**UK government Covid19 press conference 4 April 2020**

**Jeremy Hoad**

(usual caveats apply to this live transcript / commentary)

**Attending**

Matt Hancock, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Jonathan Van-Tam, Deputy Chief Medical Officer and Chair of UK Government's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG)

Ruth May, Chief Nurse

**Figures**

173,784 tested

38,168 positive

3,605 deaths

(this means an extra 683 deaths in the last 24 hours, another big rise. This 24 hour figure was not provided)

**Hancock**

Plan is to save as many lives as possible by protecting the NHS

1 slowing spread of virus, so important people stay at home

2 boosting capacity of NHS, more beds, staff, equipment and research

Cobvid19 continues its grim march

We are reminded this truly is the frontline. Two nurses and two healthcare assistants have died in last 24 hours.

I am determined to push for victory

(yet more nauseating military / war style phrasing)

Delivering more critical care beds

Planned, constructed and fully staffed in 9 days.

Shows what's possible when we come together as one team in one national effort

Pay tribute to NHS, military, plumbers, engineers, construction industry, electricians, caterers and others all playing their part to build a place of hope and a place of healing.

(I can't believe he said that. Hideous unnecessarily melodramatic phrasing.)

I want to thank you at home giving the NHS time to expand.

More Nightingale hospitals planned in Birmingham, Glasgow, Manchester and in Bristol (up to 1,000 beds) and Harrogate (up to 500 beds)

Critical care beds have overall been boosted by 2,500 before extra from Nightingale hospitals.

We have expanded capacity across the whole NHS.

2,000 beds free already.

Expanding PPE

26m production delivered in all 4 nations of UK to 281 organisations

Agreed with NI Executive - over 5m to be provided.

Over 7k NHS staff now tested

Intensively researching drugs and treatments

Science gets better every day but there's still a lot we don't know.

We are the best in the world at clinical science and trials and we are putting this to use now and delivering new trials at pace with some of the finest minds.

Primary care, hospital care and critical care trills in place now.

926 patients involved in "Recovery" trial - largest in the world.

JVT one of the finest research scientists of his generation.

Treatments will help as the science develops but for now the ONLY way to protect yourself and your families is to stay at home.

UK donated more money to global search for a vaccine than any other country.

Spoken to G7 counterparts to coordinate work

We will strain every sinew and move every mountain.

(These phrases and soundbites are getting really tedious and annoying)

Warm weekend coming up but disease still spreading. We cannot afford to relax social distancing measures now or people will die.

Instruction, not request - stay at home to protect lives then you will be doing your part.

**May**

Sad news of loss of two nursing colleagues today. Sincere condolences to families, friends and colleagues. They were one of us.

I worry there's going to be more.I want to honour them today.

With Hancock and HRH Prince of Wales by videocamera this morning as new Nightingale hospital opened.Enormous. piece of work.

Thank you to all NHS and social care staff pulling together preparing for Covid19 surge.

Grateful British public for. your patience and helping NHS.

Weekend to be warm but remember Amy and Arena and stay at home.

JVT

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Behavioural change

+15% increases mobility in residential settings

-46% grocery and pharmacy

-52% parks

-55% workplaces

-75% transit stations

-85% retail & recreation

Slide

transport use dramatic declines across all modes

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New cases increasing

This remains a dangerous time

Essential to practice social distancing even as weather turns warmer

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Hospital admission continuing to increase

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International comparison

index set at first day when 50 deaths recorded

UK in same situation as many other countries.

This is a new disease with no proven treatments

UK determined to find effective treatments

started looking at clinical trials weeks ago

gold standard to discover if a treatment works but must be safe and effective and understand right dosage and right patients to treat and right time in illness to give treatment

complicated stuff

3 trials running already targeting different stages in patient pathway

recruitment rate astonishing

initial focus on repurposed medicines already licensed for other purposes such as hydroxichloriquin (malaria drug) pinoverin ritonovir (HIV treatment)

Moving on in next stage to new drugs already in development

Therapeutic task force set up to have oversight.

Results? Don't know but could be within a few months

Faster we go getting numbers in trials better we will be at getting results and who it works for.

**Questions**

When do you expect peak to be and will NHS have enough ventilators at that point?

JVT - don't know peak yet. We will know a few weeks after social distancing measures have been put in place.

Watching carefully. Stick with science and see where it takes us.

we are not anywhere close to ventilatory capacity at the moment

will make decisions on a day by day basis

Are you looking for volunteers for clinical trails?

Hancock - yes, where possible in hospital and clinically advised.

VT - different scenario. This is about patients undergoing treatment for Covid19. Physicians must sign up for trial then ask patient if they want to take part. Yes, but with informed consent.

People are already doing this on existing trials.

Estimated 1,000 people in community with virus for recorded cases. Is that the case?

VT - testing based primarily in hospitals so there will be further cases isolating with Covid19. Can't say how many.

Hancock - huge amount of work going on under pillar four of strategy.

We don't know wider number or when peak will come as this depends how people act. Stay at home.

Range of symptoms very broad. Are you looking at changing guidelines for when they quarantine / self-isolate?

VT - expert advisory group looking at this (eg losing taste/smell) but doesn't contribute to diagnosis on current basis.

Elderly and disabled people being told they won't be treated and won't be taken to hospital and "do not resuscitate". Should people just accept this?

Ruth - DNR discussions happen all the time. Covid19 is not excuse to have these discussions, needs to be done sensitively.

(question was avoided with statement of everything goes on as usual which is obviously not the case.)

Government (Hancock) raised expectations by saying 3.5m tests were ordered. Now saying they don't work. So what is happening?

Hancock - have provisionally ordered 17m antibody tests.

No country has found effective antibody test, pillar 3 of the strategy.

Orders in place so should they work we can get them.

Clear ramp up in testing as part of strategy from the start.

2k a month ago. 10k on target by end March hit. 100k target and April.

Countries have tested different numbers.

JVT - no test is 100% accurate. The wrong antibody test will give wrong results. Important to rigorously evaluate and ensure very low error rates.

(No answer to question really - restatement of pillars and testing targets)

Has decision to carry out fewer tests cost lives?

(question ignored)

Have we spent money on these 17m tests yet?

Hancock - we have paid for tests as samples.

Need to know accuracy. Effectiveness will vastly outweigh any cost.

Getting a test that works is worth more than money.

Would you support "Green Shoots" claims?

JVT - I see green shoots in how public are behaving.

Too early to make assessment based on hospital admission data.

(contradicts what has been said over previous days. That was repeated referral to green shoots in relation to the number of cases steadying. Unhelpful contradictory messages and avoidance here.)

What help is being given to mental wellbeing of patients many dying alone and pregnant women?

Hancock - I really worry about impact on mental health and people who cannot be with loved ones at the end when they die. Need to support people with compassion and understanding.

Have put £5m into MIND.

May - on phone call this morning to Sebastian, doctor who had lost his father. Hearing extraordinary lengths nurses and clinical teams had gone to. Visitors are able to go for people with end of life care.

Wellbeing important for staff as well as patients.

Fantastic midwifery leadership being provided. Nurses using technology, Zoom, to connect.

JVT - personally distressed about this.

Any benefit to wearing face masks for public?

JVT - controversial area for decades. Evidence review for WHO confirms the view here that there's no evidence general wearing of face masks affects anything. Extensive face mask wearing in countries in Asia but this is more a cultural practice.

UK govt does NOT recommend wearing face masks for general public.

Further clamp down of movement?

Hancock - we rule nothing out to enforce social distancing. British public very largely following new rules. Police policing this with consent.

How can testing be ramped up if supplies not available?

Determined to hit 100k tests a day under 5 pillars including getting hold of all parts and reagents. Challenges around the world. Everyone and whole life sciences industry must play their part.

Only 25k of 100k likely to be more crucial antigen tests. Germany increasing to 70k a day. Is UK too ;little, too late with peak claimed to come in next two weeks?

Hancock - 100k goal over all 5 pillars of testing strategy. Pillar 1 set to 25k by end of April. Pillar 2 (private companies) and pillar 3 (antigen test) pillar 5 (national companies)

We will go on to meet PM's target.

(did not answer the question asked, just restated pillars strategy)

Sunny weekend - what about going out

Hancock - people must stick to existing guidelines.

Reports of care homes told residents won't be admitted to hospital - is this a blanket policy?

Insufficient PPE, councils having to source their own. Is social care an after thought?

Hancock - It is absolutely not a blanket rule that people shouldn't go to hospital from care homes.

We have 2029 spare critical care beds NOW before Nightingale hospitals being brought online.

There is capacity in hospitals to deal with need right now.

We have millions of pieces of PPE in stockpile - will provide ice exact figure. Also replenishing this all the time both international sources and making it nationally.

Shout out to Burberry here.

26m items distributed in last 24 hours, 400m over last 2 weeks.

Important to get PPE to people working in social care as well as NHS.

New guidance specifies what sort of PPE in what sort of setting

26,000 places for social care provision

Priority is exactly the same.

May - my mother in law lives in a care home.

Social care coming back onto emergency register, some of these going into social care settings.