaica earlier this month in partnership with TUI. The FC0 has also helped over 11,000 British travellers return from the Caribbean to the UK via commercial routes, including over 4,300 from Jamaica.

The flight will depart from Kingston, Norman Manley International Airport, to London Heathrow on 3 June 2020.

Minister for the Caribbean, Baroness Sugg, said:

I am very pleased we have been able to organise this special return flight for British travellers in Jamaica.

Getting people home as quickly as possible remains our priority and this latest flight will mean that we have helped more than 11,000 Britons return to the UK from across the Caribbean. Our team in Jamaica will ensure that any British travellers who remain receive the support they need.

Asif Ahmad, High Commissioner to Jamaica, said:

It has been a difficult time for British people waiting to return home from Jamaica. My team and I are pleased to offer this second charter flight from Kingston which would not be possible without the collaboration with the Jamaican authorities. I urge any Britons still in Jamaica wishing to return to the UK to book their flight as soon as possible.

The UK Government is working with the airline industry and host governments across the world to bring back British travellers to the UK as part of the plan announced by the Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab (30 March) – with up to £75 million available for special charter flights to priority countries, focused on helping the most vulnerable travellers.

Notes to editors

- These flights are for British nationals normally resident in the UK and dependants travelling with a British national. Vulnerable British nationals will be prioritised. Vulnerable non-British UK residents with Indefinite Leave to Remain and other foreign nationals may be accommodated if there is sufficient capacity.
- To book flights, British travellers should check the [FCO Travel Advice pages](#)
- Those who are eligible to fly will be sent information on getting to airports and flight itineraries directly when their seat is confirmed
- Details regarding luggage allowance, flight costs and carriers will be available on the booking portal
- The British High Commission continues to provide consular support to any British travellers who remain in Jamaica

Chancellor extends Self-Employment Support Scheme and confirms furlough next steps

- Rishi Sunak announces Self-Employment Income Support Scheme will be extended – with those eligible able to claim a second and final grant capped at £6,570
- Chancellor also outlines further details on the extension of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, including improved flexibility to bring furloughed employees back part time in July, and a new taper requiring employers to contribute modestly to furloughed salaries from August
- both schemes are UK wide

Those eligible under the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS), which has so far seen 2.3 million claims worth £6.8 billion will be able to claim a second and final grant in August. The grant will be worth 70% of their average monthly trading profits, paid out in a single instalment covering three months' worth of profits, and capped at £6,570 in total.

The Chancellor also set out more details on how the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) will continue to support jobs and business as people return to work, following the announcement of an extension of the scheme on 12 May.

So far, the CJRS has helped 1 million employers across the UK furlough 8.4 million jobs, protecting people's livelihoods.

From 1 July 2020, businesses will be given the flexibility to bring furloughed employees back part time. This is a month earlier than previously announced to help support people back to work. Individual firms will decide the hours and shift patterns their employees will work on their return, so that they can decide on the best approach for them – and will be responsible for paying their wages while in work.

From August 2020, the level of government grant provided through the job retention scheme will be slowly tapered to reflect that people will be returning to work. That means that for June and July the government will continue to pay 80% of people's salaries. In the following months, businesses will be asked to contribute a modest share, but crucially individuals will continue to receive that 80% of salary covering the time they are unable to work.

The scheme updates mean that the following will apply for the period people

are furloughed:

- June and July: The government will pay 80% of wages up to a cap of £2,500 as well as employer National Insurance (ER NICs) and pension contributions. Employers are not required to pay anything.
- August: The government will pay 80% of wages up to a cap of £2,500. Employers will pay ER NICs and pension contributions – for the average claim, this represents 5% of the gross employment costs the employer would have incurred had the employee not been furloughed.
- September: The government will pay 70% of wages up to a cap of £2,187.50. Employers will pay ER NICs and pension contributions and 10% of wages to make up 80% total up to a cap of £2,500. For the average claim, this represents 14% of the gross employment costs the employer would have incurred had the employee not been furloughed.
- October: The government will pay 60% of wages up to a cap of £1,875. Employers will pay ER NICs and pension contributions and 20% of wages to make up 80% total up to a cap of £2,500. For the average claim, this represents 23% of the gross employment costs the employer would have incurred had the employee not been furloughed.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak said:

Our top priority has always been to support people, protect jobs and businesses through this crisis. The furlough and self-employment schemes have been a lifeline for millions of people and businesses.

We stood behind Britain's businesses and workers as we came into this crisis and we stand behind them as we come through the other side.

Now, as we begin to re-open our country and kickstart our economy, these schemes will adjust to ensure those who are able to work can do so, while remaining amongst the most generous in the world.

Employers will be required to submit data on the usual hours an employee would be expected to work in a claim period and actual hours worked. Employees who believe they are not getting their 80% share can also report any concerns to the HMRC fraud hotline. HMRC will not hesitate to take action against those found to be abusing the scheme.

Further information

SEISS

- Individuals can continue to apply for the first SEISS grant until 13 July. Under the first grant, eligible individuals can claim a taxable grant worth 80% of their average monthly trading profits, paid out in a single instalment covering three months' worth of profits, and capped at £7,500 in total. Those eligible have the money paid into their bank account within six working days of completing a claim.

- Applications for the second grant will open in August. Individuals will be able to claim a second taxable grant worth 70% of their average monthly trading profits, paid out in a single instalment covering three months' worth of profits, and capped at £6,570 in total.
- The eligibility criteria are the same for both grants, and individuals will need to confirm that their business has been adversely affected by coronavirus. An individual does not need to have claimed the first grant to receive the second grant: for example, they may only have been adversely affected by COVID-19 in this later phase. Further guidance on the second grant will be published on Friday 12 June.

CJRS:

- Around 40% of employers have not made a claim for employer NICs costs or employer pension contributions and so will be unaffected by the change in August if their employee's employment patterns do not change.
- Many smaller employers have some or all of their employer NIC bills covered by the Employment Allowance so will not be significantly impacted.
- Around 25% of CJRS monthly claims are below the thresholds where employer NICs and automatic enrolment pension contributions are due, and so no employer contribution would be expected for these payments to furloughed employees in August.
- To enable the introduction of part time furloughing, and support those already furloughed back to work, claims from July onwards will be restricted to employers currently using the scheme and previously furloughed employees. The scheme will close to new entrants on 30 June, with the last three-week furloughs before that point commencing on 10 June.
- From 1 July, employers will be able to agree any working arrangements with previously furloughed employees.
- When claiming the CJRS grant for furloughed hours; employers will need to report and claim for a minimum period of a week, for grants to be calculated accurately across working patterns.
- The updated SEISS and CJRS schemes will continue to operate UK-wide to the timings set out above.
- If an average claim lasted 8 months, the total cost of employer contributions would represent around 5% of the gross employment costs an employer would have incurred had the employee not been furloughed.

[Factsheet for SEISS and CJRS schemes](#) (PDF, 126KB, 5 pages)

[UK Statement to the WTO General](#)

Council

As this is the first time I'm taking the floor, I would like to say farewell to all those who are leaving us and thank them for their cooperation and friendship. I wish you all the best.

We have heard from many this morning about the scale of the COVID-19 crisis, and what it means for the global economy.

One thing we all know to be true is that, while this pandemic began as a global health crisis, it is now morphing into a global economic crisis in which no country will be spared.

In the 1930s, the crisis caused by the financial crash of 1929 led to unrestrained protectionism which enormously exacerbated the scale of global economic devastation that followed. This period is not known as the Great Depression for nothing.

Today, we are seeing an increase in protectionism in response to this pandemic, compounding an unprecedented collapse in global trade, as a consequence of the global lockdown.

It is not an exaggeration to say that we risk another Great Depression if we don't take action, collectively, to protect the global trading system from serious long-term damage.

So what does that mean for our deliberations today?

First, we cannot afford a leadership vacuum between Roberto's departure and his successor taking up the helm. If we want the World Trade Organization to be relevant in this crisis, we need a sense of urgency.

Second, the United Kingdom supports an open transparent and inclusive process, but we believe that this is possible if we make it a priority and accept that this will rely on virtual meetings.

Third, I urge colleagues to make the case to our capitals about why this should be a priority precisely because strong leadership by the WTO will be one of the best ways we can minimize the damage this virus is doing to the global economy, and accelerate the process of building back better.

The United Kingdom will be offering our strong support to Ambassador Walker's efforts to run consultations in line with expedited deadlines, as necessary for this selection process; and we will be working with all other WTO Members to help facilitate the smoothest possible process to select a successor.

Action taken to halt sales of fingerprick coronavirus (COVID-19) antibody testing kits

News story

Anyone supplying these types of tests should temporarily stop this service.



The MHRA is asking providers of laboratory-based COVID-19 antibody testing services using capillary blood collected by a fingerprick, to temporarily stop providing this service until home collection of this sample type has been properly assessed and validated for use with these laboratory tests.

This does not affect rapid, point of care tests or laboratory tests performed using blood taken from the vein.

The Agency has [recently updated its guidance on home antibody testing kits](#), to ensure that the public and industry have the latest information on the reliability of test results and what they mean.

Graeme Tunbridge, MHRA Interim Director of Devices, comments:

Patient safety and public health are our main priorities and it is in the interests of everyone for antibody tests to be as reliable and meaningful as they can be.

There are several UK providers of testing services who offer COVID-19 antibody testing using a fingerprick sample of capillary blood collected in a small container.

We are asking all providers of laboratory-based COVID-19 antibody testing services using capillary blood collected by a fingerprick

to temporarily stop providing this service until home collection of this sample type has been properly assessed and validated for use with these laboratory tests.

Use of unvalidated sample types may lead to unreliable results and as such we are working closely with the service providers, laboratories and test manufacturers to resolve the regulatory and patient safety issues.

People who have purchased one of these sampling kits, and received an antibody test result, should not consider the result to be reliable and should not take any action based on it.

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