

The Transmission rate and the lock down

On Monday I was at last a winner in the lottery to get to ask a question in the Commons. The occasion was the Urgent Question on the government's approach to the lock down.

I followed up the work I have been doing and the issues I have been raising with Ministers over the scientific advice concerning the transmission of the virus and how we arrest it. The Secretary of State confirmed my argument that I have been putting for some time that to get a more accurate estimate of the transmission rate the scientists need a run of numbers of how many people in the country have the virus, based on sample tests that seek to capture the population as a whole.

He also confirmed my other point, that it is difficult constructing an accurate trend for the UK for the early weeks of the disease, because this sample testing was not then carried out. There is a danger that the numbers collected then are misleading, or that the presence of many more tests later detects more of the virus than was detected in the period of few tests.

It must also follow that as they move to more localised lock downs they will need even more accurate sampled testing to see what is going on town by town or smaller area. It appears that infection control in hospitals and care homes is also crucial, as these centres may have spread the disease more intensely than social gatherings.

There is a good case to relax the social distancing requirement from 2 metres to 1 metre as soon as possible. The evidence is very little extra protection is offered by the longer distance, though the economic impact of the reduction would be most helpful to hospitality and travel businesses.