

# Health and Social Care Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 21 May 2020

Good afternoon and welcome to Downing Street for the daily coronavirus briefing.

I'm joined by Professor Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer, and Professor John Newton, who is our adviser on test and trace.

Before I turn to the latest coronavirus data, I wanted to say something this Mental Health Awareness Week.

I know how difficult the change and uncertainty generated by this awful virus has been for so many people. So many moments of joy have been put on hold. Cherished milestones, important events and time with loved ones – things that were in the diary but can't any longer.

So I want to say this to anyone who has been finding it hard. These are tough times. It is OK to be not OK. And it is normal to feel low, anxious, or unhappy sometimes.

But it is so important that if you think you need it, please seek help. If you want to talk to someone, please, go to the NHS – it is there for you.

And if you are a health or care worker, there is bespoke series of support so we can care for you just as you care for us – just text FRONTLINE to 85258.

Mental health charities are also offering some brilliant support too. Today I am providing a further 4.2 million pounds so organisations like Samaritans and Young Minds and Mental Health UK can keep on doing what they do best.

Everyone can strengthen their mental health, just in the same way as we keep an eye on our physical health, including when we are healthy.

And PHE's Every Mind Matters campaign is something that every single person can engage with and can use to strengthen your mental health and wellbeing – in good times and in bad. So let's all come together this Mental Health Awareness Week and support each other.

Turning to the daily figures...

We have now completed over 3 million tests for coronavirus. In total, 3,090,566 tests have been carried out in the UK, including 128,340 yesterday tests carried out yesterday.

250,908 people have tested positive, that's an increase of 2,615 cases since yesterday.

9,543 people are currently in hospital with coronavirus. That is a 14% fall from the same time last week.

Sadly, of those who tested positive for coronavirus, across all settings, 36,042 people have now died. That's an increase of 338 fatalities since yesterday.

This is a deadly virus and it has brought pain to so many both here and across the world. But we are making real progress in our fight.

I'd like to take a moment to remind everyone about our plan to defeat coronavirus and to get Britain moving once again.

Slide one please.

As you may have seen at previous briefings, we have now put in place our COVID Alert Level System. It consists of 5 levels, based on the R value and the number of new cases.

This alert level guides the social distancing rules, which have proved to be so effective at getting the virus under control. The higher the alert level, the stricter the rules.

Throughout the lockdown, we have been at level 4. As you can see, level 4 means that coronavirus is in general circulation and that transmission is either high or exponentially rising.

But, thanks to your shared sacrifice, we've now brought R down. And now, because of our caution, we are in a position to start moving to level 3.

Next slide please.

And here is how we can move forward... We've set out 3 steps that we plan to take, carefully, to modify the social distancing rules and start to restore freedom in this country, all the while avoiding a disastrous second peak that could overwhelm the NHS.

At each step, we will closely monitor the impact on R, on the number of new infections and on all available data.

We are currently at step 1, which means:

- if you work but you can't work from home, you should speak to your employer about going back in
- you can now spend time outdoors and exercise as often as you like
- and you can meet one other person from outside your household in an outdoor, public place, but you should stay 2 metres apart

We will move to step 2 on 1 June if we are able to do so. Step 2 involves reopening more things, like schools and some retail. And using our test and trace system to keep R down. We will only move to step 2, and then in due course to step 3, when it is safe to do so.

Next slide please.

It is important that we stay alert and think about what we can all do to control the spread of this virus. This means, of course, staying at home as much as is possible and working from home if you can.

It means:

- hygiene: washing your hands and cleaning surfaces remains absolutely crucial
- distance: staying 2 metres apart wherever possible
- protection: wearing face coverings on public transport and in shops
- and self-isolating altogether if you have symptoms

And as we approach a bank holiday weekend, we must all renew our efforts. Over the course of this pandemic, people all across the UK have been making difficult but vital sacrifices for the greater good. So let's not go back to square one.

We can all play our part in the national effort, getting R down and keeping R down, and controlling the virus so we can restore more of the things that make life worth living.

As we follow our plan, our testing regime will be our guiding star. It is the information that helps us to search out, and defeat the virus.

Over the past few months, we have built a critical national infrastructure for testing on a massive scale. We have already put in place the building blocks. We have developed the test, we've built the test centres and the lab capacity, we've created the home testing kits.

All this gives us clarity and confidence for the long term. We hit 100,000 tests a day on time. When we said we would. But we are always striving to go further.

To expand our testing capacity, and to improve our understanding of this virus, there are 2 developments that I wanted to share with you all today.

The first is around swab tests, these are the results that tell you if you currently have coronavirus. As I announced on Monday, anybody over 5 who has symptoms is now eligible for a test.

Getting the test is important. But getting a quick result is important too. We are working hard on innovative developments that I wanted to bring you up to speed with.

It's really important to be clear about this. Working with innovative science always has its risks. Like all R&D, lots of the projects don't come off.

For instance, like vaccines, where we don't know if we'll ever get one, I'm prepared to back innovative developments even if they might never happen. And I think it's worth it, especially in these circumstances, to back things before you know for sure if they're going to work, and I make no apologies for that.

We are working with many top names to help us deliver testing with a rapid turnaround – names like Oxford Nanopore and Chronomics and DNA Nudge.

For example, one innovative company, Optigene, has produced an early test which is being trialled from today. It is interesting to us because it is so fast. It doesn't need to be sent to a lab to be processed and so you get the result on the spot, typically within around 20 minutes.

It's already proven effective in early trials and we want to find out if it will be effective on a larger scale. And we want to support companies like Optigene, and others, to develop these sort of innovative projects. We will monitor its effectiveness very closely. And if it works, we will roll it out as soon as we can.

Now this is just one of a number of innovative testing technologies that we are pushing forward, as fast as the science allows. I will leave no stone unturned and I want to thank everybody involved for their dedication.

The second development I wanted to share today is around antibody tests. These tell you if you have had the virus and have developed antibodies in response, that might help you to fight the virus in the future.

COVID-19 is a new virus and we are learning more about it every single day. I want to be frank with you about what we don't know, as well as what we do know. We are not yet in a position to say that those who test positive in these antibody tests are immune from coronavirus.

But as our understanding of the disease improves, the insight these antibody tests provide will be crucial. They can help us to understand how our bodies react to coronavirus, and how it has spread across the country. We are backing efforts to develop our own homegrown antibody tests through our UK Rapid Test Consortium – and that work is showing some early promise.

And as you know, we have been looking at a whole series of commercial antibody tests. Now many of the early tests were not reliable enough for clinical use. But we have made some available at small scale.

And we have now had the results of our antibody surveillance study. This has told us that around 17% of people in London, and around 5% or higher in the rest of the country, have tested positive for coronavirus antibodies.

This was based on a sample. But for the public at large to know whether or not they have had coronavirus, we need antibody tests at large scale.

Two lab-based tests, produced by Roche Diagnostics and Abbott Labs, have been given a positive evaluation by PHE and approved by the MHRA. And 3 further tests are being assessed right now. And I can announce today that we have signed contracts to supply in the coming months, over 10 million tests from Roche and Abbott.

From next week, we will begin rolling these out in a phased way. At first, to health and care staff, patients and residents.

The UK government has arranged supplies of these tests on behalf of the devolved administrations, and each devolved nation is deciding how to use its test allocation and how testing will be prioritised and managed locally. This is an important milestone. And it represents further progress in our national testing programme.

It's not just about the clinical advances that these tests can bring, although, obviously, that's important. It's that knowing you have these antibodies will help us to understand in the future if you are at lower risk of catching coronavirus, dying from coronavirus and of transmitting coronavirus.

We are developing this critical science, to know the impact of a positive antibody test. And to develop the systems of certification to ensure people who have positive antibodies can be given assurance about what they can safely do.

History has shown that understanding an enemy is fundamental to defeating it. And in this latest fight, our ingenuity and our brilliant scientists and our scientific curiosity is what will keep us one step ahead of this virus.

We all have something to bring though in this fight against our common foe. One action that each and every one of us can take is to follow the rules on hygiene and social distancing. Not just for you, but for your loved ones and for your community.

So please, stay alert, control the virus and save lives.

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## [Trial of rapid coronavirus test launched in Hampshire](#)

- Trials of a new coronavirus test returning results in just 20 minutes will begin in Hampshire today
- The test has been shown to be highly effective in clinical settings and

will now be trialled in a number of A&E departments, GP testing hubs and care homes in Hampshire

- Up to 4,000 people of all ages and backgrounds will be tested

The trial of a new, rapid coronavirus test will begin in Hampshire today.

The new test, which has been proven effective in clinical settings, does not need to be sent to a laboratory to be processed and can return results within 20 minutes.

The test will be rolled out to a number of A&E departments without access to laboratories, GP coronavirus testing hubs and care homes across Hampshire.

Receiving results on site will mean people with symptoms will be given immediate certainty as to whether or not they have the virus. This will mean they can rapidly follow advice to stay at home if they test positive, or return to work.

Up to 4,000 people of all ages and backgrounds will participate in the pilot, which will run for up to six weeks. It will be led by Hampshire Hospitals NHS Trust. Trained health professionals will take a swab and process the results on site.

Hampshire Hospital NHS Trust will work closely with local authorities to identify priority care homes to visit and test.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

This new test could provide accurate results almost on the spot. This will enable health and care workers to carry on with their shift or immediately isolate on the same day, and could eventually offer the same benefit to the whole country.

This could change the way that we control COVID-19 across the country, getting those with negative results back into society as quickly as possible.

I am hugely grateful for everyone in Hampshire for making this innovation possible.

In contrast to the widely used PCR tests, which need be processed at different temperatures, the loop-mediated isothermal amplification (LAMP) swab test does not require a change in temperature to detect results. This means it can be processed on site instead of being sent to a laboratory.

Validation for the LAMP test using RNA extract has already been carried out in a clinical setting at Hampshire Hospitals NHS Trust.

Following a successful clinical trial, the rapid test will then be rolled out more widely if the pilot in Hampshire proves effective.

Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust Chief Executive Alex Whitfield said:

We are tremendously excited to be able to support the government's efforts for ever more accessible, faster coronavirus testing.

That we are able to do so is a testament to the hard work and ingenuity of our entire microbiology department, from clinical scientists and the laboratory team to volunteers from academia and industry as well as the staff on the wards.

We are very much looking forward to the results of this trial and the benefits it will bring to the community we serve.

The study will run for up to six weeks and will be rolled out nationally if effective.

In contrast to the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) technology, in which the reaction is carried out with a series of alternating temperature steps or cycles, LAMP is an isothermal amplification that is carried out at a constant temperature and does not require a thermal cycler. This means it can be processed on site.

The 4,000 people tested in this pilot will contribute to the daily testing figures.

In A&E departments and GP hubs, individuals with symptoms will be prioritised for testing. All staff and residents will be tested in care homes whether they are symptomatic or not.

Coronavirus GP hubs are selected GP sites that are dedicated for patients with coronavirus symptoms. The purpose of this is to protect other patients who are visiting the GP for other reasons.

[Everyone in the United Kingdom with symptoms now eligible for coronavirus tests.](#)

The COVID-19 LAMP assay test was developed by UK manufacturer Optigene and will be used in the Hampshire pilot.

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## [Yemen's leaders must act now to prevent coronavirus catastrophe](#)

On 27 April, Abdulaziz Alqadhi, a local furniture store owner from Al Mansourah in Aden, became Yemen's first officially recorded coronavirus fatality. A day later, his brother Ahmed fell victim to Covid-19 too. In the

weeks since many Yemenis have lost loved ones to this deadly virus. Across Yemen, the spread of the infection is likely to be far higher than official data suggests. Sadly, this is just the beginning.

Yemen is of course not alone in its exposure to this global pandemic, but in Yemen Covid-19 is menacing a country already devastated by five years of war, hunger and disease. Over the coming months, many more Yemenis will die from coronavirus – be it from the virus itself or its impact on the already fragile economy and health sector. How Yemen's leaders respond to this threat will determine how many more Yemenis lose their lives.

There is an opportunity for positive action. But it is deeply concerning that some of Yemen's leaders have shirked their responsibilities and sought to use the crisis to serve their own narrow agendas. We have heard reports of the Houthis blaming migrants for the outbreak and stopping cases of coronavirus being recorded. We must see through this smoke screen.

Across the country, needless restrictions on the international humanitarian response are preventing aid from getting to those that need it most. The UN, the WHO and international NGOs are doing all they can to save Yemeni lives. We have provided £810 million in UK aid to provide food, water and sanitation since the conflict began. But these humanitarian organisations can only do what Yemen's leaders allow them to. In Houthi-controlled areas, these restrictions are so severe that they are preventing the delivery of aid to millions of people in need, meaning some donors have had no choice but to suspend their funding at the time when Yemen needs aid most. I call on Yemen's leaders to immediately facilitate humanitarian access and operations to help us win the fight against coronavirus.

Ultimately, the biggest impediment to the fight against the coronavirus remains Yemen's horrific conflict. In this respect, the recent Houthi aggression towards Marib and the conflict in the south are especially concerning. The Southern Transitional Council's self-rule declaration and latest campaign of violence only complicate UN efforts to tackle the coronavirus outbreak and reverse progress towards ending this war.

On 25 March, UN Secretary-General Guterres – backed by the UK and all permanent members of the UN Security Council – called for a nationwide ceasefire in Yemen. This statement was welcomed unconditionally by all parties and, on 9 April, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia took the decision to announce a unilateral ceasefire in Yemen and to limit its military activities to purely defensive operations. In spite of the determined efforts by the UN Special Envoy, Martin Griffiths, the Yemeni parties have not yet agreed to the UN's proposals for a nationwide ceasefire, humanitarian and economic measures, and a political process that can end this grim conflict.

The UN's proposals are Yemen's best hope of peace and of limiting the destruction of the Covid pandemic. The decision to do so now rests in the hands of Yemen's leaders. I encourage them to take the courageous steps needed to accelerate their engagement with the UN on Griffiths' proposals and to agree urgently a nationwide ceasefire to spare Yemeni lives from coronavirus. Political games, aggressive statements and provocative social



media have no place.

Yemen was already one of the world's most desperate humanitarian disasters. Under the shadow of coronavirus, it now faces a tragedy of unimaginable scale. For the sake of all Yemenis, Yemen's leaders must now park their differences and agree a political solution to fight coronavirus in Yemen and provide a pathway out of this wretched conflict. This needs to include urgent steps to: facilitate humanitarian access; free political prisoners – including detained British national Luke Symons; reach agreement on a nationwide ceasefire; and build humanitarian and economic confidence. These responsible actions are within their power.

It is the time to act. Actions, not words, are how the Yemeni people – and indeed the world – will judge their leaders. Millions of lives depend on it.

## **Further information**

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# **[UK provides new home for 478 children seeking asylum](#)**

The UK government announced today that it has successfully completed the transfer of 478 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) under section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016. Amongst some of the most vulnerable children in Europe seeking asylum, this important work has given them an opportunity to start a new life in the UK.

Today's announcement has demonstrated that the UK continues to build on its long and proud history of offering protection to those who need it.

In 2016, the government committed to transfer 480 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children displaced in Europe. The UK granted protection to over 7,320 children in the year ending March 2020 and more than 44,900 children since 2010 through a range of legal pathways, including asylum and through our world leading refugee resettlement schemes. The government has worked closely with local authorities to place children into appropriate care.

Transfers began following the French authorities' clearance of the Calais camp in 2016, and there remain two outstanding transfers delayed as a result of coronavirus. They will be safely completed at the earliest opportunity.

Minister for Immigration Compliance, Chris Philp, said:

We have made clear that protecting vulnerable children is a key priority for this government and the progress we have made – with generous support from local authorities – underlines our commitment

to that.

The UK provides a number of legal routes for those seeking protection and we will continue to offer a range of support for those who often need it most.

In 2019, the UK received more asylum applications from unaccompanied children than any country in the EU and accounted for approximately 20% of all UASC claims made in the UK and the 27 EU Member States. The UK offered protection – in the form of asylum, humanitarian protection, alternative forms of leave and resettlement – to 20,339 people in the year ending March 2020, 17% higher than the previous year.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Representative to the UK, Rossella Pagliuchi-Lor, said:

The section 67 scheme has been a lifeline for 480 extremely vulnerable unaccompanied and separated children, who were identified with the support of UNHCR and partners.

Programmes such as this assist over-burdened host states, and prevent children from making dangerous journeys in search of safety.

UNHCR will keep supporting pathways to protection in the UK like transfers of asylum-seekers under the Dublin III regulation, bringing refugee family members here under family reunion visas, and through the UK's new global resettlement program.

Under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), the government is now close to hitting its target of resettling 20,000 vulnerable refugees affected by the Syrian civil war, with 19,768 vulnerable refugees – many of whom children – resettled since September 2015.

Due to coronavirus related restrictions on movements both overseas and in the UK, it is not currently possible to undertake any refugee resettlement activity, but this commitment will be met as soon as possible once conditions allow.

Last year the UK received more unaccompanied asylum-seeking children than any EU country accounting for 20% of all cases reported in the EU and UK. As a result, local authorities are looking after more than 5,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and we are working to support them with this, particularly as a result of pressures brought on by coronavirus.

The UK continues to work with our European neighbours and plays a leading role on the world stage in providing international protection to the most vulnerable.

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## **Harm-benefit analysis review: minister's reply to the ASC's recommendations**

Following the publication of the ASC's report on harm-benefit analysis, Baroness Williams has written to Professor David Main to accept the recommendations directed to the Animals in Science Regulation Unit for implementation and to provide details of the Home Office response to the recommendations.