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THE PRIME MINISTER

28 November 2020

Dear colleague

IMPLEMENTING THE COVID-19 WINTER PLAN: SAFEGUARDING PARLIAMENT'S ROLE

On 2 December, we will end the November national restrictions in England as we said we would. The data is now beginning to show a downward curve so we can loosen restrictions across the country. From 2 December, across the whole of England, the stay at home requirement will end, non-essential shops will reopen, personal care will open, the gym and leisure sector will open, outdoor sporting activities will be able to take place once again, people will be able to meet friends and family in outdoor open spaces through the Rule of Six, and weddings and collective worship can resume.

However, while infection levels have started to fall, they are still at a high level, and the pressure on hospitals remains severe. It would not take much loosening for the transmission rate to rise again and doubling rates to accelerate. This would again put the NHS under extreme pressure at the hardest time of the year for them.

On Tuesday 1 December, Parliament will vote on the tiered approach we have designed in order to safeguard the progress the country has made.

The vote on these regulations will also cover the proposals to allow a brief period of relaxation of the social contact restrictions over the Christmas period, to apply across the whole of the UK, to allow up to three households to form an exclusive 'bubble' to meet at home and go to places of worship during the period between 23 and 27 December inclusive.

As we set out in the COVID-19 Winter Plan, while we wait for vaccine deployment, we have had to make the tiers stronger. The previous tiered system had an impact on viral transmission but SAGE advised that stronger measures would be needed to prevent the epidemic from growing. The analysis shows that in general tier 1 measures were not able to stop the growth of the virus, tier 2 managed to slow but not reverse the pace of growth, and tier 3 managed to get cases falling in most, but not all, areas.

No Prime Minister wants to impose restrictions which cause such harm to society, the economy and people's mental health. The tougher tiers, which must cover much of the country because of high prevalence, will continue to limit social mixing, and hit pubs and bars particularly hard. But I am afraid they are necessary if we are to keep the virus under control and avoid either the overwhelming of the NHS or another national lockdown which is far more damaging and restrictive than these tiers.

These measures are necessary now, but they will not last forever. In advance of the vote, I want to make the following, clear commitments, to colleagues:

- 1. Parliament will have the opportunity to confirm its support for these measures after we review their impact at the end of January.** The regulations explicitly require the Government to keep the measures under ongoing review - and to remove them without undue delay if they are no longer necessary as part of the public health response to COVID-19. The Joint Biosecurity Centre and Ministers consider the latest data weekly and there is a specific requirement in the legislation to conduct a formal review of the tiering allocations every fortnight. The fourth fortnightly review must therefore take place by the end of 27 January, at which point the data should reflect the spread of the virus following the Christmas period. These regulations will therefore have a sunset of 3 February and the Government will again need to secure Parliament's support before then, in order for the tiered approach to remain in place until the end of March as we believe will be necessary to control the virus through the winter.

- 2. There will be an opportunity to review all tier allocations at the first review point on 16 December.** At that point we will have a fuller picture of the impact of the national restrictions. We will review every local authority area and each region against the five indicators we have published:
 - Case detection rates in all age groups;
 - Case detection rates in the over 60s;
 - The rate at which cases are rising or falling;
 - Positivity rate (the number of positive cases detected as a percentage of tests taken); and
 - Pressure on the NHS.

We will also consider local views to build the most accurate picture of what is happening on the ground.

A Cabinet committee, which I will chair, will take the final decisions on the tier allocations, which will be announced on Thursday 17 December and will come into effect on Saturday 19 December.

These will not be easy decisions. With Christmas round the corner, and the difficult months of January and February ahead of us, we will need to continue to exercise caution. However where we have robust evidence that the disease is in sustained decline, particularly in those tier 3 areas that are already showing marked improvement, and that case rates are low enough to allow lighter restrictions, areas will be moved down.

3. We will set out publicly the circumstances that need to change in each region for it to be considered to move down a tier. For future reviews we will then include this guidance alongside the information we already publish, which can be found [here](#), to explain tier decisions for each area.

4. We will update the COVID-19 public data daily dashboard to include all available relevant data. This week we published a 79-page data pack setting out all the key data behind each tiering decision. We will publish refreshed versions of this data pack alongside every fortnightly review so that you can scrutinise tiering decisions for your local area. This will include information on the five indicators set out above.

5. Ahead of the vote on Tuesday, we will publish further analysis of the health, economic and social impacts of Covid and the measures taken to suppress them.

6. We will continue to support hospitality and hard-hit businesses. Since March, we have provided more than £200 billion in fiscal support overall. We have:

- [Extended the furlough scheme](#) to the end of March next year;
- [Provided grants](#) for businesses that are forced to close of up to £3,000 a month, with grants of up to £2,100 a month for businesses open but severely impacted by restrictions;
- Provided an additional £1.1 billion of funding to local authorities to support businesses particularly at risk in their areas.

This comes on top of ongoing support through business rates relief, the Eat Out to Help Out scheme that provided financial support worth £849 million to support 49,000 businesses and help protect 2 million jobs, the temporary VAT cut to 5%, VAT deferrals and government loan schemes.

I hope these commitments provide reassurance that Parliament will continue to have a full role as we implement our Winter Plan that MPs will have access to the necessary data and evidence underlying our decisions.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Boris Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

To all Members of Parliament and Peers