



16 February 2020

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
The Prime Minister

By email

Dear Prime Minister

NHS trust leaders urge caution before easing restrictions

On 22 February, your government will be setting out the roadmap to easing the current national lockdown. We write on behalf of all NHS acute, ambulance, community and mental health trusts in England to highlight four key evidence and data-driven tests that trust leaders believe must be passed before the government eases restrictions:

1. Case numbers and the R number must drop to a sufficiently low level across the country so that we can be confident the virus will not immediately start re-spreading to the extent that it did last year when restrictions were relaxed.
2. NHS capacity, particularly in intensive care, needs to have returned to levels where we can be confident that the NHS can treat all the patients it needs to.
3. The vaccination campaign needs to be sufficiently advanced to provide adequate levels of protection before restrictions are relaxed. The government needs to be clear on what level of risk of mortality and harm it is prepared to accept as it aligns the relaxation of restrictions with the progress of the vaccination campaign.
4. We need to be certain that there is a robust and effective strategy to identify and control future outbreaks from the variant strains that now pose the greatest threat from COVID-19.

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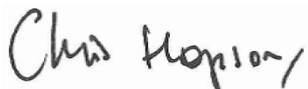
The evidence in each of these areas must show that we can have reasonable confidence that the pandemic has been contained and we can continue to contain it. We will tomorrow publish the attached *Spotlight on... Easing lockdown restrictions* for parliamentarians which sets out these tests in more detail.

The briefing recognises there is an important balance to strike between competing priorities: protecting people's livelihoods, protecting the wider economy, protecting mental health and wellbeing, and protecting lives and the NHS's ability to treat all who need care. But the maintenance of appropriate restrictions on social contact and a vibrant economy are not the binary opposites that much of the public debate implies. A healthy economy depends on a healthy public and moving in and out of repeated lockdowns, due to premature relaxation of restrictions, risks doing more long-term harm than taking a more cautious approach.

Trust leaders want the government take a cautious approach, opening up one area of national life at a time, and evaluating the impact before opening up anything further. We have had the debate about when and how quickly to lift restrictions several times before. Each time those arguing for a rapid relaxation were wrong and we had to reimpose restrictions, losing unnecessary lives and causing unnecessary long term patient and public harm in the process.

We are therefore calling on the government to resist pressure to loosen restrictions without associated evidence that it is reasonably safe to do so. To do otherwise risks triggering a further wave of infections that puts at risk all that we have collectively achieved over the past year.

Yours sincerely



Chris Hopson
Chief Executive



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Deputy Chief Executive