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THE PRIME MINISTER

23 June 2020

Dear Colleagues

COVID-19 ROADMAP: STEP 3

Today, I announced the conclusion of a review into the 2 metre rule on social distancing, and the plan for the third step in the relaxation of measures, to take effect from 4 July.

When the Government published “Our plan to rebuild: the UK Government’s COVID-19 recovery strategy” on 11 May 2020, we proposed that step three of the plan would be taken no earlier than 4 July, subject to the five tests and further scientific advice.

Since I set out our plan, we have been clear that our cautious relaxation of the guidance is entirely conditional on our continued defeat of the virus.

Four weeks ago, an average of 1 in 400 people in the community in England had COVID-19; in the first half of June, this figure was 1 in 1,700. We created a human shield around the NHS and in turn our doctors and nurses have protected us, and together we have saved our hospitals from being overwhelmed.

Taking everything together, we continue to meet our 5 tests and the Chief Medical Officers for all four home nations have downgraded the UK’s COVID Alert Level from four to three, meaning that we no longer face a virus spreading exponentially, though it remains in general circulation. The administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland hold responsibility for their own lockdown restrictions and they will respond to the united view of the Chief Medical Officers at their own pace, based on their own judgment, but all parts of the UK are now travelling in the same direction and we will continue to work together to ensure that everyone in our country gets the support they need.

2 metre guidance

Earlier this month, I asked our experts to conduct a review of our social distancing guidance. In line with the review's findings, and given the significant fall in the prevalence of the virus, we can change the 2 metre social distancing rule in England, from 4 July. Where it is possible to keep 2 metres apart people should. Where it is not, we will advise people to keep a social distance of '1 metre plus', meaning they should remain 1 metre apart, while taking mitigations to reduce the risk of transmission.

To support this, we are publishing guidance on gov.uk on how businesses can reduce the risk by taking certain steps to protect workers and customers. These include, for instance, avoiding face-to-face seating by changing office layouts, reducing the number of people in enclosed spaces, improving ventilation, using protective screens and face coverings, closing non-essential social spaces, providing hand sanitiser and changing shift patterns so that staff work in set teams. We are already mandating face coverings on public transport.

Whilst the experts cannot give a precise assessment of how much the risk is reduced, they judge these mitigations would make "1 metre plus" broadly equivalent to the risk at 2 metres if fully implemented. Either will be acceptable and our guidance will change accordingly.

I will place a summary of the review's conclusions in the Libraries of both Houses this week.

Step three

In keeping with the progress we have made to control the virus, I have today announced that in England, we will move to step three of our plan from 4 July.

We cannot lift all the restrictions at once. We have to make difficult judgments, balancing our overriding aim of controlling the virus against the natural desire to bring back normal life, and every step is scrupulously weighed against the evidence. Our principle is to trust the public to use their common sense in the full knowledge of the risks, remembering that the more we open up, the more vigilant everyone will need to be.

We will increase the degree of social contact from 4 July, such that two households will be able to meet in any setting, indoor or outdoor. This is in addition to the existing limit on outdoor gatherings of 6 people from different households. This will relieve the burden of isolation and improve the mental health of those most acutely affected by the existing restrictions, and we will ask people to follow guidance, instead of legislation.

We will allow the reopening of economically-vital activity, including pubs and restaurants. To mitigate the risk of increased transmissions, this will be subject to strict compliance with COVID-19 Secure guidance. All hospitality indoors will be seated, and our guidance will encourage minimal contact between staff and customers. Businesses should help NHS Test and Trace respond to any local outbreaks by collecting contact details from customers, as happens in other countries, and we will work with the sector to make this manageable. Hairdressers will also reopen, with appropriate precautions in place.

From 4 July - provided that no more than two households stay together - we will relax restrictions on overnight stays, including in hotels, B&Bs as well as campsites provided shared facilities are kept clean. Most leisure facilities and tourist attractions will reopen if they can do so safely, including outdoor gyms and playgrounds, cinemas, museums, galleries, theme parks and arcades.

We will also reopen our public and community services: collective worship will resume, libraries and community centres can reopen, and public services will resume more activity. These relaxations will be subject to some ongoing restrictions to manage risk: singing will not yet be able to resume, and public services will operate at reduced capacity.

Wrap-around care for school age children and formal childcare will restart over the summer. Primary and secondary education will recommence in September with full attendance and those children who can already go to school should do so - because it is safe.

Some activities will continue to be prohibited. Close proximity venues - including pools, gyms, nightclubs, soft-play areas and close-contact retail for treatments - will remain shut, until we can be confident that they can open in a COVID-19 Secure way. The Business Secretary and Culture Secretary will work with industry taskforces within these sectors to allow them to do so as soon as possible.

These changes will reopen much of society and the economy, but the risk of a resurgence of the virus remains. It is essential that everyone in the country goes about their lives in a manner which reduces the risk of transmission, whether they are at work, leisure, or using public services.

We will continue to monitor the data with the Joint Biosecurity Centre and our ever more effective Test and Trace system. I have been clear that, as we have seen in other countries, there will be flare-ups for which local measures will be needed, and we will not hesitate to apply the brakes and re-introduce restrictions, even at national level if required.

We will be updating the gov.uk guidance on the measures different settings will need to take to be COVID-19 Secure.

We have only been able to make progress in confronting coronavirus - the greatest challenge our country has faced in decades - with thanks to the many sacrifices our constituents have made. As we continue to fight this pandemic, our trust in the common sense of the British people will remain unwavering.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Boris Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

All Members of Parliament and Peers