A year since “freedom day”. Freedom for whom and at what cost?
Indie SAGE briefing 22 July 2022

Before I start, want to acknowledge the “numbers team”: Kit, Duncan, Bob

1. Infections & Vaccinations
2. NHS
3. Deaths
4. Children
5. Variants
6. Behaviour
7. Long Covid, Covid & the economy
8. Vulnerability
9. Plan
Infections & Vaccinations
Number of First, Second, and Autumn Booster Doses given by Day in the UK
Jan 11, 2021 to Jun 29, 2022
(Source: Covid Daily Update)

“freedom day”

20% of English population still without a single dose.
Percentage of English population testing positive over time
(ONS infection survey)

“freedom day”
Booster largely given
So – what has been the impact of living with these high levels of infection? (even during troughs!)
Sickness and the NHS
Daily Covid-19 admissions to English hospitals

415,000

385,000
Too many NHS staff are getting sick – on top of trauma from the first two waves

Percent of Staff Absent from NHS Acute Hospital Trusts in England
Jan 2019 to Feb 2022
(Source: NHS England Urgent and Emergency Care Daily Situation Reports 2021-22)

By no means all Covid but it has made things worse.

Top reason for absence is anxiety, stress or depression
Too many NHS staff are getting sick – on top of trauma from the first two waves

Impact on People Living with Self-Reported Long Covid
By Job Sector in the UK: May 8 - Jun 4, 2022
(Source: ONS Prevalence of ongoing symptoms following coronavirus (COVID-19) infection in the UK Reports)
Many NHS staff are leaving – and not being replaced

Stressed NHS staff in England quit at record 400 a week, fuelling fears over care quality

GPs ‘pushed to breaking point’ as hundreds of doctors leave NHS and appointments soar

Demand rocketing while we haemorrhage doctors, is pushing the remaining staff to breaking point’ says leading GP
This is making it very hard to deliver NHS services - acute care is getting less safe during waves.

Ambulance response times in England

- C1 (Most Urgent)
- C1T
- C2
- C3
- C4 (Least Urgent)
This is making it very hard to deliver NHS services - acute care is getting less safe during waves

Percent of A&E attendances greater than 12 hours from ‘decision to admit’ to hospital admission for England: Nov 2010 – Jun 2022
(Source: NHS Monthly A&E Attendances and Emergency Admissions)
This is making it very hard to deliver NHS services - acute care is getting less safe during waves.
This is making it very hard to deliver NHS services – waiting lists for non emergency care are at record levels.

Nearly One in Nine People were Waiting to Start Treatment in May 2022

(Source: NHS Monthly A&E Attendances and Emergency Admissions)

Number of Patients Waiting for Treatment in England (Jan 2016 to May 2022)

Backlog only getting worse
This is making it very hard to deliver NHS services – important diagnostic tests are taking far too long

Percent of Patients Waiting Longer than Six Weeks for Diagnostic Tests by Type for England (May 2022)
(Source: NHS Monthly A&E Attendances and Emergency Admissions)
With direct impacts of Covid ruled out, the most plausible remaining explanation is grim: we may be witnessing the collapse of the NHS, as hundreds of thousands of patients, unable to access timely care, see their condition worsen to the point of being unable to work. The 332,000 people who have been waiting more than a year for hospital treatment in Britain is a close numerical match for the 309,000 now missing from the labour force due to long-term sickness.

Difficulties in accessing primary care will almost certainly be contributing too, since this is the gateway to diagnosis and treatment. Forty seven per cent of Britons now find it difficult to get through to someone at their general practitioner’s practice, up from 19 per cent in 2012, and 27 per cent said they avoided making an appointment this year because they found the process too difficult (up from 11 per cent).
Dr Helen Salisbury
Deaths
Number of weekly deaths in England with Covid as a cause of death on the death certificate (Death registrations) to w/e 8 July 2022

Before 19 July 2021
142,000 deaths

Since 19 July 2021
39,000 deaths
Annual deaths due to flu *and* pneumonia compared to Covid over time up to end of 2021 (ONS death registration).

Before 19 July 2021: 142,000 deaths
Since 19 July 2021: 39,000 deaths

Deaths over last year much higher than annual flu/pneumonia deaths over previous 20 years.
Prof Martin McKee

Dr Steve Griffin
Children
Infections in children have been much higher since “freedom day”
Daily rolling 7-day average admissions in children with Covid-19 in England

"freedom day"

Age 2 to 11
Age 0-5
Age 6-17

Infections in children have been much higher since "freedom day"
Vaccine coverage in children (compared to young adults) as of 19 July 2022
Percentage of Pupils in All State Schools absent due to Covid-19 and Other Reasons in England from September 2020 to July 2022

(Source: Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak)

Removing requirements for contacts to isolate – and then students to isolate – has not brought absence levels to pre-pandemic levels.
Impact of long covid on teachers

Impact on People Living with Self-Reported Long Covid
By Job Sector in the UK: May 8 - Jun 4, 2022
(Source: ONS Prevalence of ongoing symptoms following coronavirus (COVID-19) infection in the UK Reports)

Nadhim Zahawi has said more than a third of secondary schools are reporting workforce challenges because of long covid.
Impact of long covid on kids

Percentage of children reporting symptoms lasting at least 4 weeks over time (ONS Infection survey)

“freedom day”

Age 2 to 11

Age 12-16
Dr Zubaida Haque
Variants and the future
Coronavirus variants in England since Oct 2020

A year ago the talk was that Delta was the last main variant...

Lots and lots of Omicron subvariants – many of them outcompeting their parents
Prof Danny Altmann

Prof Aris Katzourakis
Behaviour
Percent of people who wear face coverings when outside home and on transport – trends over time
(Source: Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain Survey)

“freedom day”

Plan B
Prof Susan Michie
Prof Steven Reicher
Prof Trish Greenhalgh
Long Covid, Covid and the economy
Impact of long covid in England

Percentage of English population reporting symptoms lasting at least 4 weeks over time (ONS Infection survey)

“freedom day”

619,000 of these were infected during Omicron era.

Long Covid not “solved” by vaccination and previous infection
Impact of long covid in England

Percent of Population Living with Self-Reported Long Covid in the UK by Age: Apr 4 - May 1, 2022
(Source: ONS Prevalence of ongoing symptoms following coronavirus (COVID-19) infection in the UK Reports)

Highest rates in working age adults

409,000 of the 2 million say their daily lives are impacted a lot
Impact of long covid in England

Bad for our economy – reducing our work force

Now, an analysis from a Bank of England monetary committee member is one of the first to draw links between long covid and the tightening of the labor market. The chronic condition has been one of the main drivers of shrinking labor pool in the UK, according to a May 9 speech from Michael Saunders, an external member of the bank’s nine-member committee.

Long Covid now major cause of long-term job absence, say quarter of UK employers

Survey suggests debilitating condition could exacerbate labour shortages and slow economic growth

Work force issues exacerbated by NHS having no spare capacity and long waiting lists! (FT today)
Impact of acute covid on the economy

A significant number of workers are off sick during Covid peaks

In 2021, Covid accounted for 24% of all sickness absence. (ONS data)

2022 might be higher!

Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey person datasets

https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/labourproductivity/articles/sicknessabsenceinthelabourmarket/2021
Prof Danny Altmann
Dr Binita Kane
Prof Anthony Costello
Vulnerable people
In every wave deaths have been highest in disabled groups. Mortality rates in the more disabled group were higher in wave 3 (winter 2022) than in the non-disabled group in the worst Dec/Jan 2021 wave.
Age-standardised mortality rates per 100,000 person years by disability status – up to March 2022
(ONS death registration)

In every wave deaths have been highest in disabled groups.

CEV people also more likely to end up in hospital, intensive care and to develop Long Covid.
Clinical extremely vulnerable people feel more lonely and less safe (ONS social survey – April 2022)

https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/coronaviruscovid19latestinsights/lifestyle#economyandemployment
Ms Celia Hensman, Director of The Disability Policy Centre, UK

Dr Zubaida Haque
Our vicious cycle –
and how to get out of it
Each go round this vicious cycle causes disruption everywhere each wave and degraded our health, NHS, economy, education and lives.
Escaping the circle – a 7-point plan

1. Clear and consistent messaging concerning covid risk and risk mitigation, reinforced by public statements by those in positions of authority;

2. Increased efforts to promote vaccine uptake & research into updated vaccines;

3. Installing and/or upgrading ventilation/air filtration in all public buildings, with schools an urgent priority over the summer holidays;

4. Provision of free lateral flow tests to enable everyone to follow existing public health guidelines;

5. Financial and other support for all workers to self-isolate if infected;

6. Systematic promotion of the use of FFP2/FFP3 masks in indoor public spaces and public transport when infection rates are high;

7. Increased support for the equitable global provision of vaccines and anti-virals.