

Face coverings to be mandatory in shops and supermarkets from 24 July

Thank you very much Mr Deputy Speaker, and with permission, I would like to make a statement about coronavirus.

Thanks to one of the greatest national efforts in peace time, this deadly virus continues to diminish.

Yesterday's figures show 530 new cases, down 90% since the peak.

162 patients are currently in mechanical ventilator beds with coronavirus – down around 95% since the peak.

The latest number of deaths recorded in all settings across the UK is 11 – the lowest figure since 13 March.

And according to today's ONS data, for the third consecutive week, total deaths are lower than normal for this time of year.

Due to this substantial progress, we have been able to restore freedoms and carefully and methodically restore the fabric of this country.

However, we cannot let our progress today lead to complacency tomorrow and so we must remain vigilant to keep this virus under control.

Our strategy is to protect the NHS, get the virus down, and keep the virus down, while restoring as much of normal life as possible and our tactic is to replace national lockdown with ever more targeted local action as we work hard to defeat this virus once and for all.

Our NHS Test and Trace system gets stronger all the time and since launch 6 weeks ago, 144,000 people have now been asked to self-isolate, who otherwise simply wouldn't have known that they had to.

Where we find clusters or outbreaks we take local action – tackling over 100 incidents a week. Mostly these are small, in an individual care home, or pub, or factory. But we are also prepared to take action on a wider basis if that's what it takes, just as we did in Leicester.

Four permanent test sites and 10 Mobile Testing Units have been deployed across the city, meaning that Leicester now has the highest rate of testing in the country.

We have launched one of the biggest communications programmes that Leicester has ever seen – including targeted social media posts, website banners, radio ads, billboards and even bin stickers. And we have been working closely with all parts of the local community, including community leaders, local businesses, and the local football and cricket clubs, to get the message out.

We've also established a process for making decisions to lift the lockdown, with the first decision point later this week.

Mr Deputy Speaker, local action is one way in which we control the spread of the virus, while minimising the economic and social costs.

Another is to minimise the risk as we return more to normality. In recent weeks, we have reopened retail and footfall is rising. We want to give people more confidence to shop safely, and enhance protections for those who work in shops.

Both of these can be done by the use of face coverings. Sadly, sales assistants, cashiers and security guards have suffered disproportionately in this crisis.

The death rate of sales and retail assistants is 75% higher among men, and 60% higher among women than in the general population. So as we restore shopping, so we must keep our shopkeepers safe.

There is also evidence that face coverings increase confidence in people to shop.

The British Retail Consortium has said that together with other social distancing measures, face coverings can make shoppers feel even more confident about returning to the high street. And the Chair of the Federation of Small Businesses has said that small firms know that mandatory face coverings have a part to play, and I quote, "in the nation's recovery both physically and financially"... And that he is "sure this [measure] will be welcomed".

We have therefore come to the decision that face coverings should be mandatory in shops and supermarkets.

Last month, we made face coverings mandatory on public transport and in NHS settings.

This has been successful in giving people more confidence to go on public transport and to a hospital setting when they need to.

Providing people with additional protection when they are not able to keep 2 metres from others, particularly people they do not normally come into contact with.

Under the new rules, people who do not wear a face covering will face a fine of up to £100, in line with the sanction on public transport and just as with public transport, children under 11 and those with certain disabilities will be exempt.

The liability for wearing a face covering lies with the individual.

Should an individual without an exemption refuse to wear a face covering, a shop can refuse them entry and can call the police if people refuse to comply, the police have the formal enforcement powers and can issue a fine.

This is in line with how shops would normally manage their customers and enforcement is of course a last resort, and we fully expect the public to comply with the rules as they have done throughout the pandemic.

I want to give this message to everyone who has been making vital changes to their daily lives, for the greater good.

Wearing a face covering does not mean that we can ignore the other measures that have been so important in slowing the spread of this virus.

Washing your hands. Following the rules on social distancing and just as the British people have acted so selflessly throughout this pandemic, I have no doubt they will rise to this once more.

Mr Deputy Speaker, as a nation, we have made huge strides in getting this virus, which has brought grief to so many, under control.

We are not out of the woods yet.

So let's all of us do our utmost to keep this virus cornered, and enjoy summer safely.

And I commend this statement to the House.

[New blueprint to protect and prepare nation from flooding](#)

A new plan to better protect and prepare millions of homes and businesses from the risk of flooding that the climate emergency will bring in the future has been launched today (Tuesday 14 July) by the Environment Agency (EA).

With more extreme weather expected, including summer temperatures up to 7.4°C hotter and 59% more rainfall by 2050, the new [Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy](#) sets out how we will build up the resilience of millions more homes and businesses as part of the EA's green recovery plan into the next decade.

More than 5.2 million properties in England are already at risk, and climate change will lead to even more people being affected.

The measures are set to include:

- Expanded flood warnings by 2022 to all at risk properties, with 62,000 more families to be added to the service
- Increased investment in natural flood management schemes to better protect communities, tackle climate change and create new wildlife habitats

- Further promote the use of property flood resilience measures to help homeowners and businesses build back better and recover quicker after flooding
- More collaborative partnerships with national road, rail and utilities providers to ensure their investments are flood resilient and benefit the public

Environment Agency Chair, Emma Howard Boyd said:

This year we had major flooding and the sunniest spring on record in rapid succession. We know climate change is going to bounce us between these extremes more and more in the coming years, but communities wouldn't want us to hermetically seal them off from the weather even if we could.

This strategy will help answer local concerns, prepare the nation for future shocks and enable greater international leadership at COP26 by showing we can walk the walk at home.

The clean, green recovery of the economy from coronavirus must have nature at its heart. This is a blueprint for using the natural world to build back better so that homes, businesses and infrastructure are more resilient.

The Strategy comes on the same day the [government announced details of the £5.2 billion that will be spent on flood protection between 2021 and 2027](#), alongside a further £200 million for innovative resilience measures in 25 areas, as well as reforms to the FloodRe insurance programme.

In addition, the Environment Agency is ready to deliver on flood schemes in 22 areas across England after the Government announced a further £170 million to accelerate flood defence construction in 2020 or 2021.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

We know that climate change is making the UK warmer and wetter, and we will be visited by extreme weather more frequently in the future.

This ambitious strategy sets out how we can become more resilient to flooding and coastal erosion by continuing to build and maintain our flood defences while also increasing investment in nature-based solutions.

It ensures ideas like reconnecting rivers with their natural floodplain or creating new areas where water can be stored and used in times of drought will become mainstream flood protection policies in the years to come.

The Strategy sets out a series of natural flood management schemes that will not only reduce the risks to local communities, but also tackle climate change through carbon sequestration and new habitats for wildlife.

These include:

- reconnecting rivers with their natural floodplain and restoring bends, recognising the role of soils in reducing rapid run-off, or creating new areas where water can be stored
- planting more trees and restoring peatland, helping to slow the run-off of water into rivers, while also creating important natural habitats and taking carbon out of the atmosphere.
- in urban areas, using green infrastructure such as restored habitats and sustainable drainage systems to reduce flood risk and provide local people with more green spaces
- in coastal areas, creating wetlands and saltmarshes, and using beach nourishment to manage erosion and provide habitats for wildlife.

Chair, Adaptation Committee of the Committee on Climate Change (CCC), Baroness Brown, said:

We strongly welcome this Strategy. Our own analysis shows that ambitious adaptation action is needed alongside global net-zero emissions to avoid a very significant increase in damage, from river, coastal and surface water flooding across England.

Investing in flood defences is critical, but will not address the challenges of climate change on its own.

If implemented in full, the Strategy is a big step forward in managing flood risk in our changing climate. We look forward to evaluating progress in due course.

Chief Executive of the National Flood Forum, Paul Cobbing, said:

Many flood risk communities across England have actively contributed to developing this strategy; recognising that if we are serious about our growing flood risk challenges we must be ambitious, forward looking, and act with speed and urgency, reflecting peoples' needs and the devastation that flooding causes.

Local flood groups will play an active role in working with the Environment Agency and other risk management authorities to put this Strategy into action.

President of ADEPT, Nigel Riglar, said:

We need to prepare for the worst on climate change, by building

resilience into our existing and future places, increasing resilience in our infrastructure, and building resilient communities – this strategy is a welcome step towards this.

Local authorities have a fundamental role to play in achieving these ambitions. They need to both lead and influence, enable a low carbon area through programmes, policies and decisions, and inspire businesses and communities to take climate action themselves.

ADEPT members have worked closely with the Environment Agency over many years to help reduce the number of homes and businesses at risk of flooding. We look forward to continuing to work in partnership to make critical investments in our communities and infrastructure at the right points in time.

Further key points in the Strategy include:

- 5:1 benefit-cost ratio – For every £1 spent on protecting communities, we avoid around £5 of property damages. The Strategy sets out in more detail the strong economic, social and environmental benefits from investing in our resilience to future flooding and coastal change.
- Resilience – From 2021 risk management authorities will work with the finance sector, Flood Re and industry to increase the uptake of property flood resilience measures in communities at highest risk and to ‘build back better’ after flooding.
- Education – By 2025, risk management authorities and other organisations will work with education providers to encourage opportunities for ongoing learning and career development in engineering and environmental sciences so that we have a diverse range of skills and experience able to respond to flooding.

[Home Office minister commends Scottish charity's work supporting EU Settlement Scheme](#)

Home Office Minister Kevin Foster met Scottish charity Perth & Kinross Association of Voluntary Service Ltd (PKAVS) today, commending the exemplary

support they have been providing to help vulnerable EU citizens apply to the EU Settlement Scheme.

PKAVS provide invaluable support to help victims of human trafficking or domestic abuse, those with severe mental health conditions, those without a permanent address, and those who are elderly or isolated apply to the EU Settlement Scheme.

It is one of the eight charities in Scotland, and 57 organisations and local authorities across the UK, being awarded up to £17 million in funding to help vulnerable EU citizens apply to the EU Settlement Scheme. PKAVS alone has already provided support to more than 1,700 vulnerable EU citizens living in Perth & Kinross.

The [latest official statistics](#) show there have been 185,900 applications in Scotland so far with the [highest number of applications](#) coming from Polish (60,680), Romanian (14,140), Italian (13,620) and Spanish (11,670) nationals.

Minister for Future Borders and Immigration Kevin Foster said:

It's fantastic there have already been more than 185,900 applications to the EU Settlement Scheme in Scotland given there is still plenty of time to apply before the 30 June 2021 deadline.

Charities like PKAVS in Perth & Kinross, which the Home Office has funded, have been doing a superb job providing support to ensure vulnerable EU citizens are able to secure their status.

Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, people in Scotland have had access to a [range of support](#) either online, by email or by telephone to help them apply to the EU Settlement Scheme. This includes over 40 [Assisted Digital](#) locations for those who do not have the appropriate access, skills or confidence to apply online.

There are also over 1,500 Home Office staff working on the EU Settlement Scheme with 250 Settlement Resolution Centre staff in place to provide assistance to applicants with any questions about the scheme or who need help applying.

Chief Executive of PKAVS Paul Graham said:

We at PKAVS are delighted to host a virtual visit from the Minister, and welcome the opportunity to share some of the great outcomes we have been able to achieve for local EU citizens through our partnership with the Home Office.

PKAVS Minority Communities Hub has been supporting people from around the world who have chosen to make Perth & Kinross their home for over 10 years. Through assisting EU citizens to apply for and secure their settled status, we are proud to play our part to

support the enormous contribution EU citizens make to the social, economic and cultural vibrancy of Perth & Kinross and the UK as a whole.

We would like to thank the Home Office for their excellent support throughout the EU Settlement Scheme process, which has helped PKAVS to empower 1,700 people to understand and apply for the EU Settlement Scheme.

To help raise awareness of the scheme at a local level, the Home Office has held a series of pop-up events across the UK where staff answer questions and help people to apply in person.

In September to October 2019, and February of this year, the Home Office ran local events in nine locations across the UK, including Aberdeen, Great Yarmouth, London, Nottingham, Leeds and Birmingham. The Home Office also supported an event to raise awareness of the scheme which was led by PKAVS in February 2020.

The Home Office also ran a £4 million marketing campaign in 2019 to encourage EU citizens to apply and a new wave of advertising began earlier this year to encourage those who have not yet applied to do so.

We have also translated [communication materials](#) into 26 EU languages, including Welsh and Irish.

[Man who repeatedly stabbed student on a Loughborough street in jail for longer](#)

A man who stabbed a female university student three times in the leg as she walked home after a night out will be imprisoned for longer following the intervention of the Solicitor General, Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP.

On 9 June 2019, the victim, in her 20s, left a nightclub in Loughborough around 2:30am to walk home. She had just finished her degree and gone on a night out with a friend to celebrate.

While walking home, the victim noticed that a man had started to follow her. The offender, Hani Habte, aged 18 at the time, then ran alongside the victim and tried to speak to her.

The victim tried to walk away from Habte but the offender grabbed her arm and pulled her to the ground. The victim tried to defend herself, hitting the

offender with her bag, but Habte grabbed at the bag and proceeded to stab the victim three times in the leg. The offender then fled from the scene.

The victim was taken to hospital, having sustained three puncture wounds and bruising to her right thigh. She repeatedly passed out due to blood loss.

The offender was later linked to the attack through CCTV evidence and a trace of the victim's blood on his left trainer.

On 19 March, Habte was originally sentenced at Leicester Crown Court to 5 years' detention for wounding with intent.

Following the Solicitor General's intervention under the Unduly Lenient Sentence scheme, the Court of Appeal today increased his sentence to 5 years' detention with 3 years extended licence.

Commenting on the increase, the Solicitor General said:

"Habte targeted a vulnerable victim, subjecting her to a callous attack and causing significant psychological harm. I am pleased the Court of Appeal agreed to increase the offender's sentence and hope this brings some comfort to the victim and her family."

UN Human Rights Council 44: **Interactive Dialogue with the UN** **Commission of Inquiry on Syria**

Thank you Madam President,

The UK remains a strong supporter of the Commission's work and we thank the commission for their comprehensive report on the situation in Idlib and surrounding areas.

The United Kingdom is gravely disturbed by the commission's findings, including those of war crimes committed by the Russian-backed regime forces and by terrorist groups. We note the finding that the displacement of one million civilians, as a result of the brutal offensive by the Syrian regime, may constitute a crime against humanity.

We urge all parties to allow humanitarian access and abide by the current ceasefire and international law. We are deeply disappointed by the shameful actions of Russia and China in the Security Council who, by use of their vetoes, have further reduced the ability of humanitarian actors to provide life-saving assistance to the suffering population in northern Syria. The Bab Al-Salam crossing supplied aid to 1.3 million people in the Northern Aleppo,

including Afrin, an area hundreds of thousands of civilians had fled to.

Madam President,

The human rights situation across the whole of Syria remains deplorable. We will present a resolution this session, which notes our concerns about the continued extensive use of arbitrary detention, torture and enforced disappearance, particularly by the regime, and requests the Commission to prepare a report on arbitrary imprisonment in Syria.

Thank you.