

Largest testing programme for coronavirus shows virus continued to decline in June

- Findings show a continued reduction in the virus as some restrictions were eased, with the virus spreading even less than in May
- Study suggests measures taken to limit transmission in care homes and hospitals are working more effectively

The [second report from the country's largest study on coronavirus rates of infection has been published](#), showing further decline in COVID-19 in late June and early July. The study involved 150,000 volunteers tested across England between 19 June and 8 July.

The research, which examines levels of infection in the general population in England, has been published by Imperial College London and will undergo peer review before a final report is published.

The findings show the virus continued to decline across the country even when some restrictions had been lifted. Despite people having more interaction with people outside their households and non-essential shops reopening, the virus continued to halve every 8 to 9 days during this period.

Today's report shows there were no significant differences between the prevalence of infection for key workers and non-key workers. This is in contrast to the findings from Imperial's first study, which looked at infection in May, and showed care workers and healthcare workers had increased risk of infection compared with those who were not key workers.

This demonstrates the positive impact of infection control measures in care homes and hospitals. With increased testing for patients, residents and staff, more contact tracing, and improved isolation of positive cases, we have been able to limit the spread of the virus among health and social care settings while wider restrictions were eased.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

This research highlights how, thanks to everyone's efforts and sacrifice, alongside targeted measures to counter the spread of this virus in health and care settings, we were able to keep rates of infection low as some restrictions were lifted.

However, we must not be complacent. I urge everyone to get a test if you have symptoms, self-isolate and provide your contacts to NHS Test and Trace so we can continue to keep the virus at bay and get back to normal.

Today's report provides an insight into who was infected with the virus between 19 June and 8 July, comparing geography, age, sex, ethnicity, key worker status and symptoms.

It shows rates of infection fell even further to just under 8 positive cases per 10,000 people between 19 June and 8 July, when some lockdown restrictions had eased. Out of the 159,199 swab tests carried out in those 2 weeks, 123 were positive.

This second report builds upon the first which looked at infection during May and showed there were on average 13 positive cases for every 10,000 people during national lockdown.

The key findings from the second report include:

- over those 2 weeks in June and July, the rates of infection halved every 8 to 9 days, similar to that measured during May, with an overall reproduction number of 0.58, compared to 0.57 during May
- at any one point in those 2 weeks there were 39,000 people with COVID-19 compared to 74,000 in May
- no significant differences in the rates of infection by age – a contrast to the May results where higher rates of infection were seen in the 18 to 24 years age group
- Black, Asian and other ethnic minority individuals were more likely to test positive than those of white ethnicity. Work is underway between the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), local directors of public health and local authorities to understand and mitigate risks of transmission for BAME communities at a local level

Professor Paul Elliott, FMedSci, Director of the programme at Imperial College London, said:

Through our community testing programme, we're beginning to build a more informed picture of COVID-19 across England. This surveillance programme is showing us the prevalence of infection between different demographics, age groups and ethnicities as well as giving us insight into how easing lockdown restrictions are affecting the infection rate.

Kelly Beaver, Managing Director- Public Affairs at Ipsos MORI said:

The second report from this hugely significant study has underlined the importance of random, at-home testing to determine the prevalence of COVID-19 throughout England as we go through the different stages of this pandemic. Ipsos MORI is incredibly grateful to all those members of the public who agreed to take part in the study.

The Real-time Assessment of Community Transmission (REACT-1) programme is the

largest, most significant piece of research looking at how the virus is spreading across the country.

The study was commissioned by DHSC and carried out by a world-class team of scientists, clinicians and researchers at Imperial College London, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust and Ipsos MORI.

In the second part of the programme (REACT-2), a number of different fingerpick antibody tests that provide a result within 15 minutes have been assessed for their accuracy and ease of use at home. These tests look for evidence that someone has been infected with coronavirus in the past. One test has since been rolled out to 100,000 people to identify the levels of antibodies against the virus that causes COVID-19 in the general public and a report is expected this month.

Other key findings include:

- there were no significant differences seen between males and females
- measured levels were highest in London and lowest in the South West
- 81% of people testing positive reported no symptoms on the day of the test or the previous week. However, they may have developed symptoms later on and it doesn't show how infectious they might have been at this time

In the second report from REACT-1, the study was upscaled with over 150,000 randomly selected people over the age of 5 from across England volunteering to provide nose and throat swabs. These were tested for antigens indicating the presence of the virus to show whether someone is currently infected with COVID-19.

In line with government guidance, those with positive test results and their household were asked to self-isolate and they were contacted by NHS Test and Trace to provide details of their contacts.

The [pre-print report](#) can be accessed on Imperial's website.

The report was commissioned by DHSC and carried out by a world-class team of scientists, clinicians and researchers at Imperial College London, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust and Ipsos MORI.

Read more information on the [REACT programme of work](#).

This study falls under the surveillance workstream of NHS Test and Trace, which focuses on mass surveillance in the general population. This is the second study which looks at a representative cross section of the whole population.

Five-year beaver reintroduction trial successfully completed

The government has today (Thursday 6 August) hailed the success of a five-year beaver trial on the River Otter in Devon, recognising its benefits to the local area and ecology.

First licensed for release into the River Otter by the Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) in 2015, two family groups of beavers have now successfully bred and dispersed throughout the catchment with up to 15 territories and 28 dams.

The five-year trial has brought a wealth of benefits to the local area and ecology, including enhancing the environment at a local wildlife site, creating wetland habitat and reducing flood risk for housing downstream.

They will now be allowed to remain there permanently and continue to expand their range naturally, finding new areas to settle as they need.

Today's confirmation of the successful completion of the trial follows assessment by Natural England and consideration by Ministers of a recent report [undertaken by the University of Exeter and partners on a five-year study](#) into the impact of beavers into the wild in England.

On a visit to the project, Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

Thanks to the hard work of the Devon Wildlife Trust and their partners, the River Otter beavers reintroduction trial has proven highly successful – improving biodiversity and water quality, mitigating flooding and making the local landscape more resilient to climate change.

We are firmly committed to providing opportunities to reintroduce formerly native species, such as beavers, where the benefits for the environment, people and the economy are clear.

But we also understand that there are implications for landowners, and take care to ensure that all potential impacts are carefully considered, and today we can confirm a new government consultation on our national approach and management will open later this year.

The five-year trial run by the DWT and licensed by Natural England ends on 31 August 2020. Later this year, the government will consult on a strategy for the management of beavers in the wild and the national approach for any further releases. In light of this, Natural England will not be licensing any further releases in the wild until after the formal consultation has completed and consideration given to the responses.

Natural England will be engaging with key stakeholders regarding the

management of beaver over the coming months to inform this approach.

Natural England chair Tony Juniper said:

The River Otter trial has been a brilliant success, thanks to the professionalism and dedication of the team at Devon Wildlife Trust and Natural England scientists who have worked with them.

This work, carried out under a licence issued by Natural England, has confirmed the positive transformations that these animals can create, including the benefits they provide for many other species, such as fish, improving water quality and smoothing flood peaks.

Reintroductions of iconic species like the beaver will be an important part of the Nature Recovery Network. We now look forward to working towards the next stages of management of beaver more widely across England.

Peter Burgess, Director of Conservation at Devon Wildlife Trust, said:

This is the most ground-breaking government decision for England's wildlife for a generation. Beavers are nature's engineers and have the unrivalled ability to breathe new life into our rivers. Their benefits will be felt throughout our countryside, by wildlife and people.

At Devon Wildlife Trust we've worked hard with our partners and local communities along the River Otter over the past five years to see what impact beavers have had. In that time their population has grown steadily so that they have successfully colonised nearly all of the river's catchment.

As their numbers have grown so has local people's awareness and appreciation of them. We're delighted that these beavers have now been given leave to stay permanently.

As outlined in our [25 Year Environment Plan](#), the government is committed to providing opportunities for the reintroduction of formerly native species, such as beavers, where there are clear benefits, as part of wider efforts to leave the environment in a better state for generations to come.

The government is developing a new Environmental Land Management scheme which will help to deliver the wildlife goals in our 25 Year Environment Plan. This scheme will reward farmers and land managers for delivering environmental measures, including the provision of habitats.

Beavers were once native to Britain but were hunted to extinction around 400 years ago.

Launch of Planning for the future consultation to reform the planning system

- Government sets out plans to overhaul outdated planning system and reform the way the country builds
- Plans to streamline process, cut red tape and harness technology to deliver homes faster
- Valued green spaces protected for future generations, with more building on brownfield land
- Building beautiful homes with communities at heart of new planning system
- 30% discount through First Homes, with an emphasis on key workers

An overhaul of the country's outdated planning system that will deliver the high-quality, sustainable homes communities need will be at the heart of the most significant reforms to housing policy in decades, the Housing Secretary has announced today (6 August 2020).

The landmark changes will transform a system that has long been criticised for being too sluggish in providing housing for families, key workers and young people and too ineffectual in obligating developers to properly fund the infrastructure – such as schools, roads and GP surgeries – to support them.

Valued green spaces and Green Belt will continue to be protected for future generations, with the reforms allowing for more building on brownfield land.

Local community agreement will be at the centre of the proposals being put forward in the white paper, [Planning for the future](#), published today.

The changes will be a major boost to SME builders currently cut off by the planning process. They will be key players in getting the country building on the scale needed to drive our economic recovery, while leading housebuilding that is beautiful and builds on local heritage and character.

The current system has shown itself to be unfavourable to small businesses, with the proportion of new homebuilding they lead on dropping drastically from 40% 30 years ago to just 12% today.

Recent studies show smaller firms feel the complexities of the planning process and its associated risks, delays and costs are the key challenges they face in homebuilding.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

Our complex planning system has been a barrier to building the homes people need; it takes 7 years to agree local housing plans and 5 years just to get a spade in the ground.

These once in a generation reforms will lay the foundations for a brighter future, providing more homes for young people and creating better quality neighbourhoods and homes across the country. We will cut red tape, but not standards, placing a higher regard on quality, design and the environment than ever before. Planning decisions will be simple and transparent, with local democracy at the heart of the process.

As we face the economic effects of the pandemic, now is the time for decisive action and a clear plan for jobs and growth. Our reforms will create thousands of jobs, lessen the dominance of big builders in the system, providing a major boost for small building companies across the country.

The reforms will mean:

- Local communities will be consulted from the very beginning of the planning process. By harnessing the latest technology through online maps and data, the whole system will be made more accessible
- Valued green spaces will be protected for future generations by allowing for more building on brownfield land and all new streets to be tree lined
- Much-needed homes will be built quicker by ensuring local housing plans are developed and agreed in 30 months – down from the current 7 years
- Every area to have a local plan in place – currently only 50% of local areas has a plan to build more homes
- The planning process to be overhauled and replaced with a clearer, rules based system. Currently around a third of planning cases that go to appeal are overturned at appeal
- A new simpler national levy to replace the current system of developer contributions which often causes delay
- The creation of a fast-track system for beautiful buildings and establishing local design guidance for developers to build and preserve beautiful communities

- All new homes to be 'zero carbon ready', with no new homes delivered under the new system needed to be retrofitted as we achieve our commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2050

Matthew Fell, CBI Chief UK Policy Director, said:

Changes to the planning system will help ramp up the availability of homes in places where people need them most. These reforms will allow housebuilders to get to work, supporting supply chains, and more flexible, local labour markets around the country.

Delivering high-quality, safe and environmentally friendly new homes is critical for meeting our climate targets while accelerating regional growth and tackling inequality. Affordability of future housing supply must remain at the forefront of these efforts.

With coronavirus continuing to cast a shadow of uncertainty over the economy, a more flexible planning system must give local authorities and businesses scope to deliver the homes people need in the short term while laying the groundwork for sustainable communities for decades to come.

James Thomson, CEO of Gleeson Homes, said:

We strongly support the reform of our historic planning system, to bring it up to speed and ensure it is fit for purpose for the modern-day. In particular, we welcome initiatives to make it more transparent, speed up planning where appropriate and has a presumption towards development rather than against. The renewed commitment to building 300,000 new homes a year is an important goal and will be aided by these new initiatives.

At Gleeson, our focus is building low-cost quality homes in areas of regeneration and on brownfield land. The permission in principle initiative will help us to fast-track hundreds of new affordable homes for first-time buyers and essential workers on lower incomes who are eager to get a foot on the property ladder. Not only will these reforms go some way to supporting local SME housebuilders and their supply chains, but they will also help to 'level-up' the country through increased infrastructure investment, bringing jobs and homes to the north.

It's also promising to see the government renew its commitment to building well designed places for people to live and work, rather than just schemes that focus solely on density often to the detriment of place.

The Housing Secretary also confirmed today that the First Homes scheme will provide newly-built homes at a 30% discount for local people, key workers and first-time buyers. The discount will be locked into the home in perpetuity, ensuring future buyers can continue to benefit from it.

A new and simpler system of developer contributions will also ensure private firms play their part in funding the new infrastructure and affordable homes that should accompany new building.

Section 106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy will be replaced with a new Infrastructure Levy that will be a fixed proportion of the value of the development, above a set threshold, helping to deliver more affordable housing.

Revenues would be spent locally on projects such as new roads, upgraded playgrounds and discounted homes for local, first-time buyers.

Helen Evans, Chief Executive of Network Homes and chair of the G15 group of London's largest housing associations said:

The country needs many more affordable homes and the planning system makes an important contribution towards that. I strongly welcome the intention of government's proposed reforms to increase transparency and certainty to help increase the delivery of affordable homes.

Towns and high streets will also benefit from renewed development. The reforms will speed up and simplify the process, breathing new life into vacant commercial properties and industrial spaces and, where desirable, transforming them into new homes.

At their heart, the proposals will ensure councils prioritise good design, establish strong, local guidance and create a fast-track for approving beautiful buildings.

Under the plans, land will be designated into one of three categories – for growth, for renewal or for protection. Communities will set the agenda for their own areas, with the categories for all land across England decided through local consensus.

Decisions on the Green Belt will stay with local authorities as they prepare their plans, so that we can continue to protect and enhance these important areas for generations to come.

Following the publication of Planning for the future, the government will now consult with planners, lawyers and local government experts on the proposals, as well as interest groups and residents.

Categorisation of land

Under the 3 categories:

- Land suitable for growth will be approved for development at the same time that plans are prepared, meaning new homes, schools, shops and business space can be built quickly and efficiently, as long as local design standards are met.
- Renewal areas will enable much quicker development where it is well-designed in a way which reflects community preferences.
- Development on Green Belt land will continue to be restricted as it is now with policy remaining a decision for local authorities as they prepare their plans.

SME facts

- Thirty years ago small builders were responsible for 40% of new build homes compared with 12% today. The membership of builders' professional bodies has also dropped in that period from over 12,215 to 2,710.
- The industry suffered during the financial crash of 2007-09 losing a third of companies.
- British firms built fewer new buildings proportionally than any other European country, data shows. (From 2017 HBF report: [Reversing the decline of small housebuilders](#) (NHBC data))
- In a [recent survey](#) of over 500 small firms, they cited their main challenges as the planning process and its associated risks, delays and costs. The survey showed:
 - 38% (the highest number) voted this their main challenge and 31% the second highest
 - the majority of firms said the costs of the planning process were getting worse
 - almost two-thirds also said the length of time and unpredictability of the system were a serious impediment to homebuilding

The paper published today also sets out measures to achieve the following:

- Supply more land in the system, to enable more high quality homes to be built in the right places and to provide businesses and communities with the space to develop.
- Meet our climate change and environmental objectives, including through higher standards for new homes.
- Make the housing industry more diverse and competitive to drive delivery and higher standards by supporting innovative developers and housebuilders including SMEs and self-builders.

Alongside the Planning for the future consultation, today the government is:

- Confirming the new First Homes home ownership scheme will provide homes with a 30% discount to first-time buyers, key workers and local people and consulting on how they can be delivered through the planning system.
- Consulting on how local housing need is assessed, ensuring locally-led plans for development help to deliver the 300,000 new homes a year we need across England while targeting more new homes in the areas they are most needed.

- Consulting on proposals to extend the current exemption of small sites from having to make 'section 106' payments, which will help smaller developers as they bounce back from the economic impact of coronavirus and help them to get more homes built.
- Consulting on extending Permission in Principle to major development to give more developers access to a fast track route to secure the principle of development for housing.
- Publishing a call for evidence to seek views on proposals to help councils and local communities better understand who controls land in their area and to assist SME and new entrants to the housing market identify land suitable for development.
- The government is encouraging feedback from individuals and organisations as part of its consultation on the proposed measures.

The full consultation document is available at:

www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future

Membership of the Planning Taskforce

News story

Details of the taskforce of experts who have offered their time and expert advice as we have developed our proposals for reform.



Planning For The Future, published today, sets out how we will reform the planning system to realise that vision and make it more efficient, effective and equitable.

Our approach has been informed by discussions with the planning and development sectors, and by research and reports published by leading commentators – including, most recently, reports from the Royal Town Planning Institute, Centre for Cities and Policy Exchange.

As part of this work, we are also extremely grateful to the taskforce of experts who have generously offered their time and expert advice as we have

developed our proposals for reform.

The task force is chaired by the Minister of State for Housing, the Rt Hon Chris Pincher and members consist of industry leaders, acting in a personal capacity, and include:

- Christopher Katkowski QC
- Sir Stuart Lipton
- Miles Gibson MCD
- Bridget Rosewell
- Nicholas Boys Smith
- Dr Tim Leunig

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[Honduras joins UK-Mexico seminar to discuss access to COVID-19 vaccines](#)

The event, co-hosted by the two countries, highlighted the importance of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator to ensure global access to vaccines, treatments and tests to face COVID-19.

Representatives of Latin American and Caribbean countries, including Honduras' Secretaries of Health, Foreign Affairs and Finance, and leaders from multilateral organisations, such as the Central American Bank of Economic Integration –CABEI–, highlighted the need for collaboration between governments, international institutions and businesses.

Officials from Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO), alongside senior policymakers and scientists from across the region, presented their views on the COVID-19 pandemic and access to vaccines.

Finding a coronavirus vaccine and supporting equitable access to it, including for Latin America and the Caribbean countries, is a priority for the UK Government. The UK is collaborating with the international community to support the rapid development and manufacturing of safe, effective vaccines as well as treatments and tests to ensure widespread global access.

The UK has already committed up to £313 million of UKAID to support research and development for vaccines, treatments and tests to ensure new tools are available to all, including the world's poorest countries. The UK also co-hosted June's Global Vaccine Summit, which mobilised US\$8.8bn to replenish Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. Gavi's work in the poorest countries is critical to sustaining immunisation coverage and bolstering the resilience of primary

health care systems needed to tackle COVID-19. In recent days, a study revealed the promising results of the Oxford University vaccine Phase I/II trials, one of a number of projects supported by the UK Government.

UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

In order to end this terrible pandemic and kick-start our global recovery, we must make vaccines, treatments and tests accessible for all, from Britain to Brazil, Ethiopia to Ecuador, Turkey to Trinidad and Tobago, and everywhere in-between.

This crisis has challenged us like never before. But it has also shown the profound importance of international collaboration. Only by working together can we defeat this virus and build back stronger and better than ever.

Mexico Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard said:

Mexico seeks to bring the governments of Latin America and the Caribbean closer to the leading multilateral institutions in the strategy for the development and distribution of the vaccine against COVID-19, in order to guarantee equitable access. We appreciate the support of the UK in opening spaces for dialogue and building inclusive responses to global problems.

Notes to editors

- The virtual seminar consisted of three panels: The End-to-End Offer on Global Vaccine Access, including the participation of GAVI and CEPI, Self-Financing for Vaccine Access (with the IFC of the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank), and Policy and Allocation of Vaccine (with the Pan-American Health Organisation).
- The UK is one of the biggest global donors on COVID-19 to date, pledging a total of £774m of UK aid that is helping to stop the spread of COVID-19, find new vaccines, treatments and tests and save lives around the world.
- On 4 June, the UK hosted the Global Vaccine Summit, raising US\$ 8.8 billion from 32 donor governments and 12 foundations, corporations and organisations. This will immunise a further 300m children by 2025, saving up to 8 million lives and supporting the global fight against COVID-19.
- On 4 May, the UK successfully co-hosted the Global Coronavirus Response Initiative, raising \$8 billion for research and development on vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics.