

I want to set out what our lives would be like from the 19th of this month - which is only a few days away – if and when we move to step 4 - a decision we will finally take on the 12th - and I want to stress from the outset that this pandemic is far from over and it will certainly not be over by 19th.

As we predicted in the roadmap we're seeing cases rise fairly rapidly - and there could be 50,000 cases detected per day by the 19th and again as we predicted, we're seeing rising hospital admissions and we must reconcile ourselves sadly to more deaths from Covid.

In these circumstances we must take a careful and a balanced decision. And there is only one reason why we can contemplate going ahead to step 4 - in circumstances where we'd normally be locking down further – and that's because of the continuing effectiveness of the vaccine roll-out.

When we paused step 4 a few weeks ago, we had two reasons. First, we wanted to get more jabs into people's arms – and we have, with over 45 million adults now having received a first dose and 33 million a second. That is a higher proportion of the adult population of any European country except Malta, and our expectation remains that by July 19 every adult will have had the chance to receive a first dose and two thirds will have received their second dose.

And second, we wanted a bit more time to see the evidence that our vaccines have helped to break the link between disease and death. And as the days have gone by it has grown ever clearer that these vaccines are indeed successful with the majority of those admitted to hospital unvaccinated, and Chris and Patrick will show the data highlighting the greatly reduced mortality that the vaccines have achieved.

So, as we come to the fourth step, we have to balance the risks. The risks of the disease which the vaccines have reduced but very far from eliminated. And the risks of continuing with legally enforced restrictions that inevitably take their toll on people's lives and livelihoods - on people's health and mental health. And we must be honest with ourselves that if we can't reopen our society in the next few weeks, when we will be helped by the arrival of summer and by the school holidays, then we must ask ourselves when will we be able to return to normal?

And to those who say we should delay again; the alternative is to open up in the winter when the virus will have an advantage or not at all this year. And so again without pre-empting the decision on 12th July, let me set out today our five-point plan for living with Covid in the hope that it will give families and businesses time to prepare.

First, we will reinforce our vaccine wall, reducing the dose interval for under 40s from 12 weeks to 8, so that everyone over 18 should be double jabbed by mid-September, in addition to our Autumn programme of booster vaccines for the most vulnerable.

Second, we will change the basic tools that we have used to control human behaviour. We will move away from legal restrictions and allow people to make their own informed decisions about how to manage the virus. From Step 4, we will remove all legal limits on the numbers meeting indoors and outdoors. We will allow all businesses to re-open, including nightclubs. We will lift the limit on named visitors to care homes, and on numbers of people attending concerts, theatre, and sports events. We will end the 1 metre plus rule on social distancing, and the legal obligation to wear a face covering, although guidance will suggest where you might choose to do so, especially when cases are rising, and where you come into contact with people you don't normally meet in enclosed places, such as obviously crowded public transport.

It will no longer be necessary for government to instruct people to work from home, so employers will be able to start planning a safe return to the workplace.

There will be no Covid certificate required as a condition of entry to any venue or event, although businesses and events can certainly make use of certification and the NHS app gives you a Covid pass as one way to show your Covid status.

Third, we will continue from Step 4 to manage the virus with a test, trace and isolate system that is proportionate to the pandemic. You will have to self-isolate if you test positive or are told to do so by NHS Test and Trace. But we are looking to move to a different regime for fully vaccinated contacts of those testing positive, and also for children. And tomorrow the Education Secretary will announce our plans to maintain key protections but remove bubbles and contact isolation for pupils.

Fourth, from Step 4 we will maintain our tough border controls – including the red list – and recognising the protection afforded by two doses of vaccine, we will work with the travel industry towards removing the need for fully vaccinated arrivals to isolate on return from an amber country and the Transport Secretary will provide a further update later this week.

Last, we will continue to monitor the data and retain contingency measures to help manage the virus during higher risk periods, such as the winter. But we will place an emphasis on strengthened guidance and do everything possible to avoid re-imposing restrictions with all the costs that they bring. As we set out this new approach, I am mindful that today is the 73rd anniversary of our National Health Service and there could not be a more fitting moment to pay tribute once again to every one of our NHS and social care workers.

And the best thing we can do to repay their courage and dedication right now is protect ourselves and others and to get those jobs whenever our turn comes.