Prime Minister's press conference

The Prime Minister was joined by the UK’s Chief Medical Officer, Prof Chris Whitty and the Chief Scientific Officer, Sir Patrick Vallance. Key points include:

- In the 24 hours since the NHS Volunteer Responders scheme was launched, 405,000 (now more than 500,000) people have responded to the call to help drive medicines from pharmacies, bringing patients home from hospital and making regular telephone calls to support those in self-isolation.
- No further detail on timescale in relation to delivering the 3.5 million testing kits.
- Chancellor will provide a further update on help for the self-employed on 26 March.
- Should have 250,000 tests a day "very soon".
- The government is looking at the legislative framework around profiteering to see if anything further is required.
- A hierarchy of people to approach with tests first:
  - There are sufficient tests for patients in intensive care in hospitals and this is being scaled up. If a patient is admitted to hospital for COVID-19, the government is confident on the testing availability for them and the scale up.
  - NHS staff who are self-isolating will be next. "We are not currently doing it as there is worldwide demand for these tests and therefore a shortage. There are multiple components to the test and therefore shortages in supply chains have been problematic worldwide."
  - Once enough tests for the NHS workforce has been secured, it will go wider and test those with symptoms in the community.
  - On antibody testing, "the technology is close and being evaluated this week but not quite there yet."
- Pressure on critical care beds is less than what we would expect to see during a bad winter, but demand is expected to continue to rise over the next two weeks. "Provided
everyone sticks to our guidance this will pull down demand a long way. It will be a close run thing and the next three weeks are critical."

• The antibody test enables the government to work out how many people have had the virus but have been asymptomatic. "We simply don’t know how many are asymptomatic at this moment in time."

**Coronavirus Bill passes final legislative hurdles and receives Royal Assent**

The Coronavirus Bill passed through the final legislative stages in the House of Lords to become law as the Coronavirus Act 2020. The legislation moved through parliament at unprecedented speed this week moving through the House of Commons in a single session after receiving cross-party support. You can find out more about what the Act means for health in our [member briefing](#).

**Public Health England announcement on tests**

Public Health England has announced that a 15-minute home test for coronavirus will be made available within days, if the testing kits pass their validation at Oxford University. The kits will be made available to the general public, with Amazon agreeing to carry out distribution.

The UK government has bought 3.5 million kits and will continue to buy more. They will be made available for purchase at chemists for the general public and the price should be minimal. Each test requires you to prick your finger before analysing the blood sample and providing a result within 10 to 15 minutes.

**Prof Neil Ferguson’s evidence to the Science and Technology Committee session**

Professor Neil Ferguson of Imperial College gave evidence to the Science and Technology Committee session on 25 March. Stating that he and his colleagues were now "reasonably confident" that the NHS would be able to cope with the coronavirus epidemic. This was partly due to the NHS surging its capacity. In addition, Prof Ferguson stated he would expect the strain on the NHS to peak in about three weeks’ time and expected up to 10 per cent of the population in London to get coronavirus.