

Coronavirus reproduction rate rises above 1 in UK, as infection cases surge

Robert Stevens
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Coronavirus in Britain is spreading exponentially due to the reckless, homicidal reopening of the economy and schools by the Johnson government.

The R or R_0 value (Reproduction rate) of COVID-19 is now at 1 or above nationally, meaning that every one person infected is infecting at least one other person.

Last Friday, the government's scientific advisory group (SAGE) announced that R had risen to between 0.9 and 1.1 in the UK as a whole for the first time since weekly reporting of data began in May. This was an increase on an estimated range of 0.8-1.0 last week and a rate of 0.8-0.9 documented by SAGE two weeks ago.

Because the information used to calculate the R and growth rate includes epidemiological data such as hospital admissions, ICU admissions and deaths, SAGE's estimates reflect the situation as it was up to three weeks ago. Subsequent changes in transmission levels—set to rocket with millions of children being sent back to school, along with hundreds of thousands of teachers and other education staff—are not yet fully reflected in the estimates.

Of the UK's most populated area, SAGE announced it “does not have confidence that R is currently below 1 in England.” In London, SAGE calculates the R rate at 0.9-1.1. The rate is even higher in some parts of the UK, with Northern Ireland's (population over 1.8 million) estimated to be as high as 1.6.

Between July 4 and August 15, virtually all remaining lockdown measures were ended nationally.

This criminal policy was enacted under conditions in which a large swathe of northern England was forced to go into a “local lockdown” at the end of July—impacting around 5 million people. This was after the entire city of Leicester had already been placed in lockdown for weeks.

Due to the rapid growth in infection rates over the weekend, the government was forced to impose further lockdown measures in Oldham and parts of Blackburn and Pendle in the north west of England. Last Friday, the east Midlands town of Northampton was named an “area of intervention” as a major sandwich producer, Greencore, was

forced to close its factory in the town with nearly 300 workers infected. Northampton is one of 19 such areas of intervention, including major population centres like Leicester, Bradford and Manchester.

Even more significantly, Birmingham—the second largest city in the UK with a population of more than 1 million—was last Friday added to the government's “watch list.” Its weekly rate of infections shot up by 27 percent, meaning it could be placed under lockdown imminently. The city's infection rate is now at 30 cases per 100,000, the highest level since mid-June. This was up from 22.4 the week before and a substantial increase on the 12 per 100,000 recorded at the start of August.

Birmingham is now classified as requiring “enhanced support,” as is Luton (population over 211,000). Another seven towns and cities are listed as “areas of concern.”

Saturday's 1,288 infections recorded nationally was the highest daily number in two months. In the last week to Monday, 4,364 new infections were recorded nationally, with the official death toll at 41,433.

In Scotland, Saturday's 123 new cases were the highest daily total in three months. Nearly 80 were recorded in Tayside. Many of Tayside's cases are centred on the Coupar Angus chicken processing plant, where at least 68 infections have been recorded (59 employees and 9 of their contacts).

Nicola Sturgeon's Scottish National Party government reopened all schools on August 11, and its devastating impact is already manifest, with infections in nearly 30 schools. On Monday, it emerged that 21 staff and 2 pupils at Kingspark special school in Dundee—also in Tayside—have contracted COVID-19. Four of their contacts in the community were infected. The school was forced to close last Wednesday, just eight days after reopening.

Nothing is being allowed to intrude on the ruling elite's maniacal rush to enforce its back to work agenda, with the damning R value data issued by SAGE totally ignored by the government. This is despite Johnson and his key scientific and medical advisors repeatedly claiming, for months, that its actions would be determined by the R value—which it

insisted had to be kept below 1 at all costs.

At the start of lockdown, the R rate was between 2.4—as estimated by Imperial College London’s COVID-19 Response Team—and 4, according to other research.

The lockdown imposed on March 23 reduced R significantly within days and by at least two thirds in a matter of weeks.

Speaking at a Downing Street conference on March 30, just seven days after lockdown, Johnson’s Chief Scientific Officer, Sir Patrick Vallance, said, “Britain’s lockdown is having a very big effect on the R_0 , bringing it down to below one.”

On April 16, the government introduced five tests that had to be met before the national lockdown could be ended. The third test was centred on lowering the R value, with Downing Street insisting it would count on “Reliable data [the R value] showing the rate of infection was decreasing to ‘manageable levels.’”

At the April 30 press conference, asked what the R rate should be, Chief Scientific Adviser Sir Chris Whitty said, “There isn’t a perfect answer to what should the R be [to lift the lockdown] but we’re absolutely confident that the wrong answer is anything over one.

“Because as soon as R goes over one, then you restart exponential growth—*it may be slow if it is just over one*, it may be a lot faster if it goes a lot above one—but exponential growth restarts and, sooner or later—and the higher it is, the sooner it is—the NHS [National Health Service] will go back to the risk of being overwhelmed and the number of cases will go up.”

At the same event, Johnson—in his first public event since almost dying after being struck down with COVID-19—stated, “the government will be monitoring R very carefully. It will be a *key factor* in how social distancing measures will be used in the future,” adding, “Let me just emphasise that keeping the R down is going to be absolutely vital to our recovery, keeping the reproduction rate of the disease down. ...”

On May 11, Johnson announced that “in order to monitor our progress, we are establishing a new COVID Alert Level System. The COVID Alert Level has five levels, each relating to the level of threat posed by the virus.” Yet again the R rate was cited as all-important. “The [Alert] level will be primarily determined by the R value and the number of coronavirus cases.”

On May 28, as a result of lockdown, the R rate was estimated to be between 0.7 and 0.9. Vallance told a press conference in Number 10, “We need to keep concentrating on R below one, that means making sure that the measures that are in place are adhered to and that we all stick to them to make sure that the right thing is done and that we end up

in a position where we can get the numbers down and the R down a bit. But we are at a fragile state.”

But the over-riding goal of the government, while cynically citing the importance of lowering the rate of infection, was always to reopen the economy and force millions back to work—in order to restart the production of profits for the corporations and super-rich. Johnson said at the May 28 event, “When we are sure that this first phase is over and that we are meeting our five tests...then that will be the time to move on to the second phase in which we continue to suppress the disease and keep the reproduction rate—the R rate—down, *but begin gradually to refine the economic and social restrictions and one-by-one to fire up the engines of this vast UK economy.*”

As is now clear in the resurgence of coronavirus everywhere, preventing its spread is incompatible with the murderous agenda of flinging open the economy and reopening schools.

At the April 30 press conference, asked what would be a manageable R rate to control the spread of the pandemic, Johnson replied, “The crucial thing is to stop the *overall national R from going over 1 again* because as Chris [Whitty] and Patrick [Vallance] have explained, that’s the moment that you get the risk of another exponential curve upwards.” (emphasis added)

With R above 1, this point has already been reached even as the health and safety of the population are set to be further imperilled—with schools throughout Northern Ireland reopening yesterday and set to reopen in England from September.

That the R rate is not significantly higher is only due to the fact that millions are ignoring the government’s advice to carry on as normal, with millions refusing to use public transport and many still shopping online, refusing to go to pubs and bars, and working from home rather than going to unsafe workplaces.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for rank-and-file safety committees to be organised in workplaces to demand and implement measures to protect workers’ lives. These measures must be based upon a scientific understanding of the nature of the disease. The SEP will provide all the assistance we can to workers in establishing rank-and-file safety committees.



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