**UK government press conference 2 April 2020**

**Jeremy Hoad**

(usual caveats apply to this live transcript / commentary)

**Attending**

Matt Hancock, Secretary of State for Health

Steve Powis, National Medical Director of NHS England

John Newton, Director of Health Improvement at Public Health England

(usual caveats apply as this is a live transcript / commentary.

WARNING - This was a long press conference.)

**Figures**

163194 tested

33718 positive

rate of infection doubling every 3-4 days

12,949 hospital admissions

2,291 total deaths

569 deaths in the last 24 hours

(no direct comment on the continued big jump in deaths initially but an acknowledgement later on that deaths would continue to rise.)

**Hancock**

At each point we've been following medical advice.

We have taken the right action at the right time

Nightingale hospital completed with 9k beds.

More to come in Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow.

Thanks to everyone following guidance. British spirit to follow these rules.

Thanks to volunteers. Britain at its best.

We are steadfast in our resolve to defeat this invisible killer.

Awed by dedication of colleagues on frontline in the institution that our nation holds so dear.

Many have been people who came to this country to help.

Strain every sinew to defeat it.

Will stop at nothing to provide equipment and support.

45m pieces of equipment delivered yesterday.

PHE announced upgraded guidance today. We have put the interests of staff first. Standards amongst highest in the world in line with WHO recommendations.

Anyone who needs PPE should call NHS hotline.

£300m available for community pharmacies

NHS Trusts - £13.4bn of historic debt written off today

(Ha! That is suddenly so easy. Hypocritical bastard Tories over a decade of austerity.)

People are yearning for certainty of good testing.

PHE can be incredibly proud.

Roll out of test fastest of any done.

Challenges:

We didn't go into this crisis with a huge diagnostic industry

cf Germany 100 test labs

Shortage of swabs and reagents - swabs issue fixed, reagents issue being addressed.

Challenge of prioritisation

Hancock took decision to prioritise life or death decisions for patients.

Of course NHS staff need testing as well - to be rolled out at the weekend.

Several tests have been failed when they've been tested.

Approving tests that don't work is dangerous and I won't do it.

Goal - testing for patients who need it, NHS staff and families, critical key workers and then. community.

Testing strategy

1 swab testing in PHE labs and NHS hospitals

10k tests per day reached 25k per day by end of April

2 new swab testing facility del;iv red by private companies and universities

new service launched and ramping up rapidly

numbers will increase this weekend

initially for NHS front-line staff

in final stages of development.

5k NHS workers have been tested

5.7% doctors absent due to Covid19

3 blood tests (have people had it and are noe immune)

could be done at home with finger prick

amnitbody tests, result in 20 minutes

4 surveillance through ultra high accuracy test operated by PHE at Porton Down

sampling tests to be used to help decision making

5 diagnostics industry being built with Astrazeneca and GSK at scale now to provide tests for everyone who needs testing

Goal of 100,000 tests per day buy end of April

Prof John Newton at PHE to take on new role to focus on testing

There will be problems, criticisms made and some will be justified

We will bring together the best science and allies to fight this war against an invisible enemy. We will prevail.

Stay at home to protect the NHS and to save lives.

**Steve Powis**

Key thing is to reduce e our contact with others - social distancing - to reduce spread of virus and reduce cases.

Slide

Transport use continuing to fall although small rise in cars a couple of says ago

Slide

New cases

Still seeing an increase in infections

Slide

Hospital admissions

London ahead of the rest of the country but other areas rising as well now

Constant level of increase with hope this will flatten off hopefully in a week or two

Slide

Deaths continue to increase

We will still see higher number for a few weeks yet until actions impact

**Questions**

Will test target for end of month include all tests?

Hancock - new goal 100k per day over all testing

no test is better than a bad test

calling on life sciences industry and public agencies to come together to meet that goal

Testing NHS staff 5k so far absence figures lower than previously reported

will ensure all staff and families that needs a tests gets one over the coming weeks - before the end of the month

Newton - most urgent priority are swab tests

Powis - important to prioritise NHS staff we most want to test, particularly those self isolating

Talk about green shoots recently but big leap in new cases and death rise. Have green shoots vanished?

Powis - still think reasons to be hopeful as public still complying

transmission rate may have fallen to below 1 - additional evidence infections are going to reduce.

Able to make assumptions based on the way people interact with each other.

Lots of hospitals reporting concerns about running out of other "consumables" at hospitals.

Hancock - detailed plan to manage supply chain. Probably best in the world because of the preparations for No Deal Brexit.

Under which criteria was Hancock tested?

(GAP because bloody BBC cut away from the live coverage)

Newton - need for testing increasing exponentially.

3 new mega labs coming onstream

Hancock - 1,821 spare critical care beds available as of last night.

Powis - we are keeping ahead of surge so far. 25% unoccupied even before Nightingale hospital comes onstream

Working to increase oxygen supply for weeks in NHS hospitals

Alert notices issued regularly to ensure all Trusts have same information to spread rapid learning

Lockdown studies have said lockdown measures will have to be for long time.

Two months ago Hancock said we are well prepared, now we are announcing emergency measures

Hancock - we've been able to expand the NHS faster than the in c tease in demand.

Increasing tests mission critical

We have stocks of PPE but challenge has been distribution to 1.4m in NHS, 2.2m in social care and beyond.

We were well equipped and well prepared.

Powis - everybody has been clear the initial 3 weeks will not be the end of it (lockdown measures?)

This is a new virus and there's more we need to know in plotting a strategy going forward.

We don't know how long immunity its lasts

We don't know yet what drugs will work although we've already put people into trials in the UK

International effort on vaccines but can't be confident when this might be available

Will lockdown be in place for some time?

Hancock - need to understand how much the whole population has antibodies

Don't assume link between 28 day delay on antibody testing and lockdown.

Number one message is to stay at home and maintain social distancing.

Newton - lockdown is the right thing to do to control the spread of infection

(this raises the question again as to why it wasn't done earlier)

peak level of immunity is at 28 days to test for antibody

Sun Readers thank NHS staff

(oh, good grief, as if nobody else thinks this)

Should everyone wear masks when they go outside?

Hancock - approach is to listen to all complaints and work out what we can do better. Labour Party said. we needed to do more and so we took extra steps.

Give shout out to NHS staff and carers. I know this is something The Sun has been leading the charge on.

Powis - also thankful to the Sun and other media for the work they're doing.

(Bloody hell, we can do without the bloody Sun love-in prompted by its own reporter)

Understand how hard lockdown is for everyone.

100k target - what proportion is for antigen tests rather than antibody tests? Commitment for NHS staff by end of April?

Hancock - yes firm commitment by end of April

100k target across all 5 pillars of new strategy

Is it moral for Premier League Clubs to refuse to stop high wage employees while cutting staff on furlough?

Hancock - Everybody must play their part. First thing Premier League players can do is to play their part and take a pay cut.

Is a second wave inevitable and could it be worse?

Powis - Second wave not inevitable

What criteria will be used to end lockdown?

Hancock - we will be guided by the science

evidence rate of infection is not exponential

got to get rate of increase in infection down before we can release lockdown

High rate of infection in Midlands - why?

Powis - With no social distancing infection rate is 3 - 9 - 27 etc. and you rapidly get to very high numbers

Cutting down frequency of transmission reduces the curve from exponential to more linear.

Virus has arrived in different ways in different nations. Geographies will differ.

More detail on ultra high accuracy testing?

Hancock - yes, a bit like doing an opinion poll as a sampling method.

Newton - high accuracy testing at rate of 3k a week

Cohort studies also being done

First results in next few days

Powis - viruses spread better in confined areas hence reducing social contact

work going on on environmental spread

Stay at home, avoid contact - best ways to stop spread

Mass testing?

Hancock - yes, we do want to get to mass community testing but this depends on how quickly we can get a home antibody test to work

Newton - Swab test to detect virus is more complicated

Blood test for if you've had it can be scaled up very quickly to millions of people.

Immunity passports?

Hancock - yes, we are looking at immunity certificates to enable people to show this and get back to normal life. Science isn't advanced enough for this yet.

Domestic violence spike - can there be a new emergency fund and use spare hotel rooms?

Hancock - will look at all options to keep people safe. We understand the impact of social distancing measures.

Powis - overal 8% of staff absent due to Covid19 symptoms

What lessons from London have been learned?

Hancock - building extra capacity for hospitalises critically important.

Powis - will be saying more tomorrow on possibly building more temporary hospitals.

Important to get ahead of demand. Reduce elective surgery. Expand into new areas of the hospital with existing oxygen supplies. Use independent sector.

Rapid dissemination of experience.

Newton - testing labs spread across the nation

(He means England, not the nation)

Does government not have an exit strategy before imposing lockdown?

Hancock - lockdown essential as with no measures 500,000 people would die

17.5m tests have been bought subject to them working

Some have not performed well. Hopeful later tests will be reliable enough

3 weeks ago advice was to attend large gatherings. Did the lockdown come in too late?

Johnson said target was 250,000 a day

Hancock - yes, hope to get to 250k but 100k target is by the end of April

We took the right measures at the right time on the basis of the best available le science.

(completely avoided the point and even suggested people had said lockdown should come later - that is a pathetic justification with no evidence.)

Thanks to all at PHE as well.