

Covid policy now is that many must suffer to keep Johns...

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We now know that according to the Prime Minister all Covid restrictions in England (but not, necessarily, the other countries of the UK) will be lifted by 24 February. This is a months earlier than previously anticipated.

It will happen despite around 15,000 people being in hospital with Covid yesterday, with those people occupying more than ten per cent of NHS beds. 430 were in intensive care.

There were also more than 1,500 Covid deaths in the last week. That's maybe 75,000 deaths a year. Fewer than 2,000 people die of flu a year (the rest of the flu statistics are pneumonia and related respiratory diseases, which are not the same thing).

In other words we still have a public health crisis.

We still have very large numbers of people deeply vulnerable to Covid in society.

There is also growing anxiety about long Covid and its impact. It is known it has impact on the rate of heart disease. The impact on the brain is beginning to look like that created by Alzheimer's disease, with unknown long term consequences for those who might suffer in this way. Children are badly affected.

And there are four things to note.

First, the Prime Minister did not consult SAGE, the scientific advisory team to the government on this policy change. One member made clear on Peston last night that this was the case.

Second, the only motivation for the change appears to be to appease right-wing Tory MPs. How many people must die for this cause, I have to ask?

Third, we have heard nothing from Sir Chris Whitty or Sir Patrick Vallance. If they have an ounce of gumption between them they should now be saying what they think - or resigning. If they don't it is very hard to see how they have not failed in their duties.

Vallance chairs SAGE.

Fourth, variant BA.1 is rampant, and likely to become predominant on the day restrictions end. It is as transmissible as measles. If you are in a room with someone who has it you will almost certainly get it unless a very good mask is worn. This crisis is not over.

So, where are we on policy?

Has public health been abandoned now?

Are people with infectious disease now simply expected to turn up at work, or school, and knowingly infect others?

And how is education to be managed when it is likely that many children will be off with recurring versions of this disease?

How are the vulnerable to be protected? What does 'living with Covid' mean for them, and what help will they get?

To these and other such questions there are at present no answers.

All we know is that many must suffer to keep Johnson in office.

This is what extremism looks like.