

# Strategy for COVID-19: Maximum Suppression or Mere Containment?



Cabinet Office

Guidance

## COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021

Published 22 February 2021

### We welcome

- Measures introduced in phases, with time gaps built-in for data-informed review.
- Prioritising school opening and outdoor activity, the latter being associated with at least 20x less risk than indoor activity.

However, there are clear deficits in the approach, which endanger its ambition of the route out of lockdown being 'one-way' and irreversible:

1. The **absence of an overall strategy** over and above vaccination (strategy of containment).
2. Opening of schools and colleges on a single date **without sufficient mitigating or compensatory measures**.
3. **Insufficient focus on addressing inequality**, thus risking turning COVID into a disease of the poor.

## We have a choice



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### Containment strategy

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- Risks new variants of the virus undermining the vaccination programme.
- Risks future restrictions and overwhelming NHS.
- 1000's of avoidable deaths and many times more cases of Long Covid.
- Higher rates in disadvantaged communities.

### Maximum suppression strategy

indie\_SAGE

The Independent SAGE • Following the science

- Implemented by many countries successfully managing COVID & protecting economies, e.g.
  - Australia, New Zealand, China, South Korea, Singapore, Vietnam, Uruguay, Finland, and Norway.
- Requires driving down transmission levels and keeping them there, towards “Zero Covid”.

# Key dangers of current containment strategy

1. Raising hopes that are likely to be dashed – mixed messaging
  - “*data not dates*” when focus was dates along with lifting restrictions
  - “*cautious approach*” whilst fully opening all schools and colleges on the same day.
2. A gamble – with high transmission levels. Risk of new variants of concern undermining the vaccination strategy.
3. Increasing inequalities – report did not address this in 68 pages
  - ‘tolerating’ rather than suppressing the virus will hit the most disadvantaged and diverse ethnic minority communities hardest, as they are more exposed to catching COVID and have lower rates of vaccination.

# Achieving Maximum Suppression of COVID

February 19, 2021

The Independent Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE)

## A 'Sustainable Suppression' Strategy for Keeping Society Open

The Independent SAGE Report 37

### FIVE PILLARS

1. **Vaccination** for the entire population (including children once approved).
2. Widespread testing as part of a **test, trace and isolate system** organised through local public health.
3. **Practical and financial support** to enable all sections of the community to self-isolate.
4. Ensure **COVID-safe environments** in work, educational, and public spaces.
5. Robust **international travel** measures.