

Briefing: Our Plan to Rebuild: The UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy

1. Introduction

The government published its COVID-19 recovery strategy on 11th May. It describes the progress made to date and sets out a roadmap for moving to the next phase of its response.

2. The current situation

The strategy notes that COVID-19 has spread to almost every country in the world and its spread has been rapid.

The key steps taken by the government are highlighted:

- 3rd March – published its plan to contain, delay, and mitigate any outbreak.
- 7th March - those with symptoms were asked to self-isolate for 7 days.
- 16th March – the Government introduced shielding for the most vulnerable and called on the British public to cease non-essential contact and travel.
- 18th March, the Government announced the closure of schools.
- 20th March entertainment, hospitality and indoor leisure venues were closed.
- 23rd March the Government introduced the Stay at Home guidance.

SAGE's latest assessment is that, across the UK, the rate of infection (R) has reduced to between 0.5 and 0.9, meaning that the number of infected people is falling, with social distancing measures having played a central role in reducing R.

Moving to the next phase

On the 16th April the Government presented five tests for easing measures. These are:

- Protect the NHS's ability to cope
- A sustained and consistent fall in the daily death rates
- Rate of infection decreasing to manageable levels
- Operational challenges, including testing capacity & PPE are in hand
- Any adjustments to the current measures will not risk a second peak of infections that overwhelms the NHS

The strategy notes that good progress has been made but currently not all have been achieved, therefore Government can only cautiously lift elements of the existing measures.

Challenges

The strategy notes the challenges facing the UK and other countries around the world as it moves into the next phase of its response to the virus:

1. **This is not a short-term crisis.** It is likely that COVID-19 will circulate in the human population long-term, possibly causing periodic epidemics.
2. **In the near term, we cannot afford to make drastic changes.** To successfully keep R below 1, there is little room for manoeuvre. Fully opening schools or relaxing all social distancing measures now will lead to a resurgence of the virus and a second wave that could be larger than the first.
3. **There is no easy or quick solution.** Only the development of a vaccine or effective drugs can reliably control the epidemic and reduce mortality without some form of social distancing or contact tracing in place.
4. **The country must get the number of new cases down.** Holding R below 1, allowing for effective tracing of new cases, which in turn, will enable the total number of transmissions to be held at a low level.
5. **The world's scientific understanding of the virus is still developing rapidly.** We are still learning about who is at greatest personal risk and how the virus is spread.
6. **The virus' spread is difficult to detect** as some people carry the disease asymptotically, or those who do develop symptoms often do not show signs of being infected for around five days; a significant proportion of infections take place in this time.
7. **The Government must prepare for the challenges that the winter flu season will bring.**
8. **The plan depends on continued widespread compliance** to avoid R tipping above 1 and the epidemic increasing in an uncontrolled manner.

Reflecting these challenges, the rest of the strategy **sets out a cautious roadmap to ease existing measures “in a safe and measured way, subject to successfully controlling the virus and being able to monitor and react to its spread”**. The roadmap will be kept constantly under review as the epidemic, and the world's understanding of it, develops.

3. Aims: saving lives; saving livelihoods

The Government's central aim is to: “Return life to as close to normal as possible, for as many people as possible, as fast and fairly as possible...in a way that avoids a new epidemic, minimises lives lost and maximises health, economic and social outcomes”.

It notes that to do this, **Government will need to steadily redesign the current social distancing measures with new, smarter measures that reflect the level of risk at that point in time, and carefully wind down economic support schemes while people are eased back into work. Government will do this by considering three main factors.**

1. **Health effect** – the first consideration is the nation's health. Government will take into account:
 - Direct COVID-19 mortality
 - Indirect harms arising from NHS emergency services being overwhelmed
 - Increases in mortality or other ill health as a result of measures taken
 - The long-term health effects of any increase in deprivation arising from economic impacts
 - The biggest threat to life remains the risk of a second peak

2. **Economic effect** - the second consideration is protecting and restoring people's livelihoods and improving people's living standards. Government will take into account:
 - The short-term economic impact, including the number of people who can **return to work where it is safe to do so**, working with businesses and unions
 - The country's **long-term economic future**, which could be harmed by people being out of jobs and by insolvencies, and investing in supporting an economic bounce back
 - The sustainability of **public finances** so the Government can pay for public services and the healthcare response
 - **Financial stability** so that the banks and others can continue to provide finance to the economy
 - **The distributional effects**, and so considering carefully the Government's measures on different income and age groups, business sectors and parts of the country.

The Government also needs to **protect the UK's international economic competitiveness** and where possible, will seek new economic opportunities, for example for the UK's world-leading pharmaceutical and medical-device manufacturing sectors.

3. **Social effect** - the third consideration is the wider effect of the social distancing measures on how the public live their daily lives. Government will take into account:
 - the number of **days of education children lose**
 - the **fairness of any actions** the Government takes, especially the impact on those most affected by social distancing measures
 - the importance of **maintaining the strength of the public services and civic organisations**, especially those that protect or support society's most vulnerable.

The strategy notes that part of the UK wide approach will be acknowledging that the virus may be spreading at different speeds in different parts of the UK. Therefore **measures may need to change in different ways and at different times.**

4. Approach: A phased Recovery

The strategy outlines two further phases of recovery as the UK exits phase 1 of the Government's response:

Phase 2 – smarter controls

The Government will gradually replace the existing social restrictions with smarter measures. It will enact measures that have the largest effect on controlling the epidemic but the lowest health, economic and social costs.

These will be developed and announced in periodic steps over the next few weeks and months seeking to maximise the pace at which restrictions are lifted but with strict conditions to move from each step onto the next. The Government will maintain options to react to a rise in transmissions, including re-imposing restrictions if required.

Over time, government will improve the effectiveness of these measures and introduce more reactive or localised measures through widespread accurate monitoring of the disease, enabling the lifting of more measures for more people at a faster pace. Meanwhile government will continue to increase NHS and social care capacity while restoring normal healthcare provision.

Throughout this phase:

- people will need to minimise the spread of the disease through continuing good hygiene practices, including hand washing.
- the number of social contacts people make each day must continue to be limited.
- the exposure of vulnerable groups must continue to be reduced from normal levels, and symptomatic and diagnosed individuals will still need to isolate.

Over time, social contact will be made less infectious by:

- **Making such contact safer** (including by redesigning public and work spaces, and those with symptoms self-isolating) to reduce the chance of infection per contact.

Many measures require the development of new **“COVID-19 Secure guidelines”** that set out how each type of physical space can be adapted to operate safely. The Government has been consulting relevant sectors, industry bodies, local authorities, trades unions, the Health and Safety Executive and Public Health England on their development **and will release them this week.**

The Government will continue to ask all employers and operators of communal spaces to be innovative in developing novel approaches; **UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) will welcome grant applications for proposals to develop new technologies and approaches that help the UK mitigate the impact of the virus.**

- **Reducing infected people's social contact** by using testing, tracing and monitoring of the infection to better focus restrictions according to risk.
- **Throughout this period, the Government will need to continue an extensive programme of shielding those who are clinically vulnerable, and will continue to introduce more support and assistance for these individuals.** Government will also **bring in further measures to support those providing the shield**, such as care workers for testing and protective equipment. Protections for other vulnerable locations like prisons and care homes will also be adjusted, based on an understanding of the risk.
- **Stopping hotspots developing** by detecting infection outbreaks at a more localised level and rapidly intervening with targeted measures and restrictions, possibly at short notice.

Phase 3 – reliable treatment

Eradication of the virus is very unlikely, but rolling out effective treatments and/or a vaccine will allow us to move to a phase where the effect of the virus can be reduced to manageable levels.

To bring about this phase as quickly as possible, the Government is investing in research, developing international partnerships and putting in place the infrastructure to manufacture and distribute treatments and/or a vaccine at scale.

There are currently over 70 credible vaccine development programmes worldwide and the first UK human trial has begun at the University of Oxford.

Even if it is not possible to develop an effective vaccine, it may be possible to develop drug treatments to reduce the impact of contracting COVID-19, as has been done for many other infectious diseases. **The best scientific advice is that it is likely any drugs that substantially reduce mortality or are protective enough to change the course of the**

epidemic will have to be designed and developed specifically for COVID-19, and that this will take time, with success not guaranteed.

5. Roadmap to lifting restrictions

Below is the Government's step-by-step timetable for lifting restrictions, dependent on successfully controlling the spread of the virus.

The content and timing of the second and third stage of adjustments will depend on the most up-to-date assessment of the risk posed by the virus. The five tests previously set out must justify changes.

Step One

The changes to policy in this step will apply from Wednesday 13th May in England.

This guidance should be considered alongside local public health and safety requirements for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Work

- **For the foreseeable future, workers should continue to work from home** rather than their normal physical workplace, wherever possible.
- **All workers who cannot work from home should travel to work if their workplace is open.** Sectors include food production, construction, manufacturing, logistics, distribution and scientific research in laboratories. The only exception to this are workplaces such as hospitality and non-essential retail which should remain closed.
- **Workplaces should follow the new "COVID-19 Secure" guidelines**
- **Anyone who has symptoms, however mild, or is in a household where someone has symptoms, should not leave their house to go to work.**

Schools

- The rate of infection remains too high to allow the reopening of schools for all pupils, however **vulnerable children and the children of critical workers are able to attend school.**
- The **Government is amending its guidance to clarify that paid childcare, e.g. childminders, can occur** subject to meeting the public health principles in Annex A.

Travel

- When travelling **everybody (including critical workers) should continue to avoid public transport wherever possible. If they can, people should choose to cycle, walk or drive,** to minimise the number of people with whom they come into close contact.
- The Government will **increase funding and provide new statutory guidance** to encourage local authorities to support people to travel by walking and cycling.
- **Social distancing guidance on public transport must be followed.** Transport operators should follow guidance to make their services COVID-19 Secure; this will be published this week.

Face-coverings

- Increased mobility, as more people return to work, means **the Government is now advising that people should aim to wear a face-covering in enclosed spaces where social distancing is not always possible** e.g. on public transport or in some shops.

- **Homemade cloth face-coverings can help reduce the risk of transmission in some circumstances.** They should not be used by children under the age of two, or those who cannot manage them correctly, e.g. primary age children unassisted, or those with respiratory conditions.

Public Spaces

- SAGE advise that the risk of infection outside is significantly lower than inside, so the Government is updating the rules so that, **as well as exercise, people can now also spend time outdoors** subject to: not meeting up with any more than one person from outside your household; continued compliance with social distancing guidelines to remain two metres away from people outside your household; good hand hygiene, particularly with respect to shared surfaces; and those responsible for public places being able to put appropriate measures in place to follow the new COVID-19 Secure guidance.
- **People may exercise outside as many times each day as they wish.**
- **People may drive to outdoor open spaces irrespective of distance, so long as they respect social distancing guidance.**
- When travelling to outdoor spaces, it is important that people respect the rules in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and do not travel to different parts of the UK where it would be inconsistent with guidance issued by the devolved administration.

Protecting the clinically vulnerable

- **Clinically vulnerable people should continue to take care to minimise contact with others outside their households, but do not need to be shielded.**
- **Those in the clinically extremely vulnerable group are strongly advised to stay at home at all times and avoid any face-to-face contact.**
- In recognition of the challenge faced by those shielding, the Government is:
 - Providing essential food to those unable to leave their home.
 - Facilitating volunteer support.
- The Government will continue to support people shielding and providing support to other vulnerable people e.g. those at risk of loneliness (see GOV.UK website).
- The Government will ensure people with disabilities can have independent lives and are not marginalised, including making sure that they can access public services and will ensure their overall health doesn't suffer disproportionately.

Enforcement

- **The Government will impose higher fines to reflect the increased risk to others of breaking the rules as people are returning to work and school.**

Parliament

- It is vital that Parliament can continue to scrutinise the Government and legislate to support the COVID-19 response. Parliament will move, in step with public health guidance, towards further physical proceedings in the House of Commons.

International Travel

- The Government will **introduce a series of restrictions at the UK border** to keep the overall number of transmissions in the UK as low as possible. They include:
 - **All international arrivals to supply their contact and accommodation information.**
 - **All international arrivals not on a short list of exemptions will have to self-isolate in their accommodation for fourteen days on arrival into the UK.** If international travellers are unable to show where they will self-isolate, they will be required to do so in accommodation arranged by the Government.

- These international travel measures will not come into force on 13th May but will be introduced as soon as possible.

Step Two

It is possible that the dates set out below will be delayed if these conditions are not met. Changes will be announced at least 48 hours before coming into effect.

The Government's current aim is that step two will be made no earlier than Monday 1 June. Until that time the restrictions currently in place will continue.

There may be circumstances where different measures will be lifted at different times depending on the variance in rate of transmission across the UK.

The current planning assumption for England is that step two may include as many of the following measures as possible:

- **A phased return for early year's settings and schools.**
 - Schools should prepare to begin opening for more children from 1st June, with Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 to be back in school in smaller sizes from this point.
 - Secondary schools and FE colleges should prepare for some face to face contact with Year 10 and 12 pupils who have key exams next year.
 - The aim is for all primary school children to return to school before the summer for a month if feasible.
- **Opening non-essential retail.**
 - This is intended to occur in phases from 1st June; Guidance will be issued shortly on the businesses included and the phasing approach.
 - Other sectors e.g. hospitality and personal care will not re-open at this point.
- **Permitting cultural and sporting events to take place behind closed-doors** for broadcast, while avoiding the risk of large-scale social contact.
- **Re-opening more local public transport in urban areas, subject to strict measures** to limit as far as possible the risk of infection in these normally crowded spaces.

Social and family contact

- SAGE are examining whether, when and how it can safely change the regulations to **allow people to expand their household group to include one other household in the same exclusive group.**
- The intention of this would be to allow those who are isolated more social contact, while continuing to limit the risk of chains of transmission. It would also support some families to return to work e.g. by allowing two households to share childcare.
- Also ongoing examination to enable people to gather in slightly larger groups to better facilitate small weddings.

Step Three

The Government's current planning assumption is that this step will be no earlier than 4th July.

The ambition at this stage is to open some of the remaining businesses and premises that have been required to close, including personal care, hospitality, public places and leisure facilities requiring they meet the COVID-19 Secure guidelines.

To facilitate the fastest possible re-opening of these higher-risk businesses and public places, the Government will carefully phase and pilot re-openings to test their ability to adopt the new COVID-19 Secure guidelines and monitor the effects of re-opening.

6. Fourteen supporting programmes

To deliver the phased plan, the Government will deliver fourteen programmes of work:

1. NHS and care capacity and operating model

- Ensuring staff are protected by the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), in all NHS and care settings.
- The Government will seek innovative operating models for the UK's health and care settings, to strengthen them for the long term and make them safer for patients and staff in a world where COVID-19 continues to be a risk.
- The Government will invest in preventative and personalised solutions to ill-health, empowering individuals to live healthier and more active lives.
- The Government remains committed to delivering its manifesto, to build 40 new hospitals, reform social care, recruit and retain 50,000 more nurses and create 50 million new GP surgery appointments.
- The Government will continue to bolster the UK's social care sector, to ensure that those who need it can access the care they need outside of the NHS.

2. Protecting care homes

The Government will support care homes by:

- Offering a COVID-19 test to every staff member and resident in every care home in England, whether symptomatic or not; by 6 June, every care home for the over 65s will have been offered testing for residents and staff.
- Supporting the supply and distribution of PPE to the care sector, delivering essential supplies to care homes, hospices, residential rehabs and community care organisations. The NHS has committed to providing a named contact to 'train the trainers' care home that want it by 15th May.
- Expanding the social care workforce, through a recruitment campaign.
- Accelerating the introduction of a new service of enhanced health support in care homes from GPs and community health services by 15th May.
- Providing a variety of guidance, including on GOV.UK.
- Working with Local Authorities to ensure each care home in their area has access to the support on offer to minimise the risk of infection.

3. Smarter shielding of the most vulnerable

The Government is taking a cautious approach, but some inherent risk to the most vulnerable remains. The Government and local authorities have offered additional support to people who are shielding, including delivery of food and basic supplies, care, and support to access medicines, if they are unable to get help with this from family and friends. The guidance on shielding and vulnerability will be kept under review as the UK moves through the phases of the Government's strategy. The Government will review the effect on shielded individuals, the services they have had, and what next steps are appropriate.

4. More effective, risk-based targeting of protection measures

The virus disproportionately affects older people, men, people who are overweight and people with some underlying health conditions. This is a complex issue. **Public Health England is leading an urgent review into factors affecting health outcomes from Covid-19 (to include ethnicity, gender and obesity) and this will be published by the end of May.**

5. Accurate disease monitoring and reactive measures

The Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC) will have an independent analytical function that will provide real time analysis and assessment of infection outbreaks at a community level, to

enable rapid intervention before outbreaks grow. It will work closely with local partners and businesses to:

- Collect a wide range of data to build a picture of infection rates across the country;
- Analyse that data producing picture of changes in infection rates across the country;
- Advise the Chief Medical Officers of a change in the COVID-19 Alert level who will then advise Ministers.

The JBC will be responsible for setting the new COVID-19 Alert level to communicate the current level of risk clearly to the public. The alert levels are:

- **Level 1** - COVID-19 is not known to be present in the UK
- **Level 2** - COVID-19 is present in the UK, but the number of cases & transmission is low
- **Level 3** - A COVID-19 epidemic is in general circulation
- **Level 4** - A COVID-19 epidemic is in general circulation; transmission is high or rising exponentially
- **Level 5** - As level 4 and there is a material risk of healthcare services being overwhelmed

6. Testing and tracing

The UK has capacity to carry out over 100,000 tests per day, and the Government has committed to increase capacity to 200,000 tests per day by the end of May.

The Test and Trace Taskforce established, will:

- identify who is infected more precisely, to reduce the number of people who are self-isolating with symptoms that are not actually infected, and to ensure those who are infected continue to take self-isolation measures; and
- ensure those who have been in recent close contact with an infected person receive rapid advice and, if necessary, self-isolate, quickly breaking the transmission chain.

To achieve this several systems need to be built and successfully integrated.

Anyone with symptoms should isolate immediately, alongside their households, and apply for a test. If a negative test is returned, then isolation is no longer required. Once identified, those contacts considered to be at risk will be asked to isolate, either at the point of a positive test or after 48 hours - whichever is sooner.

Information collected through the Test and Trace programme, together with wider data from sources such as 111 online, will form part of a core national COVID-19 dataset.

7. Increased scientific understanding

Better scientific understanding of COVID-19 will help us act more precisely and confidently to limit its spread, improve treatments and help us develop vaccines. The Government is investing across the board in both basic genetic research and clinical studies.

8. “COVID-19 Secure” guidelines

The most important guidelines people can follow to stay safer outside their homes are set out at Annex A. For example:

- Individuals should keep their distance from people outside their household, wherever possible.
- People should wash their hands often, using soap and water, and dry them thoroughly, touching of the face should be avoided, hand sanitiser should be carried when travelling and clothes should be washed regularly.

- It is possible to reduce the risks of transmission in the workplace by limiting the number of people that any given individual comes into contact with regularly. Employers can support this where practical by changing shift patterns and rotas to keep smaller, contained teams. Evidence also suggests the virus is less likely to be transmitted in well-ventilated areas.

9. Better distancing measures

During the second phase, the Government will steadily replace the current social restrictions with better targeted ones.

10. Economic and social support to maintain livelihoods and restore the economy

The Government has introduced a package of measures, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme and has increased the standard allowance of Universal Credit and basic element of Working Tax Credits by £20 a week for one year.

The support offered through the benefit system for housing costs and for the self-employed has been increased, and a moratorium on private rental sector evictions introduced. The new hardship fund and support for rough sleepers have also been provided. Lenders are offering mortgage holidays for borrowers struggling with their finances and unable to make their repayments.

There is also additional support being provided for businesses including VAT deferrals until the end of June, a business rates holiday and direct cash grants.

The Government is also supporting the NHS and other public services in the fight against the virus. So far more than £16bn from the COVID-19 Response Fund has gone towards the effort. A £750m package has been provided to enable charities to continue supporting UK communities.

As the UK adjusts the current restrictions, the Government will also need to wind down the economic support measures while people are eased back to work

11. Treatments and vaccines

To move to phase three as quickly as possible, the Government must compress the time taken to develop, test, manufacture and distribute a reliable vaccine or treatments as far as possible. That means four immediate actions:

- The government has launched the Vaccines and Treatments Taskforce, which will accelerate the development of a vaccine and treatments.
- Second, on therapeutic treatments, the UK currently has three key national phase III drugs trials underway.
- Third, the Government is investing in the UK's sovereign manufacturing capability to ensure that at the point a vaccine or drug-based treatment is developed it can be manufactured at scale as quickly as possible.
- The Government is working on the general principle that people should be vaccinated as soon as a safe vaccine becomes available.

12. International action and awareness

On 4th May the UK co-led the Coronavirus Global Response International Pledging event, bringing together 42 nations to mobilise £6.5bn. The UK also co-led, with India, the development of the G20's Action Plan that, among other things, calls for the rapid

implementation of the \$200bn package of global support from the World Bank Group and Regional Development Banks.

The UK will provide £330m a year for the next five years to the Global Vaccine Alliance (Gavi), making the UK the world's largest donor and readying Gavi to distribute a COVID-19 vaccine in developing countries. The UK is hosting the Global Vaccine Summit on 4th June.

The Government will use the UK's position as a world leader in international development to safeguard the wellbeing of the world's most vulnerable populations. COVID-19 will exacerbate gender inequality & the UK is pushing for greater explicit consideration and support to women and girls across the COVID-19 response.

The Government is working to ensure that all countries have access to critical goods, including medical supplies and food, despite the restrictions on movement required to counter the pandemic.

13. Public communication, understanding and enforcement

As more social contact resumes, the Government will need to ask people to operate in new ways. The Government will invest in enhancing population-wide public health education to ensure everyone has the information needed to take responsible risk judgements, and operate in a way that is safe for themselves and for others.

14. Sustainable government structures

The crisis has shown many parts of Government at its best and there is now an opportunity to spread these innovations across government. It is the Government's responsibility to build the public health and governmental infrastructure that will protect the country for decades to come.

Annex A: Staying safe outside your home

The Government's guidance sets out the principles people should follow to ensure that time spent with others outside their homes is as safe as possible (unless they are clinically vulnerable or extremely vulnerable in which case they should follow separate advice on GOV.UK). Below are all the guidance points summarised.

1. Keep your distance from people outside your household.
2. Keep your hands and face as clean as possible.
3. Work from home if you can.
4. Avoid being face to face with people if they are outside your household.
5. Reduce the number of people you spend time with in a work setting where you can.
6. Avoid crowds.
7. If you have to travel (to work or school, for example) think about how and when you travel.
8. Wash your clothes regularly.
9. If you can, wear a face covering in an enclosed space where social distancing isn't possible and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet. This is most relevant for short periods indoors in crowded areas, for example on public transport or in some shops.
10. You should follow the advice given to you by your employer when at work.