

Former advisor reveals Johnson government's herd immunity plan envisaged 800,000 deaths in UK

Robert Stevens
24 May 2021

Boris Johnson's former chief adviser Dominic Cummings has confirmed the Conservative government planned for a herd immunity policy envisioning the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people.

A Public Health England (PHE) exercise revealed by Cummings worked out scenarios based on up to 800,000 people dying of Covid-19.

Cummings states that behind closed doors the architects of social murder in Downing Street worked on a Plan B, assuming over a quarter a million would die, in his words by "choking to death," after being forced to discard their Plan A when told this would see over half a million deaths.

Cummings was central to all government pandemic decisions until the day he left office last November. Johnson hired him as his main adviser after Cummings oversaw the Vote Leave campaign in the 2016 Brexit referendum. He is giving evidence to Parliament's Health and Social Care Committee and Science and Technology Committee, as part of a joint parliamentary committee inquiry into "the lessons that can be drawn from the handling of the pandemic, and applied now and in the future."

Over the last week, Cummings has been as explicit as possible—including providing documentary evidence—in declaring that the Johnson government implemented a herd immunity policy from the start of the pandemic and had carried out exercising envisaging mass deaths. This is revealed in a thread of tweets numbering 59 as of Monday evening.

Cummings is now providing details and confirming what was already known, that herd immunity was the official and publicly-declared policy by Johnson and his chief medical advisers, until the government was forced by public outrage to implement a lockdown on March 23, 2020.

One tweet states, "Herd immunity wasn't 'a secret strategy', it was THE OFFICIAL PUBLIC EXPLAINED ON TV/RADIO STRATEGY! Halpern, on SAGE, literally explained it on radio explicitly, 11/3/20, as did others."

This is a reference to the statement by Dr. David Halpern, a member of the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), who told the BBC on March 11, 2020, that at some undefined "point" the government would want to

isolate "at-risk groups so that they basically don't catch the disease and by the time they come out of their cocooning, herd immunity's been achieved in the rest of the population."

On March 5, 2020 Johnson appeared on ITV's *This Morning* to explain, "One of the theories is, that perhaps you could take it on the chin, take it all in one go and allow the disease, as it were, to move through the population, without taking as many draconian measures."

On March 12, 11 days before the government was forced into its first lockdown, Sir Patrick Vallance, the government's chief scientific adviser, was insisting, "It's not possible to stop everyone getting it and it's also not desirable because you want some immunity in the population to protect ourselves in the future." On March 13, Vallance told BBC Radio's *Today* programme it was beneficial 'to build up some degree of herd immunity so more people are immune to this disease', and on the same day told Sky News, "About 60 percent is the sort of figure you need to get herd immunity."

Among the documents Cummings refers to are slides presented to the government's Cobra emergency committee (COBR). He states in one tweet (number 38), "Herd immunity by Sep' [September] was *literally the official plan in all docs/graphs/meetings* until it was ditched."

Tweet 46 shows an official "Cabinet Secretariat" document marked "Official Sensitive", with Cummings stating, "A COBR doc from week of 9/3/20 explains official thinking behind Plan A: ie. suppression [of the virus] either won't work or wd [would] lead to 2nd peak during NHS winter crisis, so the advised herd immunity approach was what [Department of Health and Social Care]/Cabinet Office described as 'single peak optimal strategy'".

Health Secretary Matt Hancock and Michael Gove's Cabinet Office belatedly "understood herd immunity effects: 100s of 1000s choking to death + no NHS for *anybody* for months + dead unburied + econ implosion; so we moved to Plan B: suppression + Manhattan Project for drugs/vaccines + test&trace etc".

Tweet 40 states, "In week of 9/3 [March 9], No10 [Downing Street] was made aware by various people that the official plan

wd lead to catastrophe. It was then replaced by Plan B. But how 'herd immunity by Sep' cd [September] have been the plan until that week is a fundamental issue in the whole disaster."

Cumming continues in tweet 49, "Jenny Harries told us, the same week [9/3/20] herd immunity was the official plan, masks are a 'BAD idea', 'we don't want to disrupt people's lives', acting 'too early we will just pop up with another epidemic peak later'." Harries was advising the government as Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England. Referring to her subsequent promotion in April this year to the position of chief executive of the UK Health Security Agency and head of NHS Test and Trace, Cummings ends the tweet, "So Whitehall [government] has promoted her, obviously".

Tweet 51 shows a COBRA document from early March in which the single words "Deaths" is written in a grey box next to a graph in which a 259,000 death toll and over 4,000 deaths a day is presented as the "optimal single peak strategy". On the same graph, a "do nothing" line estimates that the death toll would be 510,000—and up to over 14,000 deaths a day—if no measures were put in place. Cummings states of this document, "It was in week of 9/3 that we started to figure out Plan B to dodge herd immunity until vaccines. Even AFTER we shifted to PlanB, COBR documents had the 'OPTIMAL single peak strategy' graphs showing 260k dead cos the system was so confused in the chaos..."

Deaths on an even greater level were being actively considered in Downing Street. In tweet 31, Cummings reveals, "There was a PHE exercise called Exercise NIMBUS in a hypothetical future 14/4/20 with mock COBR slides." The document front page is marked "OFFICIAL SENSITIVE".

The tweet states that there would be an assumed peak week of May 13, 2020, and 33 million cases of Covid-19 in the population over a "16 week wave". He declares of this scenario that hospitals would be full by April 14, 2020 and that there would be more than "800K deaths" and "schools told stay open(!)" Cummings indicates that the PHE exercise happened in March 2020, i.e., before or around the time that the government was forced into imposing a lockdown.

Cummings is no doubt seeking to distance himself from a murderous herd immunity policy he is implicated in and now claims that virtually no deaths would have occurred in Britain with "competent people in charge". The *Sunday Times* reported in March 2020 that just a few weeks earlier, at the end of February, Cummings had outlined the government's strategy at a private meeting, with one observer describing the policy as, "herd immunity, protect the economy and if that means some pensioners die, too bad."

Cummings indicates that the Tory government could never have got away with its plans for mass murder had the media so much as questioned the denial by Health Secretary Matt Hancock, on March 13, 2020, who wrote in the *Sunday Telegraph*, "We have a plan, based on the expertise of world-leading scientists. Herd immunity is not part of it."

In tweet 38 Cummings declares, "Media generally abysmal on covid but even I've been surprised by 1 thing: how many hacks have parroted Hancock's line that 'herd immunity wasn't the plan' when 'herd immunity by Sep' [September 2020] was *literally the official plan in all docs/graphs/meetings* until it was ditched."

He does not say, however, that the government survived both the herd immunity agenda planned and the disastrous policies subsequently pursued thanks above all to the opposition Labour Party—first under Jeremy Corbyn and then his successor Sir Keir Starmer, who both declared a policy of "constructive criticism". Indeed Corbyn revealed last August, after keeping this a secret for months, "We were involved in meetings with the government throughout the spring of this year and [shadow health secretary] Jon Ashworth and I remember distinctly going to a meeting at the Cabinet Office, where we got a lecture about herd immunity.'

The Tories repeatedly returned to their preferred herd immunity policy whenever a decline in cases could be used to justify doing so, ending the first lockdown last summer, with the backing of Labour and the trade unions. Most workers were forced into factories, offices and shops.

It was during this period, at the end of October, that Johnson is reported to have blurted out in Downing Street, "No more f***ing lockdown, let the bodies pile high in their thousands". A subsequent temporary and extremely limited lockdown had little or no impact, creating the conditions for a second wave of the pandemic in the months between December 2020 and February 2021 taking even more lives than the first—even during a third lockdown—with 2,500 hospitalisations a day at its peak.

That lockdown has ended and the policy revealed by Cummings has been reinstated, to deadly effect amid the spread of the highly contagious Indian variant.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)