



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

31 October 2020

Dear Mr Meagan,

This evening, I held a press conference to update the public on our response to COVID-19.

Two weeks ago I set out our plans to pursue a local and regional approach to tackling this virus. I continue to believe that this was the rational approach. The cost and damage of these restrictions, the impact on jobs and businesses, and on mental health are such that we did not want to shut pubs and restaurants in one part of the country, where incidence was low, when the bulk of infections were taking place elsewhere.

We hoped that with strong local action, and with strong local leadership, we could get the rates of infection down where the disease was surging. I want to thank the millions of people who have been putting up with restrictions for so long. There are signs that your work has been paying off; and we will continue as far as we can to adopt a pragmatic and local approach in the months ahead.

We must also, however, be humble in the face of nature. In this country as across much of Europe the virus is spreading even faster than the reasonable worst case scenario of our scientific advisers, whose models now suggest that unless we act we will see deaths in this country running at several thousand a day - a peak of mortality far bigger than the one we saw in April. In the South West, where incidence was so low, it is now clear that on current projections they will run out of hospital capacity in a matter of weeks.

The overrunning of the NHS would be a medical and moral disaster beyond the raw loss of life. The huge exponential growth in the number of patients – by no means all of them elderly – would mean that doctors and nurses would be forced to choose which patients to treat, who could get oxygen and who could not; who would live and who would die; and they would be forced to choose between saving COVID-19 patients and non-COVID-19 patients. The sheer weight of COVID-19 demand would mean depriving tens of thousands - if not many more non- COVID-19 patients of the care they need.

If we let infections grow in the way they could, then the risk is that the NHS will not be there for us. Even if the Government could double capacity overnight – and I am proud that we have 13,000 more nurses than a year ago, many more doctors – it still would not be enough, because the virus is doubling faster than we could conceivably add capacity.

Now is the time to take action, because there is no alternative. On Monday I will set out our plans to parliament; on Wednesday, parliament will debate and vote on our proposed course of action.

Subject to that vote, from Thursday until the start of December, the law will set out that people must stay at home, and only leave home for specific reasons, including:

- For education;
- For work, if you cannot work from home;
- For exercise and recreation outdoors, with your household or on your own with one person from another household;
- For medical reasons, appointments and to escape injury or harm;
- To shop for food and essentials; and
- To provide care for vulnerable people.

Further to this:

- There is no exemption for staying away from home on holiday – so people cannot do so in this country or elsewhere.
- Non-essential shops, leisure and entertainment venues will all be closed – though click and collect services can continue and essential shops will remain open, so there is no need to stock up. Pubs, bars, restaurants must close except for takeaway and delivery services.
- Workplaces should stay open where people cannot work from home – for example in the construction or manufacturing sectors. The House authorities have the guidance they need to support all of you to continue your work as Members of Parliament.

- Single adult households can still form exclusive support bubbles with one other household, and children will still be able to move between homes if their parents are separated.
- If you are clinically vulnerable, or over the age of 60, you should be especially careful to follow the rules and minimise your contacts with others. I know how tough shielding was, and we will not ask people to shield again in the same way again. However we are asking those who are clinically extremely vulnerable to minimise their contact with others, and not to go to work if they are unable to work from home.
- My priority remains keeping people in education. Childcare, early years' settings, schools, colleges and universities will all remain open. Our senior clinicians still advise that school is the best place for children to be. We cannot let this virus damage our children's futures even more than it has done already. I urge parents to continue taking their children to school and I am extremely grateful to teachers across the country for their dedication in enabling schools to remain open.

I am under no illusions about how difficult this will be for businesses which have had to endure unimaginable hardship already this year. To support people and businesses at this critical time, we are going to extend the furlough system through November.

These measures will be time-limited, starting next Thursday 5 November. They will end on Wednesday 2 December, when we will seek to ease restrictions on a local and regional basis according to the latest data and trends. While the festive period will be very different this year, by taking tough action now, we can allow families across the country to be together.

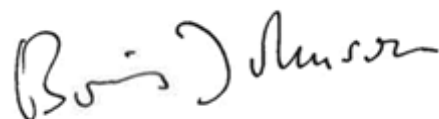
It is vital that we will keep provision for non-COVID-19 healthcare needs going. Unless someone's clinicians tell them otherwise they should continue to use the NHS, get their scans, turn up for their appointments and pick up their prescriptions and treatments. If at all possible, we want people to continue to access these services, now and through the winter.

We have updated the Devolved Administrations on the action we are taking in England and stand ready to work with them on plans for Christmas and beyond.

I am optimistic that this will feel different and better by the spring. We have ever better medicine and therapies, and the realistic hope of a vaccine in the first quarter of next year. We now have the immediate prospect of using many millions of cheap, reliable and above all rapid turnaround tests, that you can use yourself to tell whether or not you are infectious within 10 to 15 minutes. We know from trials across the country in schools and hospitals that we can use these tests to drive down the disease. We are planning a steady but massive expansion of these quick turnaround tests applying them in all kinds of situations, from helping women to have their partners with them in labour wards, to testing whole towns and even whole cities. The army has been brought in to work on the logistics and the programme will begin in a matter of days, working with local communities, local government, public health directors and organisations of all kinds to help people discover whether or not they are infectious, and immediately to get them to self-isolate and to stop the spread.

The country will get through this – but we must act now to contain this autumn surge. We are not going back to the full-scale lockdown of March and April - it is less prohibitive and less restrictive. However, from Thursday until the 2nd of December the basic message is the same: stay at home; protect the NHS; and save lives.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Boris Johnson', written in a cursive style.

All MPs and Peers