**UK government Covid19 press conference 24 April 2020**

**Jeremy Hoad**

(usual caveats apply to this live transcript / commentary)

(press conference now preceded by advice video with trancey dance music)

**Attending**

Grant Shapps, Transport Secretary   
Dr Jenny Harries, Deputy Chief Medical Officer

**Figures**

612,031 tested (28,532 since yesterday)

143,463 positive

17,049 hospitalised

19,506 dead

684 increase in dead over last 24 hours

**Shapps**

Condolences to family and friends of dead

Despite continuing challenges ahead tentative signs of progress

Main reason stay at home and social distancing

Avoiding public transport frees up space for critical workers

New measures

Far reaching package to safeguard flow of essential goods

Trilateral agreement with French and Irish govts to keep trade routes open to give time to meet needs of coutries

Rising financial pressure due to falling demand

Many operators bring in essential goods

Protecting ferry routes to NI

£17bn funding

IoW and Scily Isles £10m package

Air link will continue

5 ferry and 2 air routes to NI

26 routes to Europe safeguarded

Transport Support Unit launched dedicated to fight pandemic

Spare capacity directed to logistical tasks to fight virus

Able to help NHS Trusts and Local Resilience Groups

Ref 4 aeroplanes plus ships, ferries and trains

Vehicles from Highways England will act as mobile testing units

Thanking Network Rail workers

TSU getting to work helping frontline staff

Green light to trails of drones to deliver emergency supplies

£8m allocated earlier this year in testing programme

Fastrack trials to carry medical supplies and equipment to IoW

Funding to help trams operating across England

Allowing essential routes to remain open

New initiatives build on existing work since crisis began

(eg trains and buses, repatriating pple)

No British holidaymers left on cruise ships now

MOTs extended

Tribute to transport critical workers to ensure supplies for hospitals and supermarkets – hauliers, train drivers, airport workers

Part of an army of critical workers helping to fight this dreadful scourge

Ref 5 tests

Don’t know when day will come to relax measures but will come sooner if motorists and others continue to make only essential jouneys

Infrastructure will be ready

**Harries**

Slide

Transport

Down to 59% lower than 1st week of Feb but increased in last week

Slide

New cases

Cases have risen – fluctuation of reporting but curve is flattening

With increased tests available will expect to see an increase in cases as increase in detection numbers

Slide

Hospitalisations

Markedly fallen in London

Fallen below 1,000 in last 24 hrs for first time in many weeks

Slide

Critical care bed use

Sharp rise but capacity has always been sufficient

Capacity continuing to increase as we move forward

Slide

Confirmed hospital deaths

Increase in deaths as epidemic. Spread, gradually but subtly trend downwards

Slide

Global comparisons

Far right blue death line indicates hospitals only

Also adding in community data

**Questions**

Online booking for virus testing v popular – assurances about future demand being met?

Shapps – website hadn’t crashed, just that slots for today had been taken up.

Imp to make sure we are using the capacity available

10.72m critical workers

16,000 booked today

Site back up now will be on/off as slots become available

Trajectory to 100k tests will be met in terms of capacity

(ie govt target not sure of being met)

Devolved administrations want to join this online booking system

Are you confident you can meet the demand?

Shapps – we don’t quite know how many pple will want to be tested

Now much wider number of pple

We don’t know how many that will be

(perhaps 10.72m?)

46k went to portal earlier today

Social distancing in NW – conversation today with healthcare worker whose sister

In tears because of number of pple not practicing social distancing

(no mention of thousands on streets yesterday causing chaos at Clive Pinnock funeral and across south Manchester!!!)

Shapps – danger of warm, sunny weekend that pple don’t realise the peak has not been established yet

This lies in your own hands – more pple adhere to social distancing the faster we can change

Harries – pple who have lost loved ones really feel when they see pple flouting the social distancing rules

Earlier debate about compliance with social distancing but on the whole pple are complying

Pretending we can jump out of this easily is not the case

Need to encourage everyone to comply

Manchester trams within days of having to be mothballed – when will support come and in what form?

Shapps – agree with Burnham support is required

Not looking to run the full service but imp availability for critical workers

£2.5m funding for ferry services to IoW and Scilly -0 what about other services eg Port of Dover – will they also get funding from govt?

15k per day flying =into UK, why no checking for covid?

Shapps – trilateral P&O, Stenna and others and 26 freight routes secured as well in addition to ferry services

All included in package to ensure a minimum level of service

(he misunderstood the question about Dover)

Flights – numbers down massively, requirements for pple coming in to stay in one place and not leave for any reason as we come out of this we will continue to keep medical and scientific advice under review

Ctries that locked down flights eg USA have not necessarily weathered the storm any better than us

HJarries – leant a lot from W Africa ebola outbreak

Some time screening can be useful and reassuring incl exit screening

Closely quarantined pple early on from Wuhan

Once prevalence spread that is a less useful approach

Reliability of, eg. Temperature control and recording can vary by 2-3 degrees

Port of entry measures less accurate as incubation period for virus is 21 days

Promised 10m key workers a test – accept you raised expe3ctations far higher than you can deliver? No eligibility tests for signing up online – change that in future?

Shapps – will always keep this under review

10.72m eligible key workers and familes

No point taking test unless you think you have it and have symptoms

No point testing if you think you’ve had it

(contradicts test, trace advice, surely?)

Much easier to obtain tests so that’s a good thing

Everyone will welcome us getting to 100k figure

(avoiding waffle)

Harries – this is the have you got it now test

Need to encourage pple if they have symptoms to take tests so they can get back to work and pple out within social distancing rules

Pple should use these tests as intended

Critical workers and shift workers can’t just sit there hitting refresh – new system to open up availability?

Shapps – drive through centres

Aiming to increase that number to 48 by end of next week

Want to make it as easy as possible

Trial of home tests – hope to expand that as well

If we’ve got near goal of 100k

Harries – you should not be at work if you are symptomatic

Shapps – everyone knows this is an enormous challenge building a test system from. Scratch

Hopefully we can balance demand with capacity in coming days

Latest round of Brexit talks ended today saying limited progress made – snr pple saying transition shld be extended – are they wrong?

Huge demand for home testing kits but this is not a simple task – reliable? Failure rate?

Shapps – Pple may not be aware talk continuing actually some v good progress and energy, transport and civil nuclear

Not so m uch distance between us

Ctry voted to leave EU (I didn’t) and GE, a lot of pple voted for manifesto saying we wouldn’t extend transition period

Transition period WILL end at the end of the year and will carry on negotiations in good faith to provide certainty

(this provide the opposite – chaos and unknown future)

Harries – tests may fail for various reasons

Diff to put a number on the failure element of somebody taking the test themselves but piloting tests we have run in parallel trained and not trained workers, remarkably comparable otherwise we wouldn’t be doing this

Imp to undersand prevalence of disease across the ctry

Other settings – eg care homes likely to be additional training to get good answers

Can be quite an unpleasant thing to do

Video alongside programme of home testing kits

Clip of Trump referencing disinfectant – message to Trump over spreading disinformation

Shapps – defer to Harries

Harries – we would advbise generally against pple injecting anything into their bodies

Nobody shld be injecting anything and we shold be using tested approaches that are safe

Support for trams ok but you haven’t said how much funding you will provide?

Why pple from some ethnic minority backgrounds seem to be dying disproportionately – why?

Shapps – I don’t have figures for diff systems yet, in discussion, package runs into the millions, more details soon

Systems running way below ordinary capacity

Need to find a route with them which enables them to remain viable b ut not run same service as normal

Harries – hugely imp and complex subject

Disease prevalence and severity involves diff characteristics eg gender, age, ethnicity

Trying to untangle all these diff elements is very complex

Data has to be v good and recording of ethnicity is hugely complex including ctry of origin but won’t explain community or how pple have lived their lives

Need to wait until we have very clear data

PHE will be doing detailed review into this

Not just as simple as the ethnic position but also eg other conditions that pple suffer from, eg hypertenstion more prevalent in some ethnic minorities

Also about how pple live their lives eg living closer together

Also diff socio-economic status that needs to be considered

Need to engage with those communities to understand

High representation in NHS and frontline cvare services of minority ethnic groups so may be over-represented compared to wider population

Health Sec promised 100k daily by end of month but goalposts moved to capacity – when will we reach PM’s target of 250k?

Contact tracing app – similar model to S Korea with GPS phone tracking?

Shapps – 100k capacity clear and ambition likely by end of the month incl superlabs

Problem has been not sufficient people coming forward through their employer to take the test

Seen today excess demand for tests

Numbers will rise sharply and quite fast

Number of tests as well as capacity are headed in the right direction

PM 250k not a scpecifc timetable

App – Bluetooth signal anonymously used for contact tracing

Harries – ambition to digitilise some of this process. To support measures to bring us back out of social distancing measures

Younger generation in p’tic have techniology

Will require certain proportion of us to be using the right phones and fast contac t tracing to take qppropriate action

A lot of work still to do

Hybrid approach will be used

SHapps – another great national effort required to implement this app and show support for NHS

Johnson said 250k target by 25/3 – will this just stay as an ambition?

Shapps – when that was said we had 7k a day making progress to 100k a day shows what we can wchieve enormous scale up that was a very ambitious target

Finish by saying pple ask when this phase can end this is in many ways in our own hands

Flattening curve, do not let this slip this weekend

Stay at home to protect the NHS and save lives

(ends with govt warning video)