

PM Commons statement on coronavirus: 22 September 2020

Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will make a statement on our response to the rising number of Coronavirus cases

and how we must act now to avoid still graver consequences later on.

At every stage in this pandemic we have struck a delicate balance between saving lives by protecting our NHS

and minimising the wider impact of our restrictions.

And it is because of the common sense and fortitude of the British people that earlier this year we were able to avert an even worse catastrophe, forming a human shield around our NHS,

and then by getting our country moving again by reopening key sectors of our economy and returning children to school.

But we always knew that while we might have driven the virus into retreat, the prospect of a second wave was real.

And I am sorry to say that – as in Spain and France and many other countries – we have reached a perilous turning point.

A month ago, on average around a thousand people across the UK were testing positive for Coronavirus every day.

The latest figure has almost quadrupled to 3,929.

Yesterday the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Adviser warned that the doubling rate for new cases could be between seven and 20 days with the possibility of tens of thousands of new infections next month.

I wish I could reassure the House that the growing number of cases is merely a function of more testing,

but a rising proportion of the tests themselves are yielding a positive result.

I also wish I could say that more of our people now have the antibodies to keep the virus off,

but the latest data suggest that fewer than 8 per cent of us are in this position.

It is true that the number of new cases is growing fastest amongst those aged 20-29,

but the evidence shows that the virus is spreading to other more vulnerable age groups,

as we have seen in France and Spain

where this has led to increased hospital admissions and, sadly, more deaths.

In the last fortnight, daily hospital admissions in England have more than doubled.

Tens of thousands of daily infections in October would, as night follows day, lead to hundreds of daily deaths in November and those numbers would continue to grow unless we act.

And as with all respiratory viruses, Covid is likely to spread faster as autumn becomes winter.

Yesterday, on the advice of the four Chief Medical Officers, the UK's Covid alert level was raised from 3 to 4, the second most serious stage, meaning that transmission is high or rising exponentially.

So this is the moment when we must act.

If we can curb the number of daily infections, and reduce the Reproduction rate to 1,

then we can save lives, protect the NHS, and the most vulnerable,

and shelter the economy from the far sterner and more costly measures that would inevitably become necessary later.

So we are acting on the principle that a stitch in time saves nine.

The Government will introduce new restrictions in England,

carefully judged to achieve

the maximum reduction in the R number

with the minimum damage to lives and livelihoods.

I want to stress that this is by no means a return to the full lockdown of March.

We are not issuing a general instruction to stay at home.

We will ensure that schools, colleges and universities stay open – because nothing is more important than the education, health and well-being of our young people.

We will ensure that businesses can stay open in a Covid-compliant way.

However, we must take action to suppress the disease.

First, we are once again asking office workers who can work from home to do so.

In key public services – and in all professions where homeworking is not possible, such as construction or retail – people should continue to attend their workplaces.

And like Government, this House will be free to take forward its business in a Covid-secure way

which you, Mr Speaker, have pioneered.

Second, from Thursday all pubs, bars and restaurants must operate table-service only, Mr Speaker, except for takeaways.

Together with all hospitality venues, they must close at 10pm.

To help the police to enforce this rule, I am afraid that means alas closing, and not just calling for last orders. Simplicity is paramount.

The same will apply to takeaways – though deliveries can continue thereafter.

I am sorry this will hurt many businesses just getting back on their feet, but we must act to stop the virus from being transmitted in bars and restaurants.

Third, we will extend the requirement to wear face coverings to include staff in retail,

all users of taxis and private hire vehicles,

and staff and customers in indoor hospitality, except when seated at a table to eat or drink.

Fourth, in retail, leisure, tourism and other sectors, our Covid-secure guidelines will become legal obligations.

Businesses will be fined and could be closed if they breach these rules.

Fifth, now is the time to tighten up the rule of six.

I'm afraid that from Monday, a maximum of 15 people will be able to attend wedding ceremonies and receptions.

Though, up to 30 can still attend a funeral as now.

We will also have to extend the rule of six to all adult indoor team sports.

Finally, we have to acknowledge that the spread of the virus is now affecting our ability to reopen business conferences, exhibitions and large sporting events

so we will not be able to do this from 1 October.

And I recognise the implications for our sports clubs, which are the life and soul of our communities,

and my RH Friends the Chancellor and Culture Secretary are working urgently on what we can do now to support them.

Mr Speaker, these rules measures will only work if people comply.

There is nothing more frustrating for the vast majority, the law-abiding majority that do comply than the sight of a few brazenly defying the rules.

So these rules will be enforced by tighter penalties.

We have already introduced a fine of up to £10,000 for those who fail to self-isolate and such fines will now be applied to businesses breaking Covid rules.

The penalty for failing to wear a mask or breaking the rule of six will now double to £200 for a first offence.

We will provide the police and local authorities with the extra funding they need,

a greater police presence on our streets,

and the option to draw on military support where required to free up the police.

The measures I have announced all apply in England and the Devolved Administrations are taking similar steps.

I spoke yesterday with each of the First Ministers and again today and I thank them for their collaboration:

the health of everyone in these islands depends on our common success.

Already about 13 million people across England are living under various local restrictions, over and above national measures.

We will continue to act against local flare-ups, working alongside councils and strengthening measures where necessary. And I want to speak directly to those who were shielding early in the pandemic and may be anxious about being at greater risk. Following advice from our senior clinicians, our guidance continues to be that you do not need to shield – except in local lockdown areas – and we will keep this under constant review. I must emphasise that if all our actions fail to bring the R below 1,

then we reserve the right to deploy greater firepower,

with significantly greater restrictions.

I fervently want to avoid taking this step, as do the Devolved Administrations,

but we will only be able to avoid it if our new measures work and our behaviour changes.

Mr Speaker, we will spare no effort in developing vaccines, treatments and new forms of mass-testing

but unless we palpably make progress, we should assume that the restrictions I have announced will remain in place for perhaps six months.

For the time being, this virus is a fact of our lives and I must tell the House and the country that our fight against it will continue.

We will not listen to those who say let the virus rip;

nor to those who urge a permanent lockdown;

we are taking decisive and appropriate steps to balance saving lives with protecting jobs and livelihoods.

I know all of this will have profound consequences for our constituents,

so the government will give the House every opportunity to scrutinise our decisions.

In addition to regular statements and debates,

Hon Members will be able to question the government's scientific advisers more regularly,

gain access to data about their constituencies, your constituencies

and join daily calls with my RH Friend the Paymaster General.

After six months of restrictions,

it would be tempting to hope that the threat has faded,

and seek comfort in the belief that if you have avoided the virus so far then you are somehow immune.

I have to say that it is that kind of complacency that could be our undoing.

If we fail to act together now we will not only place others at risk

but jeopardise our own futures with the more drastic action that we would inevitably be forced to take.

Mr Speaker, no British government would wish to stifle our freedoms in the ways that we have found necessary this year.

Yet even now we can draw some comfort from the fact that

schools and universities and places of worship are staying open,

shops can serve their customers,

construction workers can go to building sites,

and the vast majority of the UK economy can continue moving forwards.

We are also, Mr Speaker, better prepared for a second wave,

with the ventilators, the PPE, the dexamethasone, the Nightingale Hospitals, and a hundred times as much testing.

So now it falls to each of us and every one of us to remember the basics – wash our hands, cover our faces, observe social distancing – and follow the rules.

Then we can fight back against this virus,

shelter our economy from even greater damage,

protect the most vulnerable in care homes and hospitals,

safeguard our NHS

and save many more lives.

And I commend this statement to the House.

[Gas goes green as UK takes another step toward net zero](#)

- Consultation launched on a Green Gas Levy to reduce emissions from the gas grid and help the UK reach its net zero target by 2050
- new levy will be applied to gas suppliers in Scotland, Wales and England, and will be used to increase green gas production to help decarbonise the gas grid
- committed to building back greener, these new measures could prevent 21.6 million tonnes of CO₂ from entering the atmosphere – the equivalent of planting 71 million trees

Supported by the new Green Gas Levy, the UK government is helping people across Great Britain go green on their energy supplies, with plans to scale up green gas production to heat around 230,000 homes.

Green gas – or biomethane – is produced from environmentally-friendly organic waste products. Using more of this gas from renewable sources to power boilers in homes, or in industrial processes in factories, will help to lower carbon emissions and protect the environment without hitting consumers'

pockets.

With the potential to prevent as much as 21.6 million tonnes of CO2 entering the atmosphere, the Green Gas Levy will result in only minimal costs for consumers – starting at just 11 pence per month – yet will see climate gains equivalent to planting over 71 million trees.

Energy Minister Kwasi Kwarteng said:

Reaching net zero means reducing emissions across our entire energy system, including the way we heat our homes and businesses.

This new funding will support an ambitious scheme to decarbonise the gas grid that will prevent millions of tonnes of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere – another step towards reaching net zero by 2050 at minimal cost to UK bill payers.

The Green Gas Levy was first announced in the 2020 Budget earlier this year, and today's announcement launches a consultation which invites views on how the final initiative will be designed and implemented.

The levy will play a key role in supporting the government's UK-wide green economic recovery by funding the Green Gas Support Scheme, which will help bring investment into rural areas of Great Britain and support jobs in this sector.

More biomethane plants will be built as a result of the funding from the levy, leading to more biomethane being injected into the grid. This will also benefit society by boosting our carbon savings, and making an important contribution to the UK's efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change. The launch of the consultation has been welcomed by the gas industry.

Charlotte Morton, Chief Executive of the Anaerobic Digestion and Bioresources Association (ADBA) said:

Fully deployed, the biomethane industry could deliver a 6% reduction in the UK's greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and provide heating for 6.4 million homes, creating tens of thousands of jobs and boosting energy and food production security.

As biomethane is already compatible with our current gas grid, it is also a particularly cost-effective way to decarbonise the UK's heating infrastructure. We welcome this consultation and the commitment shown by BEIS to integrate biomethane into the government's net zero strategy. With the right policy support, there is much more this industry could contribute to the green economy and to achieving the UK's 5th Carbon Budget, over the next decade, but this represents a significant step in the right direction.

Today's consultation is the latest measure designed to fight climate change and help the UK reach its net zero target. Last month the government announced the £2 billion Green Homes Grant, which will fund up to 2 thirds of the cost of upgrading the energy performance of homes – impacting more than 600,000 homes in England and saving households up to £600 a year on their energy bills.

- The [consultation](#) for the Green Gas Levy is now live
- more information about the £2 billion Green Homes Grant can be found at the [Simple Energy Advice website](#)
- gas suppliers will pay the cost of the levy to Ofgem, who will use the funds to pay biomethane producers for the green gas they inject into the gas grid

[Rail Minister thanks efforts of volunteer Journey Makers and work to provide cleaner, safer stations](#)

- Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris visits Norwich Rail Station to meet Journey Maker volunteers and see new deep-cleaning equipment in use by Greater Anglia
- Journey Makers volunteer scheme will provide passenger support at up to 86 rail, bus and light-rail stations across England
- rail operators across the country are carrying out enhanced cleaning regimes for all stations and services

Volunteers focused on providing passengers with simpler, safer journeys were recognised by Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris today (22 September 2020), as he thanked 'Journey Makers' at Norwich Station for their role in helping support passenger journeys on the railways.

Announced in May 2020, the project – which the Department for Transport (DfT) is delivering with the national charity [Volunteering Matters](#) – will deploy hundreds of volunteers to stations across the country, supporting the existing transport staff to welcome passengers and help them to travel confidently and safely across the network.

Journey Makers are trained to provide reassurance, advice and friendly assistance to passengers around transport hubs. The volunteers will help to

deliver a continuous flow of people around stations, preventing overcrowding and queues.

In addition, Mr Heaton-Harris met staff at Greater Anglia at Norwich station to launch a new line of deep-cleaning equipment as part of its enhanced train cleaning scheme. Spot-check scanners, disinfecting fogging guns and powerful vacuum cleaners, used to clean both the air and surfaces, were demonstrated by the train presentation team – showcasing the huge efforts to create a safe environment for passengers.

As more passengers begin to use the rail network, it's vital that operators continue their stringent cleaning regimes at stations, platforms and on carriages. This scheme builds on rigorous cleaning measures already in place across the rail network, including the implementation of a hospital-grade anti-viral spray used regularly on touchpoint and hygiene areas which provides additional protection to customers.

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris said:

As the network becomes busier, the Journey Makers scheme is going to be an invaluable part of passenger safety, complementing existing staff and preventing stations from becoming congested and overcrowded.

I'm thankful to Volunteering Matters and all our Journey Makers, who are providing a crucial service that will be even more vital as footfall at stations continues to increase.

The huge efforts by rail operators, including Greater Anglia, to deliver comprehensive cleaning measures across the network, will also ensure that trains and stations are regularly sanitised, meaning passengers feel confident when travelling.

Jamie Burles, Greater Anglia managing director, said:

We're doing everything we can to keep our customers safe while travelling with us, including investing in new powerful cleaning equipment, such as fogging guns which spray a mist of disinfectant onto all surfaces, vacuum cleaners which clean the air as well as the floor, and hygiene monitoring equipment to improve the efficiency of our cleaning routines.

We're also taking on extra cleaners as we've stepped up our cleaning paying special attention to high touch areas such as push buttons, door handles and grab rails.

Stephen Skeet from Volunteering Matters said:

We've been delighted to support DfT in efforts to rebuild public confidence to travel safely through the Journey Makers Scheme. Across England, our volunteers are at transport hubs providing passengers with reassurance, a friendly face and ensuring they understand new arrangements for accessing stations.

It's been brilliant for volunteers to support their local communities in a safe way at this time, meet new people while social distancing, and help travellers go to work safely.

Government launches cross-sector Working Group to help address multiple small pension pots

At a virtual launch event on Tuesday 22 September, the Minister for Pensions and Financial Inclusion, Guy Opperman, outlined his vision for the Working Group, the challenge of small pots, and the Government's commitment to putting the consumer at the heart of this work.

Minister for Pensions and Financial Inclusion, Guy Opperman, said:

Automatic enrolment has transformed the way people save for retirement, meaning millions more can look forward to a more secure future.

With the launch of the cross-sector Working Group and our ongoing efforts to make Pensions Dashboards a reality, we are focused on ensuring that consumers can stay on top of their pension savings, make more informed choices about their financial futures and have real returns from their savings.

The Minister, speaking at the event led by the Department for Work and Pensions and supported by the Pensions Policy Institute (PPI) and Now: Pensions, confirmed the Working Group will report later this Autumn with an initial assessment, recommendations and an indicative roadmap of actions for industry, delivery partners and Government.

Since launching in 2012, more than 10 million people have been automatically enrolled into a workplace pension and over 1.7 million employers have met their duties.

Making workplace pension saving the norm, including for lower earners and people who move jobs frequently, increased the possibility that an individual's pension savings could become fragmented into a number of deferred, small pension pots.

The Government is working with industry and others to ensure the delivery of Pensions Dashboards, allowing consumers to see what they have, online and in one place.

The new Working Group will complement the work on dashboards to identify the priority option or combination of options to help tackle the growth of deferred, small pension pots – involving experts from within the pensions industry, fintech and those representing member interests and employers.

Media enquiries for this press release – 020 3267 5144

Follow DWP on:

[Committee on Standards in Public Life announces landscape review of public standards](#)

The independent Committee on Standards in Public Life has today announced that it will be carrying out a review of the institutions, processes and structures in place to support high standards of conduct.

The review will look at best practice and identify any themes and gaps in the way the [Seven Principles of Public Life](#) are promoted and maintained.

Announcing the review, Committee Chair, Jonathan Evans said:

“There are now a wide range of different bodies involved in investigating, promoting, and maintaining standards, based on the Nolan principles – some as a result of the Committee's recommendations over the last 25 years.

“As well as sharing any lessons learned and best practice, we will consider whether there are gaps or issues that require further work. We want to check whether the Nolan principles are well understood, properly embedded and that they continue to reflect the standards expected by the public of those that serve them.

“High standards are a public good. They improve predictability and promote better outcomes for society, increasing public confidence and the functioning of the economy. The Committee last undertook a strategic review of standards structures in 2013. Back then, our predecessors concluded that the

institutions, processes and codes of conduct were in place but that organisations needed to work harder to fully embed a culture of high standards.

“Standards issues change and evolve over time. Organisations and institutions need to have the right culture and processes in place to maintain high standards of conduct, with the ability to properly and fairly investigate standards issues where necessary.

“The Committee is launching an open consultation today and will be talking to regulators, academics and parliamentarians, as well as carrying out research with the public as part of this review. We intend to report to the Prime Minister in Summer 2021 with our findings and recommendations.

“We published research mapping the standards regulators last year. The Committee is aware that public perceptions of standards remain low, as they have for many years in fact. We want to look at what is working well and what more needs to be done to support high standards of conduct across public life.”

[Read the terms of reference for the review](#)

[Watch the Committee's short videos about the Nolan principles.](#)

1. Interview requests and media enquiries should go to Maggie O'Boyle on 07880 740627.
2. The independent Committee on Standards in Public Life advises the Prime Minister on ethical standards across the whole of public life in the UK. It monitors and reports on issues relating to the standards of conduct of all public office holders.
3. The current members of the Committee are: Lord (Jonathan) Evans, Chairman, Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP (Labour), Dr Jane Martin CBE, Dame Shirley Pearce DBE, Jane Ramsey, Monisha Shah and Rt Hon Lord (Andrew) Stunell OBE (Liberal Democrat) and Jeremy Wright QC MP (Conservative)
4. The Committee is also currently conducting a [review of electoral regulation](#), on the way donations and campaign expenditure by candidates, political parties and non-party campaigners in election and referendum campaigns are regulated and enforced by the Electoral Commission, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Police. It is due to report on electoral regulation by June 2021.
5. You can follow the Committee on Twitter [@PublicStandards](#).