

Coronavirus: What next in the UK coronavirus fight? 18 March 2020 By Nick

Triggle BBC Health correspondent <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/explainers-51632801>

Coronavirus is spreading in the UK and the government is seeking ways to minimise its spread. A worst-case scenario, if nothing is done, could see 80% of people infected.

So what is the UK doing about coronavirus?

The government's strategy has been changing quickly over recent weeks.

It started off trying to contain the outbreaks by isolating people who tested positive and asking anyone who had close contact with them to self-isolate too.

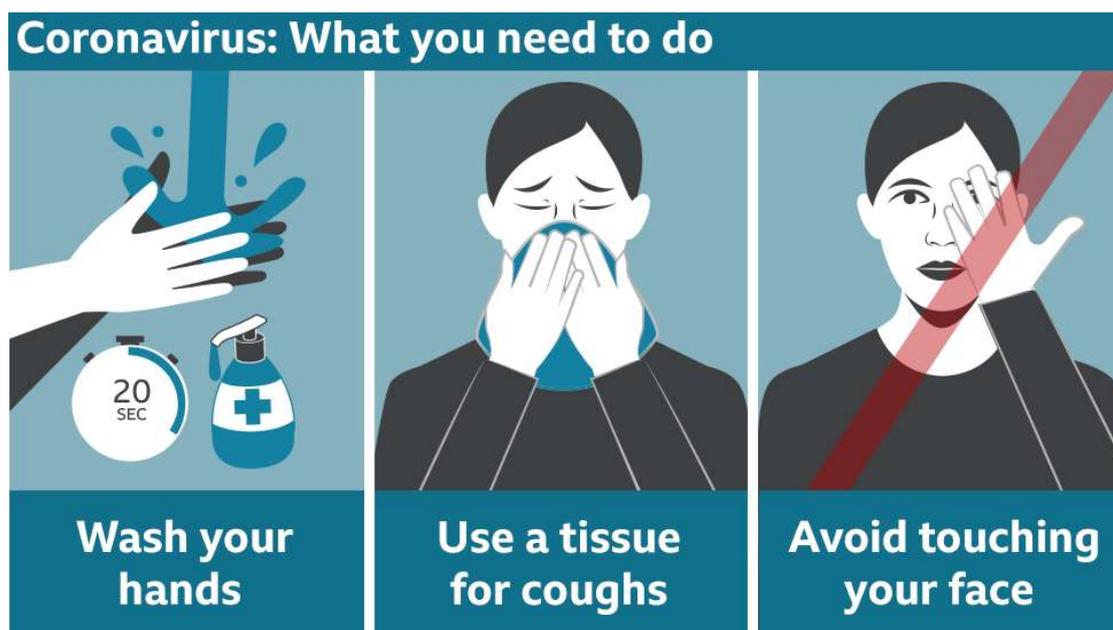
In early March, ministers accepted that was no longer viable so instead introduced policies to delay and reduce the peak.

The idea was that by pushing the peak back to the summer it would allow the NHS to cope.

But new modelling released by Imperial College London then prompted a change in approach.

It warned the policy of a managed spread could still lead to more than 250,000 deaths with hospital intensive care units getting overwhelmed.

Ministers are now seeking to suppress the spread completely - hoping in the process to keep deaths below 20,000.



What steps are being taken?

The government is taking arguably the most drastic steps in peacetime.

The public is essentially being asked to reduce social contact, with the strongest warnings for the most vulnerable.

Those who show symptoms, and those they live with, are being asked not to leave their homes.

- Anyone with a fever or persistent cough should stay at home for seven days if they live alone or 14 days if they live with others. Anyone who lives with someone displaying coronavirus symptoms should also stay at home for 14 days. **People who have to isolate themselves** should ask others for help
- Everyone should stop non-essential contact with others. This is particularly important for people over 70, those with underlying health conditions and pregnant women
- People should work from home where they can

- People should avoid places like pubs, clubs and theatres. This applies especially to those in London which is "a few weeks ahead" of the rest of the UK
- People should stop all unnecessary travel
- By the weekend, those with the most serious health conditions - around 1.4 million with conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, or asthma - should be shielded from social contact for 12 weeks

The government says its previous advice also remains, which is that everyone should regularly wash their hands and avoid contacting the NHS unless it's essential.

What about schools?

All schools and nurseries will close in England on Friday until further notice. A number of schools will remain open for children of "key workers". The government said this group would include the children of NHS staff, police and delivery workers.

There will also be school provision for vulnerable children (pupils with educational and health plans). The Prime Minister confirmed that all exams due in May and June (GCSEs and A-Levels) will be cancelled.

In Scotland, all schools and nurseries will close by Friday.

Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has said that from next week schools "will have a new purpose" and will offer support to those most in need including those involved in the response to the coronavirus outbreak.

Wales is also closing its schools on Friday. The Welsh government says it is looking at how it can support pupils on free school meals and those with "additional learning needs".

Schools in Northern Ireland will also close from the end of the week.

What is going to happen next?

We are in uncharted territory - so it is impossible to tell.

The problem with trying to suppress the virus is that as soon as you lift those measures the fear is it rebounds with a vengeance.

One option put forward by experts advising the government is to go through a cycle of lifting and reapplying the brakes, using demand on intensive care as a guide.

There will be close attention paid to China which is now looking at how it lifts restrictions.

The hope is that you break the spread of transmission and the virus goes away.

But that is not considered realistic.

Then you have to consider the social and economic factors at play.

Businesses are going to struggle and people are going to lose their jobs.

And how long are the public going to put up with being told they cannot go out, need to work from home and can no longer watch sport or go to festivals?

How do you balance stopping society against saving lives? It leaves the government with some very difficult decisions to take.