

The COVID-19 pandemic is not over and it will not be over on 19 July

Statement from the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges

09 July / 2021

While getting back to normal life is what everyone wants, it is essential that we all take a responsible approach when restrictions are formally lifted.

Medical royal colleges, as the professional voice of doctors, believe that continuing to be cautious is the right thing to do for both individuals and organisations. There is little doubt that things will get worse before they get better.

We are already in the turmoil of a third wave of the virus and cases are rising dramatically. Thankfully, due to the success of the vaccination campaign, that is not translating into the previous levels of hospital admissions and deaths, although numbers of both are rising steadily. There are reports of routine care having to be postponed again due to healthcare professionals having to isolate as well as the rising caseload which risks increasing the pressures on the NHS.

For a combination of reasons, not all of which are yet clear, the NHS is currently under unprecedented pressure. People who stayed away from the NHS during the pandemic are now coming forward, some of them with more serious problems because of the delay in seeking help.

The numbers of people attending GP surgeries and emergency departments has rocketed to levels which are causing real problems for the NHS and are difficult to manage. In addition to the growth of Long-COVID, particularly in younger adults presents additional pressures and challenges to the service. At the same time the hospitals are trying to tackle the huge backlog in elective work which has built up over the pandemic. It is like the worst of a bad winter in July.

As restrictions are lifted we will see increases in other respiratory infections as well as COVID cases further adding to the pressures. We have already seen this in children, although COVID itself is very unlikely to cause severe illness or death in children or teenagers.

The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges and its member organisations would ask the public to continue to show caution in their approach. As medical leaders have repeatedly said, it really is sensible for the protection of other people to continue to wear face masks in crowded indoor spaces.

We would also expect all health and care organisations to continue to require staff, patients and the public to take appropriate precautionary measures and would urge everyone to follow local guidance. Retaining this cautious approach will enable the NHS to continue the task of treating the backlog of patients.

There is no doubt that we will get to a position when this dangerous and erratic disease is largely under control for the population as a whole and we can 'learn to live with' COVID-19.

However, we are not in that position yet and sadly, we have to expect things to get worse again. Doctors are therefore urging people, organisations and governments to continue to act with care. Only in that way will we fully and finally emerge from this pandemic.