



Covid-19: UK lockdown is “crucial” to saving lives, say doctors and scientists

Gareth Iacobucci

The BMJ

Medical leaders and scientists have backed the UK government’s decision to impose stringent new restrictions on people’s movement to combat the spread of covid-19.

The prime minister, Boris Johnson, announced new nationwide restrictions on Monday 23 March, telling residents they must leave their home only to travel to work where “absolutely necessary,” to shop for essential items, to exercise once a day, and to access medical care. Shops selling non-essential goods were told to close immediately.

The move came after the government came under increasing pressure to toughen physical distancing measures to help fight the spread of the virus, which as at 23 March had claimed 335 lives in the UK.

On 20 March more than 600 public health specialists, epidemiologists, scientists, and other doctors had sent a joint letter to the government urging it to implement a lockdown and to widen covid-19 testing.

It read, “Lessons learned in terms of public health response from those countries ahead of the UK in the epidemic curve need to be seriously considered and implemented without any further delay. These experiences, along with data, modelling, and international guidance are clearly in favour of a package of enforced social distancing measures, extensive case finding, isolation, and contact tracing.”

Reacting to the latest measures, the BMA’s chair of council, Chaand Nagpaul, said, “The government has issued a very simple instruction—that people must stay at home—and it is absolutely crucial that they follow this. This is about saving lives, protecting the most vulnerable in society, and ensuring that our NHS can cope and care for patients. Healthcare workers need everyone to help to battle this virus and save lives.”

Robert Lechler, president of the Academy of Medical Sciences, said he was “fully supportive” of the new measures. “These interventions will not have been decided upon lightly. They are based on evidence and advice from world leading experts who have been studying the best way to flatten the peak of the coronavirus outbreak and prevent the loss of thousands of lives.

“If we do not act now then we risk pushing the NHS beyond its limits. We must all show our support for the huge number of doctors, nurses, scientific researchers, and those that keep these workforces going by following the advice laid out by the prime minister.”

James Gill, honorary clinical lecturer at Warwick Medical School, said, “If we look at the doubling rates of other countries, especially those who appear to have had more success in flattening the curve, these new restrictions are exceptionally welcome additions to the UK response to covid-19.”