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THE PRIME MINISTER

12 October 2020

Dear Colleague

Today I made a statement to the House of Commons on how we will fight back against this resurgent virus, protecting our NHS and saving lives, while keeping our children in school and our economy running to safeguard jobs and livelihoods.

Three weeks ago, the number of people testing positive for COVID-19 in the UK every day had almost quadrupled in a month to 3,929; that figure has almost quadrupled again. We are testing more people, more often, than any other European country; however the proportion of positive results is increasing rapidly. Positive cases are highest in parts of Northern England, in particular the North East, North West, Yorkshire and Humber. This is already creating pressure on NHS capacity. In the last four weeks, hospitals in the North West and North East have seen a 7-fold increase in the number of COVID-19 patients in their Intensive Care Units. This increase is steepest in the Liverpool University Hospitals Trust, with over 250 COVID-19 patients using beds with mechanical ventilation, whilst 20 per cent of beds with mechanical ventilation in Greater Manchester are filled with COVID-19 patients. In just four more weeks, if cases keep rising, hospitals in the North West and North East could be treating more COVID-19 patients than in the first wave.

If we were to leave these trends unchecked and allow the NHS to be overwhelmed, we would suffer more preventable deaths, and not only from COVID-19, as hospitals would be unable to provide the treatments people need for other conditions, including cancer.

Our strategy remains to control the virus by bringing down the R number. We have chosen to prioritise the welfare of our children by keeping our schools open, and to keep our economy moving forwards with people working in a COVID-Secure way. Additional measures must be focused on reducing our social contacts. That is why we have the Rule of Six and why, regrettably, we have had to place restrictions such as a 10pm closing time, and table service only provisions on hospitality. People go to pubs, bars and restaurants precisely for the purpose of socialising.

While the evidence available is imperfect, studies by Public Health England here and the Centre for Disease Control in the United States point to the hospitality sector as a vector for transmission. We are not alone in taking this decision. In Spain, where hospitalisations have increased ten-fold since July, half of Spanish regions have 10pm closing times. In Denmark and the Netherlands, all food and beverage retailers have to close at 10pm. In Paris, where COVID-19 patients now account for 40 per cent of intensive care beds, all bars have shut.

There is evidence that existing national and local measures are having an effect. Left unchecked, each person with the virus will infect somewhere between 2.7 and 3 others; SAGE assesses that R nationally is currently between 1.2 and 1.5.

In recent months, we have worked with local leaders to counter local spikes with targeted local restrictions. Over time, this has led to different sets of rules in different parts of the country, becoming complex to understand and enforce. We will now simplify and standardise our local rules by introducing a three-tiered system of Local COVID Alert Levels in England:

- The “**medium**” alert level, covering most of the country, consists of the current national measures and guidance. This includes the Rule of Six restriction on gatherings (indoor and out), the closure of hospitality at 10pm, and office workers working from home where they can.
- The “**high**” alert level aims to reduce household to household transmission by preventing all mixing between different households or support bubbles indoors. In these areas, the Rule of Six will continue to apply outdoors, in public spaces as well as private gardens. Areas already subject to local restrictions will automatically move into the “high” alert level. As a result of rising infections, Nottinghamshire, East and West Cheshire and a small area of High Peak in Derbyshire will move into this level.

- The “**very high**” alert level will apply where transmission rates are rising most rapidly and where the NHS would soon be under intolerable pressure without further restrictions. The Government will set a baseline, prohibiting interactions beyond household groups in further settings. This will include outdoor premises which are ticketed such as zoos and theme parks, as well as in private gardens and outdoor premises of hospitality settings. People will still be able to meet under the Rule of Six in public outdoor space, such as in parks, highways or in outdoor sports courts. Wedding receptions must sadly no longer take place and pubs and bars close unless they are serving all alcoholic drinks with substantial sit down meals. People will be asked to avoid non-essential travel and guidance will apply on overnight stays.

This alone will not go far enough. We want to create the maximum possible local consensus behind more severe local action and will therefore work with local government leaders on what steps that area should take to go beyond this baseline in the “very high” level to drive down transmission. This could lead to further restrictions on the hospitality, leisure, entertainment or personal care sectors. Retailers, schools and universities will remain open. The attached Annex sets out what restrictions would apply for each alert level, including the potential additional actions that could be taken in areas of “very high” alert. Copies of this Annex will be placed in the Libraries of each House and we will also publish this on gov.uk.

As the Chancellor of the Exchequer has set out, the Government will extend its unprecedented economic support to assist those affected by these restrictions. Our Job Support Scheme is there to support businesses who are open but face lower demand and to help keep people in their jobs, topping up their salary if they have to work fewer hours. Now the Chancellor has announced the extension of the scheme to cover two-thirds of the wages of those in any business that is required to close, and providing those businesses with a cash grant of up to £3,000 a month, instead of £1,500 every three weeks. We will also provide local areas with additional funding for enforcement and compliance, assistance from the armed forces to support local services if desired, and greater control over testing and contact tracing. On top of this, we are also providing Local Authorities across England with around £1 billion extra to manage pressures.

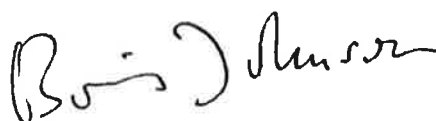
I am grateful to the local leaders who have engaged with the Government over the course of the weekend. We have been able to reach agreement with leaders in the Liverpool City Region that they will move immediately into the “very high” alert level from Wednesday and that indoor gyms, fitness and dance studios and sports facilities (with a few exemptions for where they can remain open), casinos, adult gaming centres and betting shops will close. Engagement with other leaders in the North West, the North East and Yorkshire & Humber will continue this week.

I hope that rapid progress will be made so that we can protect the NHS and save lives in those areas. Regulations for all three Local COVID Alert Levels and Liverpool City Region are being laid today and will be debated and voted on tomorrow. We will keep these measures under constant review, with a four-week sunset clause for interventions in “very high” areas, to ensure that no part of our country is forced to shoulder such restrictions for a moment longer than necessary.

We will shortly launch a postcode search on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) and the NHS COVID-19 app will show which Local COVID Alert Level applies where. We are also publishing updated guidance to assist those who are clinically extremely vulnerable. While these alert levels specifically apply to England, we continue to work closely with the Devolved Administrations, who participated in COBR this morning, to tackle this virus across the whole of the United Kingdom.

Though the path ahead may be tough, we are better prepared to meet this second wave, with three times the availability of ventilators, a four-month stockpile of PPE, half a million tests a day by the end of October, ever improving treatments and all the work being done to realise the prospect of a vaccine. This is not how we want to live our lives, but at this pivotal moment of very real danger, it is the only way to protect our lives - and our livelihoods.

Yours sincerely

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