
August 20, 2021

The Independent Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE)

The Independent SAGE Report 46

**The ‘Following the Science’ Timeline:
What SAGE and Independent SAGE
advised as key behavioural mitigations
versus what the Westminster Govern-
ment did January 2020 – July 2021**

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Submitted to The UK Government and the People of Great Britain
& Northern Ireland by Sir David King, former Chief Scientific Adviser,
UK Government, Chair of Independent SAGE

The 'Following the Science' Timeline: What SAGE and Independent SAGE advised as key behavioural mitigations versus what the Westminster Government did

January 2020 – July 2021

The 'Following the Science' (FTS) Timeline charts the main behavioural recommendations from SAGE¹ and Independent SAGE scientists about measures needed to minimise the spread of COVID-19. The recommendations are presented alongside what the Westminster Government² implemented and when.



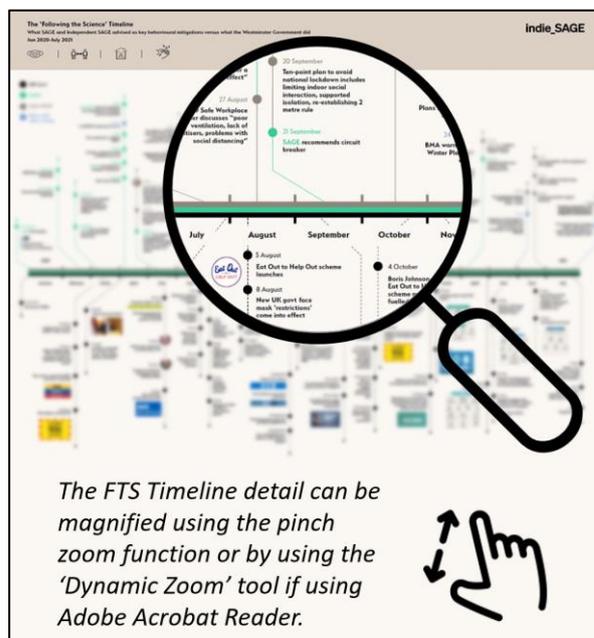
The FTS Timeline is organized with **SAGE** and **Independent SAGE** advice above the date line and what the **UK Government** did below. Selected **news and other events, recommendations and decisions** appear in **blue**.

The FTS Timeline focuses on four main areas – *hand and respiratory hygiene, face coverings, physical distancing, and self-isolation*. In addition, it includes selected events (e.g., lockdown timings) as an aide memoire to the overall trajectory of the pandemic. Some dates about the airborne nature of Covid are included since they have implications for behaviours like wearing face coverings or opening windows. The timeline does not systematically include travel regulations or the testing and vaccination programmes.

The information underpinning the FTS Timeline draws on [SAGE papers and minutes](#); [Independent SAGE reports, statements, and media](#); media [reports of SAGE papers](#); [media articles](#) including trailed and leaked information about upcoming changes to guidance and regulation, and the [Institute for Government's](#) 'Timeline of UK coronavirus lockdowns, March 2020 to March 2021.' The timeline builds on and extends Independent SAGE's [November 2020 paper](#) on UK government messaging and communication and Independent SAGE's [February 2021](#) 'Timeline of Reports.'

Areas of divergence of UK government actions from scientific advice include:

- Delaying the implementation of requirements to wear face coverings
- Confusing and contradictory messaging and communications
- Focusing on punitive rather than supportive measures to try to get people to self-isolate
- Reducing social distancing to 1m / '1m plus'
- The 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme
- Delaying the second 'circuit-breaker lockdown' in autumn 2020
- Delaying the announcement of and changing Xmas restrictions
- Setting out a 'road map' based on fixed dates while talking about 'data not dates'
- Using 'personal responsibility' messaging instead of implementing an evidence-based risk-management strategy
- Lifting all remaining restrictions in one go on 19th July 2021



¹ Strategic Advisory Group on Emergencies

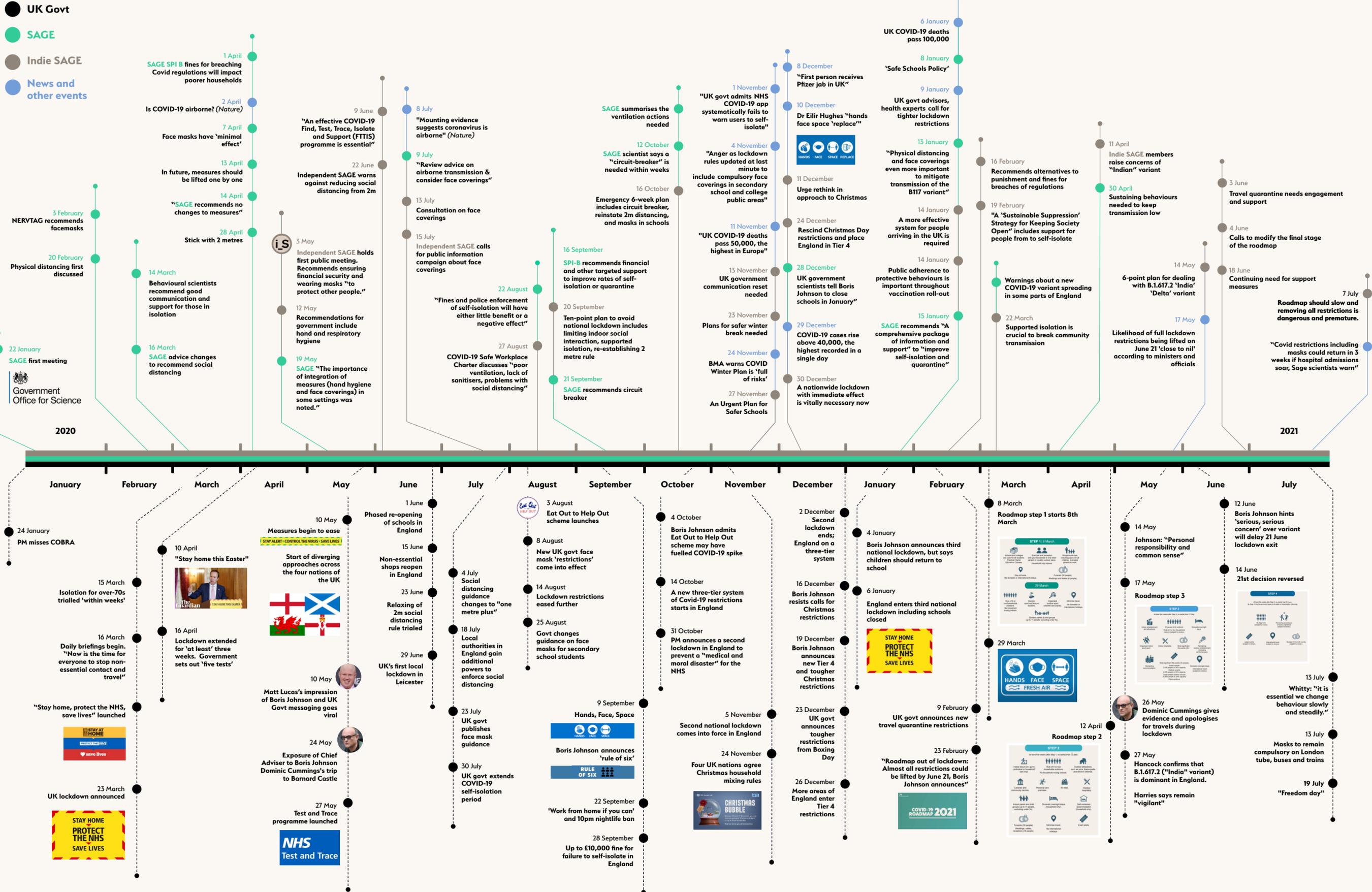
² Primarily having jurisdiction over England

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What SAGE and Independent SAGE advised as key behavioural mitigations versus what the Westminster Government did

Jan 2020-July 2021

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