**UK government Covid19 press conference 17 April 2020**

**Jeremy Hoad**

(usual caveats apply to this live transcript / commentary)

**Attending**

Alok Sharma, Business Secretary   
Yvonne Doyle, Director for Health Protection and Medical Director at Public Health England  
Patrick Vallance, Chief Scientific Adviser

**Figures**

438,991 tested (21,328 more than yesterday)

108,692 positive (5,599 increase)

18,978 hospitalised

14,576 dead

847 increase in dead over last 24 hours

**Sharma**

Step by step action plan aiming to slow the spread of virus to protect NHS ability to cope

We have followed scientific advice done right thing at the right time

Expanding beds, staff and equipment on frontline

This is why we are instructing pple to stay at home to save lives

We must never forget there are pple behind every statistic

Thoughts and prayers

Powerful reminder of need to keep adhering to measures

Stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives

5 requirements

1

Protect NHS ability to cope & provide critical care

2

Sustained and critical fall in daily death rate

3

Need reliable data from SAGE to show infections de creasing

4

need to be confident range of operation needs met

5

Confident any adjustments to current measures will not risk a 2nd peak

Worst thing we cld do now is ease up

Thank each and every person for staying at home to protect NHS and save lives

Know we are asking for sacrifices

Working together we will defeat this invisible enemy

We must stay vigilant for you and pple around you

(this is all a carbon copy of what was said by Raab yesterday, same script, much word for word the same)

We can defeat virus by developing vaccine

Apply best of scientific endeavour

Vaccines task force set up to accelerate development of vaccine

(Oh right, so months after this hit the worlkd and the UK the govt has only now set up a vaccines task force. Great. Thanks for acting so quickly. Govt has been slow and reactive at every stage. Appalling)

Ensure vaccine available to public as fast as possible

Govt, industry, academia and regulators

Task force will support progress at all stages of vaccine development

UK leader of clinical development of vaccines

Rapid and well supervised trials

Work with academic and industry

Build on £250m for SEPI to find vaccine

23 research projects (£14m from £25m fund)

6 projects anmounced last month already carrying out pre-clinical trials moving to clinical trials

Looking forward to manufacture by the millions

Harwell facility being accelerated

Bioindustry working with task force to mass produce vaccines as soon as one is ready

Under no illusions producing vaccine is massive task

Govt is betting big to maximise success

Again and again Britain has stepped up to find a solution to beat this invisible killer

Ctry with rich history of pioneering science

Best chance to do this as soon as possible

**Vallance**

Slide

Dip in transport

Across ctry unevenness p’tic in some areas where there haven’t been so many cases yet

Urge everbody to continue with social distancing

Slide

Tested cases - Has become flat over last few days Expect this to decrease

Slide

Hospitalisations

Gradual decrease in London

Flattening in some other areas

As expected as social distancing. Measures feed through

Here also that some work on treatments beginning to take hold

UK studies have enrolled 5.5k pple in clinical trials to work out whether existing medicienes can help treatment

Won’t be quick, will plateau and take a while for numbers to come down

Imp to maintain social distancing measures

Slide

Deaths continue to occur, a tragedy

Will continue at a plateau for some while before coming down slow2ly after that

**Questions**

21k test yesterday, how will you get to 100k by end of month with just 13 days, how can public be assured of this?

Sharma – capacity is 38k a day

Continue to work to reach 100k

26 drive through testing centres

2 out of 3 superlabs doing testing up and running

Making sure we reach target

Doyle – have more capacity than is being used

Imp those in social care now able to use this capacity

Imp they accept the testing

(this repeated refrain that pple are not taking up / accepting tests is grossly insulting. There’s obviously a problem with how the govt is providing tests)

When we have vaccine how will this be prioritised who gets it first?

Vallance – 1st thing to get vaccine and ensure safety

Industry has stepped up looking at big manufacturing capacity

Most vulnerable first then wider population

Tourism industry – any hope some kind. Of summer season this year?

(question ignored)

Expecting further surge of cases in east of England?

Sharma – I speak to businesses and representatives every day

Measures to support businesses put in place

Bus rate holiday for a year

Smaller business grants of £25k

Furlough scheme extended to end of June

Acknowledge this is a tought time for businesses

Key thing to provide support when we come out the other – and we will come out the other side - side businesses can bounce back

(ignored question again and daft to say we will come out of this idiotic comment)

Vallance – expect cases in community to be coming down

R value less than 1

Hospitals showing plateau of cases now

Extra capacity in place

Confident NHS won’t have capacity breached, poss diff times across the ctry

As we get decrease in community we may have r above 1 in hospitalos or care homes

Dorries said only way exit full lockdown is with lockdown is that the case?

Sharma – imp thing is we are taking scientific advice and following measures

Thank British public have responded, taken advice, staying at home, understand protecting NHS and saving lives

Grants in place for businesses £12.3bn now with local authorities

£3.7bn has been paid out to businesses

Look to accelerate that

Always led by scientific advice

(ignored the question)

Oxford scientists behind vaccine triials starting next week say they are so confident they will start manufacture 1m doses during trials – what is govt doing to ensure supply and sign contarcts to make sure Britain is at the front of the queue for the m/f of that vaccine?

Sharma – govt supporting vaccine development

Key element manufacture

Brought forward development of vaccine centre and working with industry

Stepping forward to support effort at Oxford and Imperial

(waffle)

How do balance the rapid development of a vaccine to save lives and exiting lockdown while at the same time making sure it is safe?

Vallance – about 100 vaccine projects across the world

Each project does not have a high probabaility of success, never the case you know you’ve got a vaccine that will work

Many trials and work taking place across the globe

Imp vaccines tested properly for safety

Only when that is done can vaccine be used in population

UK late on tests and late on ventilators, can’t afford to be late on vaccines as well?

Sharma – that’s why we’ve set up task force

£250 put into SEPI int’l body looking at this CEO of SEPI on task force board

Valance – vaccine could come from anywhere

UK centres working as fast as possible

Most big companies working on this also

Organisations like SEPI imp so world sees this as priority

Hancock announced investigations into NHS workers who have passed away – have there been any general findings and any changes in workplace as a result?

Sharma – pay tribute to staff, every death is one too many

Doyle – sadly number of healthcare workers have died each death imp to investigate

Work underway on deaths and also those more at risk

Eg BAME investigations

A lot of speculation but factors are complex we are investigating this correctly

(Doyle always seems tetchy and defensive)

When will preliminary findings start to come back?

Doyle – not all will be workplace deaths

(really? You wan’t to even suggest the idea of “it wasn’t out fault” here???)

Imp to investigate factors that led to death

Investigated and communicated in the appropriate way at the right time

Investigations seen as very imp

CBI told businesses and employees must get used to a new normal – what will this mean – rerstrictions until vaccine available?

Sharma – asking pple to stay home

If able to work from home you must absolutely do that

Certain work setting m/f or construction where you must go in

Imp employers follow PHE guidance to ensure safe workplace

Employers are adapting

Need to adaqpt in a safe way

(ignored or misunderstood question)

Carry on working from home until there’s a vaccine?

Sharma – measures put in place renewed yesterday

Message to follow guidance for next 3 weeks

Ultimately about saving lives

Certain exceptions

Clear from start across sectors is to emphasise pple must be following PHE guidance for safe. Working

(Sharma seems a bit thick or is deliberately ignoring the question)

Govt talked about strenghthening lockdown in some areas and easing it in others – what would that llook like

Sharma – very clear current measures will continue for 3 weeks then we will be guided by scientific advice

Ref 5 tests again

(ignored question AGAIN)

Vallance – imp to focus on measures to reduce r value

You can see how other ctries are releasing measures

Too early to be talking about that here

Get numbers down priority

(basically look at other ctries because you won’t get us answering asny questions on this – pathetic response)

Face masks – on public transport? Will there be enough?

Sharma – current guidance PHE to use masks in public health setting

SAGE looking at this now

Vallance – looking at evidence now

Twice this week again on Tuesday

Currently entirely in line with WHO recommendations

One thing clear absolutely crucial masks available in hospitals and othe high risk settings

Care workers and NHS risking their lives, was it a mistake to brand these pple as low skilled labour?

Many pple working in sector only have access to £94 a week and can’t afford not to come into work – is this a public health risk?

Sharma – tribute to sector

Making sure PPE gets to frontline

NHS and NHS workers vital to us

We support them because they support us

(ignored both questions AGAIN)

Doyle – guidance always been clear if you are not well you should not work

Understand economic pressures but imp they don’t work if feeling unwell and that frontline accept testing – I would like to see they accept that.

(misunderstood this wasn’t specifically about frontline workers. Insulting repeat of blaming pple for not “accepting” the testing available)

Said value NHS and care workers – wld you commit to full pay and statutory sick pay for NHS and social care workers?

Sharma – whole range of support we have provided eg furlough schemes and grants

Will support smaller businesses as well

We value heroes we have across ctry in NHS and social care sector

(again completely ignored question. Sharma is an arrogant dolt)

W Midlands have disproportionetly high deaths – why?

Some W Mids hospitals running low on PPE what was promised last week was not delivered will that change next week?

Sharma – is of course a global supply issue

Hancock announce3d plan

Burberry, Ineos and Diageo name checked

Local resilience forums have been getting supplies

We need to be on top of it

We are working night and day to procure more PPE and m/f it

(waffle)

Doyle – initially saw cases from travel now very widespread and it has hit cities

London then other cities as concentration of. Populations

Community trabnsmissions beginning to reduce

Closely watching hotspots

Care homes

Not seen end of this p’tic phase expect to see this in other parts of ctry due to population density

Forecasts of damage to economy – treasury’s coffers emptied out so why proceed with HS2 – suspend work?

Sharma – pay tribute to businesses and pple working from home and going into other work settings

Major impact on our economy and globally

That;’s why we’ve put in place schemes

Reason so employees in place and we can bounce back

Imp we support m/f and construction sectors

Vital we keep economy going while we can

Reason for measures is to save live by protecting life we protect businesses and jobs

(question ignored AGAIN - For goodness sake can Sharma only remember ONE answer and uses it for everything?)

I know diff for businesses and individuals

Continue to follow the very clear advice govt has set out

Ultimately about saving lives

About saving your life and those who you love

(ends with govt warning video)