

When will we be allowed out of Lockdown?

The government's scientific advisers come across as pessimists about our future. They seem to think the policy answer for wherever we are in combatting the virus is more and longer lockdown. If the virus is spreading more we need tougher lockdown. If it is falling we need to continue with lockdown as only lockdown can get it falling. If a tough lockdown is in place and it does not seem to be working it is the fault of the public, as too many must be breaking the rules.

The government accepted nine months of variable lockdowns last year, and sustained it with the public by suggesting as soon as enough people have been vaccinated we can relax. Now the government advisers are telling us it is not as simple as that. They will not be satisfied even when all the people most at risk of dying from the disease have been vaccinated. They say they do not know whether people who are vaccinated can still pass the virus on, nor how long immunity from vaccination might last. The advisers leave most of us without reliable figures on bed occupancy, NHS capacity and Nightingale use. They have changed the definitions of what is a covid death, and decline to tell us where the various numbers have to reach before they would recommend a relaxation.

Ministers say they are following the science. They are of course following a few prominent government scientists, who speak for one version of the science. The science on the pandemic is fortunately changing, as scientists work hard to understand the disease and remedies better, and as they study the pattern of infection worldwide. There are also various divisions of opinion over what treatments work or work best, over vaccines and how much and how often they have to be administered to an individual, over what the rate of spread may be at any given time and how best to conclude someone died of CV 19 rather than other complex conditions that many elderly people also suffer from.

Ministers need to offer us guidance on how we get out of this latest long lock down. Either they need to show us mass vaccination is the promised game changer and they will relax as soon as all the vulnerable who wish have been jabbed, or they need to come up with a plan for us to live alongside the virus better if vaccination is not going to ban it.