

There is only one solution to the problem of Covid, and...

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I cannot have been alone in expressing a deep sense of frustration when hearing Steve Baker MP demanding a timescale for the ending of Covid restrictions yesterday.

My first response was to wonder what it was that was so restricting his life at present when the most impact current restrictions are likely to have on him is to require that he occasionally wear a mask.

My second reaction was to wonder on what planet he lived if he really thought it was within the power of the PM to declare that Covid was over for good and we can go back to what, no doubt, he thinks to be 'normal' without any further actions being taken.

The simple fact is that we now know that the policy of letting Covid rip through the country without precautions being taken is deeply destructive of well-being, people's health, of lives and livelihoods, and for the NHS. Despite this, it would appear that this is what Baker wants. If normality is what he desires his route to achieving it is the worst available.

We do have ways of mitigating Covid. In the first instance, it has to be acknowledged that this disease is airborne and therefore all measures to stop its transmission have to take that fact into account. Quite bizarrely, this is still not the official case and so we still see things like hand sanitiser on offer as if they provide any solution to this problem. They don't.

Second, given that Covid is airborne the drive has to be for clean air. In the short term this requires the installation of as many HEPA air filtration units in schools, hospitals, workplaces, universities, hospitality locations and other places where people gather as is possible. They are proven to eliminate the vast majority of Covid from the air. To put it quite simply, they are the most effective known current mechanism for stopping the transmission of this disease. Stopping that transmission is essential to both bringing the rate of infection down and stopping new mutations developing. Government funding to assist this programme is essential.

Third, Until such time as these units are in place compulsory mask wearing in public spaces is essential. The masks in question should be at least N95s or FFP2s. Quite bizarrely, even NHS staff are not being issued with these at present in an act of irresponsibility by our government. Their provision should be made compulsory by employers and within schools, and once again government funding should be provided because this is the cheapest option by far to beating this disease.

Fourth, vaccination for the world has to happen. We cannot beat this disease in isolation. This means that the government has to join with others in making vaccines available, patent free, to developing countries. The cost is insignificant compared to the benefits obtained.

Fifth, new vaccine development has to continue, using public funding, with the aim being that these should not have proprietary ownership.

Sixth, the resources required to police these measures have to be made available. The underfunding of law enforcement of all sorts has to end.

Seventh, the risk that there will be further outbreaks of Covid has to be accepted and that means that significant additional resources must be invested in the NHS so that it has the capacity to deal with any future crisis. A decade of underfunding is now undermining confidence in UK healthcare, and we cannot afford that.

Eighth, there has to be political commitment to public health in the future. Steve Baker appears to be dedicated to opposing this essential public service as if he denies that there is such a thing as a public good. He is wrong. We can all benefit from firm communal action to tackle issues that we are individually completely unable to address. Responsible politicians have to state this, time and again.

In other words, Steve Baker can have what he wants, but not in the way that he wants it and not in the way that our current prime minister is willing to deliver it. If, though, we are to return to something that looks like a normal life and coexist with Covid then this is what we must do. Steve Baker's alternative, of letting it rip through society is wholly unacceptable. There is only one solution to this problem, and the state is at the heart of it.