

Scientists and doctors issue warnings as UK infections continue to rise

Thomas Scripps
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Cases of Covid-19 are growing exponentially in the UK, driven by the more infectious Delta variant and made possible by the government's lifting of public health restrictions.

5,683 cases were recorded yesterday, the fifth day in a row with more than 5,000 cases. A total of 35,796 cases have been recorded in the last seven days, 52.9 percent more than the previous week.

The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) revised its estimate for the reproduction (R) value of the virus in England last Friday, from 1-1.1 to 1-1.2, just behind Scotland where the R is between 1.1 and 1.3.

Infections are rising across large areas of the country, with three quarters of local authorities reporting an increase in the week to June 2, the highest proportion since the surge in January, according to Public Health England (PHE). This includes 30 out of 32 local authorities in London, 35 out of the 39 in the North West and 31 out of 32 council areas in Scotland.

Twenty-seven local authorities have infection rates above 100 per 100,000, the largest number since the end of March. The worst rates in the country are still being suffered by Blackburn with Darwen, at 516 per 100,000.

The Delta variant, already reported as dominant in the UK, is growing especially quickly. According to PHE, there were 12,431 known Delta cases in the week to June 3, compared to 6,959 the week before—a 79 percent rise.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock has now stated the Delta variant is 40 percent more transmissible than the Alpha (Kent) variant that drove the second wave last winter. There is no reason to take what this compulsive liar says as good coin, given that previous estimates put the increased transmissibility in the range of 30 to 100 percent. But 40 percent poses huge risks. Models drawn up by SAGE in May predicted that a 40 percent more transmissible variant coupled with the government's

reopening "roadmap" would lead to as many or more people being hospitalised than during the January second wave.

Real-world data suggests vaccination provides significant protection from severe disease against the new variant. However, people who have received only one dose, and even small numbers of the fully vaccinated, are still ending up in hospital, and large numbers remain unvaccinated. A major surge in infections would translate into a serious increase in demand for hospital care.

Any rise in hospitalisations will strain an already overburdened National Health Service (NHS). NHS Providers CEO Chris Hopson warned last week that hospitals are under "worrying" pressure, working "full-pelt" to deal with huge treatment backlogs built up in the last year. He continued, "We know that the hospitalisations are increasing, that the rates of people coming into hospital in those areas [virus hotspots] are rising. We can't just go into June 21 and say, 'There's not a problem'."

Dr Megan Smith, legal and policy officer for campaign group EveryDoctor, told PA, "Everyone in the NHS at the moment is kind of terrified... We've heard of hospitals effectively closing their waiting lists, which is unheard of."

Former president of the Society for Acute Medicine Dr Nick Scriven added that "any slight rise in numbers" would put backlog surgery "in jeopardy" and that there was "very significant concern" over the Delta variant, "especially around the potential for vaccinated staff to be asymptomatic carriers".

Scientists are warning that the government's planned removal of all public health restrictions on June 21 must not go ahead. Most prominent is former Chief Scientific Advisor and current Chair of Independent SAGE, Sir David King. He told Sky News, "[There are] 5,300 new cases of the disease per day in the United Kingdom and

we're up about 2,000 on last week.

"Now we've been discussing whether or not we're going into a serious third wave and I don't think we can possibly wait any longer. This is the evidence of another wave appearing."

He continued, "[On] the number of people in our hospitals, which the government says is relatively stable, it's 932 per day going into hospital, which is up 65 from last week. It's not actually stable, it is slowly rising."

"What all of this means is that intensive care is needed for a significant proportion of our population today.

"I'm very reluctant to say that we should not go out of lockdown on June 21, but I think the figures are in now, and it will be wise for the government to announce right away a delay in opening, just so that we can all plan for the post-June 21 period."

King also noted, "Dying isn't the sole issue about that we're trying to avoid here. The number of people who are suffering from Long Covid in the country is enormous and this is not a simply a flu, once you've had the vaccine."

Professor Stephen Reicher, an adviser to the government as part of its Scientific Pandemic Insights Group on Behaviours (SPI-B) team, said, "By the government's own criteria, it would be foolish now to proceed on the data that we've got. The risk would be very great indeed."

Professor Ravi Gupta and Dr Mike Tildesley, members of SAGE subgroups, have pointed to the risk of allowing a new, more dangerous variant to develop out of a surge of infections. Gupta told BBC Breakfast, "The more transmissions that are allowed to happen, the greater the chance of these new added variants arising. We are not achieving the limitation of new infections in the way that we need to remain fully open as a society in the long-term."

Tildesley told *Sky News*, "The problem is, if you have huge numbers of cases, then that increases the risk of the virus mutating, and it may be that you might get a variant emerging that all of a sudden evades the vaccines completely."

Scientists who speak out against the government's plan have been subjected to hysterical denunciations in the media, absurdly accused of never wanting lockdown to end. This is a witch-hunt on behalf of the government and big business, desperate to secure a full return to profit-making and austerity. It is wildly out of step with the feeling in the majority of the working class, the primary victims of Covid-19, who are aware of the current

dangers.

A recent poll commissioned by the *Independent* newspaper found that 65 percent of people were worried about the "1 metre plus" rule being scrapped, 63 percent about removing the need to wear masks in public settings, 60 percent about allowing unlimited numbers into concerts, theatres and sports stadiums and 58 percent about reopening night clubs.

This sentiment currently finds no political outlet and is actively suppressed by the Labour Party and the trade unions, allowing right-wing, anti-scientific forces to dominate. Even the scientists opposing the government's June 21 final reopening only feel able to call for a few weeks' delay, despite cases rising dramatically because of the majority of restrictions having already been abandoned.

The government is reportedly considering a delay, to deflect rising concern and opposition in the population. Civil servants have been asked to draw up contingency plans for a two-week pause, to July 5. Hancock has said the government is "open" to such a step. Members of the more fiercely anti-lockdown Tory right have described any delay as "unacceptable".

Within the framework of capitalist politics, no serious opposition to this criminal agenda can be mounted. A scientific strategy which prioritises health and lives, using the vaccination programme not as an excuse to rush to a bloody reopening but as a means of controlling and eradicating the virus, demands a socialist political offensive by the working class to enforce safety measures, close unsafe schools and workplaces and establish the global cooperation necessary to ending the threat of the virus.



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