

The pandemic still haunts too many countries

It is good news the U.K. case rate has collapsed and the death rate fallen sharply. Widespread vaccinations are clearly having a big impact. Other similar countries on the continent using lockdown without high vaccination rates have not seen anything like the same declines. That might start to change as we move into summer as it did last year before the vaccines arrived, as there was a seasonal pattern in 2020.

The UK's death rate is now the 13th highest for the pandemic to date, not the worst as some like to claim (deaths per million people on official worldometer figures). The case rate is 38th, continuing to show a higher death rate relative to cases than many other places. I still think this is more likely to be more death certificates attributing death to CV 19 when it was just present in a person with other possible causes of death, as otherwise it implies something wrong with the way the NHS treated UK patients. The EU has now had the most deaths in the world at 627,000 followed by the USA at 575,000. The current epicentres of the pandemic are Central Europe led by Hungary, Czechia and the Balkans, and Mexico, Peru and Brazil in Latin America. Mexico on her recently swollen numbers has more deaths per million than Brazil but well under the Central European levels. Italy with lockdown has overtaken the U.K. for deaths per million amongst the larger countries but remains well behind Belgium, Hungary, Czechia and some of the Balkan countries.

The figures continue to be problematic with different levels of reporting, different volumes of testing, different reliabilities on tests and with some different definitions. Nonetheless they provide some guide and have probably become more accurate over time as more testing is done and more understanding achieved. The theory that cutting contacts cuts transmission sounds very sensible. Surely the fewer people you meet and the less time you spend with them the less chance of catching the disease. However, there is no simple correlation between length and severity of lockdown with reduced disease, with some of the EU countries that have had long and strong lockdowns having bad numbers for cases and deaths. It may be their populations are more prone to the disease and still catch it despite much reduced social contact, but there is as yet no widely accepted explanation of why for example , Asia has been so much less affected than Europe.

It would be good to have more informed analysis from doctors and other experts in disease transmission on why the EU and some parts of Latin America have had much worse experiences than much of Asia. It does look as if the vaccines when offered to all those vulnerable make a huge difference to the death rate, and should allow a substantial relaxation in limits on personal freedoms and business activity.