**UK government Covid19 press conference 16 April 2020**

**Jeremy Hoad**

(usual caveats apply to this live transcript / commentary)

(some interruptions to the video during broadcast)

**Attending**

Dominic Raab, Foreign Secretary
Sir Patrick Vallance, Chief Scientific Adviser
Prof Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer

**Figures**

327,608 tested

103,093 positive

XXXX hospitalised

13,729 dead

(no figure given for hospitalisations or increase in dead in last 24 hours)

**Raab**

Step by step our Action Plan aims to slow spread of. Virus to reduce. Infections and prevent hospitalisation

We are taken the right steps at the right time

(stock phrase / claim for Ministers at press conferences regardless of situation)

At the same time we are expanding key staff and life-saving equipment at the frontline so pple get the care they need when they need it and also why we need pple to stay at home to protect the NHS and save lives

I have chaired Cabinet and COBRA meetings today to look at SAGE advice

Mixed and inconsistent picture

Infections still likely to be increasing in some settings

R number likely to be below 1 in community

Overall still don’;t have infection rate down as much as we need to

Issues with virus spreading in some hospitals and care homes

Any change in social distancing measures now would risk significant increase infections

That would threaten a second peak, substantially increase number of deaths and undo progress to date and require and even longer period of social distancing measures

Early relaxation would do more damage to economy over a longer period

Let me be clear early relaxation would risk damage to public health AND the economy

Relaxing current measures would undo progress we’ve made to do and would do more damage to economy and public health

Based on SAGE advice we are saying the current measures must remain in place for at least next 3 weeks

5 reqwuirements before relaxing measures:

1

Protecting NHS ability to cope and provide critical care across UK. NH staff have been incredible we must support them

2

Sustained and consistent fall in daily death rates so confident we have moved beyond the peak

3

Need to see reliable data from SAGE to show rate of infection decreasing

4

We need to be confident the range of operational capabilities including testing and PPE are in hand

5

Any adjustments to measures will not risk second peak that woulod overwhelm the NHS and hit the British pple wld be worst outcome for UK

Will continue to monitor progress of virus

Soon be able to test 100k per day

Give greater understanding of scope of virus across the ctry and how to adjust measures

Guided by science and data we will then adjust measures to remain effective but allow some economic activity

Could involve relaxing in some measures, strengthening in others

At all times we will be guided by the scientific advice

Unprecedented measures put in place for jobs, businesses and for hospices and charities supporting most vulnerable in society

Pple want more details so we are being as open as we responsibly can at this stage

Wld not be respoinsible to prejudge evidence from SAGE will not say more at this time

We carefully follow other ctries

Talking to foreign ministers and other opposite numbers around the world

We need to do what is right for British pple based on the advice of OUR experts and we will make the right decisions best at the right time for this ctry

I appreciate impact considerable on pple and businesses

Costs, sacrifices, pple cooped up all week long

Parenets having difficult conversations with their children

Children not understanding why they can’t go out

Balancing home schooling

Concerns about jobs, finances, small businesses

We get it, we know it is rough going at this time

Whenever I read out grim toll at this lectern I think of what the loved ones left behind must be going through – sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, grandchildren

(yes, we know what family relationships are)

Makes me and this govt focus harder on what we must do

Together united we must keep up this national effort

Sacrificed too much to let up now

Your efforts are paying off

There is light at the end of the tunnel

Difficult and dangerous stage

Risk sacrificing progress

Second lockdown would damage health and economy

Safely return to life as soon as possible as much as possible

Now not the moment to give virus a second chance

Lets stick together and defeat the virus for good

(you cannot “defeat” a virus. It just exists. It is not an. Enemy in a war.)

**Vallance**

Slide

Transport

Evidence highly likely r is below 1 (transmission foce of virus)

Imp change, epidemic likely shrinking in community

Hospitals and social care settings may be greater

Slide

New cases

Flattening, poss sign of decrease

Slide

Critical slide in hospital beds

Decreasing across many regions, some flat

Consistent with idea r is below 1

Slower to 1 more likely small changes could lead to r going above 1 which means this would run risk of growth and second peak with all the damage to health and economy that would bring

Imp all measures stay in place

Slide

Expect deaths to reach a plateau then stay up for a little while

All settings ONS data now included

Changes we have made has made a diff and will continue to make a diff

Imp to continue with this

**Questions**

Can you give public any hope of when restrictions might life – 3 weeks or 3 months

Raab – PM said from outset it would take 3 months to come through peak broadly correct

Can’t give definitive timeframe

Light at end of tunnel, progress

Must keep up social distancing measures

We’ve seen ctry pull together nothwithstanding huge losses I have described

Why can’t you share anything about what comes next?

Raab – we can, we do press conferences

(where they refuse to explain anything about what might come next or how we get out of the current lockdown measures)

We shouldn’t prejudice data SAGE is getting and prejuding decision we need to take now wld be wrong

Constant review of options

Set out 5 principles to give hope to ctry

Death toll huge tragedy for so many pple

Can’t let up now, damaging for public health or economy]

We are taking the RIGHT decision at the RIGHT time as we have always done

(debatable, govt appears to have been slow to act and been constantly reactive to issues such as PPE provision or care home protections)

Whitty said yesterday information useful would be survey data from ctry to indicate infection rate across the ctry – are tests not delivering reliable results and if so. Where does that leave us figuring out lockdown future are we flying blind?

Whitty – we have crude estimate of infections more data needed and to inform getting a vaccine

A lot of work not just in Porton Down – academic, commercial and other areas

3 things slowed us down

1

Don’t yet have a serological test we can rely on

2

Don’t yet have good enough sampling frame, working to set this up across the ctry

3

Takes at least 21 days for tests to be reliable, early data not as reliable before we reach evidence of peak, diff stage of infection, data will become more useful over time

Moving fast, will have crude shot soon

All cases now added to slides – will this change SAGE’s prediction of peak and what is happening with r are we seeing faster transmission in care home setting that will effect future decisions?

Vallance – ONS data covid on death certificate, not necessarily tested

R is not necessarily below 1 in every hospital and care home

Imp area to now look at but doesn’t change overall view R is below one so we expect to see slowing and turn of epidemic

Whitty – ONS data also indicates “excess mortality” diff btwn expected death rate and current death rate

Excess mortality last week was btween 5-6,000 pple

Can include pple who stayed at home because they avoided going into hospital

Imp pple realise if pple are having a medical emergency that is life threatening they must go to hospital, contact 111 – nHS is open for business if life-threatening

Sky analysis found 70% frontline staff who have died are non-white, BAME, what specifically can you say, what’;s your message for this community

Raab – defer to Vallance

We are on the side of everyone

We want to follow data carefully

Older pple get worried seeing everybody else as priority if measures change how can you reassure them they feel they might never see their grandchildren again?

Raab – priority is to safeguard life

Whitty – age, co-morbidities and male sexare very clear riski factors

Ethnic minority group risk is less clear, have looked at this across medical and nursing professions, very keen to get this very clear to minimiserisk

At this point in time ethnicity is not clear as a risk factor

Vallance – aim is very clear to get the numbers down now so imp absolute number and r number comes down

Once at this stage then we can consider measures to ensure we don’t get moregrowth

Differential approach to this, jobs etc.to do this in a safe way

Understand basic principles of transmission and allow policymakers to make decisions based on this

Minisyters and No10 pretending there isn’t a debate about what next – is it wise Ministers absent themselves form this debate?

Raab – we aren’t absenting ourselves, we come to press conferences, set out 5 principles, will continue to be guided by scientific evidence to take the right decisions at the right time

(by saying this Raab shows govt is still avoiding engaging in any. Meaningful discussion about what might come next. Or what. Options might be)

Spread in community on way down but up in hospitals and care homes – have measures there proved inadequate - what will you do to reassure pple?

Raab – you are right we have made progress

In terms of care homes we are absolutely gripping this

Health Sec has set this out

(summary of what Hancock said before re care sector a coupkle of days ago)

Recognise virus hasn’t spread uniformly but committed to where it has raised its head to tackle this

Have deaths been modelled?

(video broke up so entire question not clear)

Whitty – indirect deaths we need to remember and take account. Of

1

Direct deaths

2

Indirect. Deaths if NHS overwhelmed (haven’t come close to that)

3

Indirect deaths due to NHS reoriented to covid19

4

Deprivation

Committed to look at all of these and how they interact to ensure proper response from NHS to all causes

Vallance – no tension btwn economy and health

We do look at long term consequences and modelling that

New measures care homes recognition enough wasn’t in place are you confident changes are enough

Raab – Care England said it was heartening government was listening

Make sure measures and testing in place where needed

Need to keep significant level of social distancing for up to 18 months until vaccine?

Do you agree with WHO assessment putting UK with Russia and Belarus regarding coping with outbreak?

Raab – haven’t seen that report yet, diff ctries react differently

Measures may be calibrated in diff ways in a reliable way to protect NHS andease up on economy and allow pple to engage in social activity

Vallance – therapeutic programmes being developed as well as vaccine development

UK somewhere a lot of that work is going on

Social distancing needed to reduce infections to low level

All about reducing. Contact and transmission so number of measures may need to continue whilst vaccines and therapeutics come along but that is diff to sayingcurrent measures need to continue

(video interrupted)

Lifting lockdown – how many daily tests will have to be available before community testing can begin?

Raab – 100k target and will keep ramping that up

(video interrupted)

And how that intearacts with testing and tracing

Good news r less than 1 in community but still seem concerned in other settings such as elderly population – are you tacitly warning us about deaths to come in care homes?

Vallance – all settings r number needs to come down

Masks – how is govt line reached that masks no help outside care setting? Did govt consider only medical evidence or that there aren’t enough masks to go round public?

Whitty – if ever there was a competition between healthcare and public settings that would be bade situation

Very live issue we are examining

SAGE looking at this

Evidence of. Small effect there for masks in certain circumstances but evidence is weak at the moment

Scientific advice evolves, constantly re-evaluating this

UK still tracking Italy, we were 4weeks behind Italy so. Why aren’t we making more progress with death rate?

Vallance – r has come down, cases come down in hospital, lag before deaths reduce

Very much curve that has been followed in other ctries

We are 3-4 weeks behind Italy

(imnpression UK tracking Italy was inevitable is contentious to say the least – did we waste time? Not answered)

Will there be a reckoning with China as some in Tory Party now suggesting?

Raab – there needs to be a very deep dive with China after crisis but imp of international cooperation

We can’t have business as usual

What in practice? Tariffs? Restrictions on China investment in UK?

Raab – we need to look at this in future

Need to ask hard questions about how it came about and why it wasn’t addressed. Earlier

Can’t track this response until wqe get these answers

Covid19 deaths in NW one of worst in ctry – reasons? Deprivation? widespread ill health?

Whitty - until recently NW was tracking Midlands and SW but below. London

Covid cases have started to trend downwards but only short period so caution needed

Need to look at all-cause mortality and at care homes (quite a few in the NW)

If number of cases in NW remains high cld this mean slower release than elsewhere and what measures are being taken to tackle mental health?

Raab – want. To get r level down across all areas

Look at SAGE analysis by end of the month

Won’t jump ahead

Vallance – isn’t really a huge variation across the ctry

Much more similarity in time course and trajectory

Whitty – mental health risks of delivery of mental health services and loneliness

Set up large number of things to look at how to improve provision of mental health services

Everybody who has looked at this is seriously concerned

Academic colleagues looking at this in covid19 circumnstance in p’tic.

Raab – Thanks.

(ends with govt warning video)