

# Get on with your lives! Professor says as coronavirus 'not as deadly as first thought'

*Lucy Johnston*

## Coronavirus 'will be with us forever' warns professor

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He said exaggerated fears of Covid have led to "people going about their daily lives misunderstanding and overestimating their risk".

And he said introducing local lockdowns could do more harm than good by forcing people into their homes, potentially infecting other vulnerable people that live with them.

Professor Heneghan - whose work led to a lowering of the official death toll after he revealed Covid deaths were being counted even if someone had subsequently died of other causes - spoke as he released new data revealing the infection fatality rate had fallen from 2-3 per cent in the height of the pandemic to 0.3.

He said if the downward trend continues the pandemic may end up no worse than a bad flu season.

Reasons for the fall, he said, could not only be down to the consequences of lockdown because cases are continuing to drop despite society opening up.

Rather it was linked to better understanding of how to treat Covid patients, more testing - diluting the number of severe and fatal cases - the fact that more younger people are catching the virus and that the virus is circulating at a much lower level.

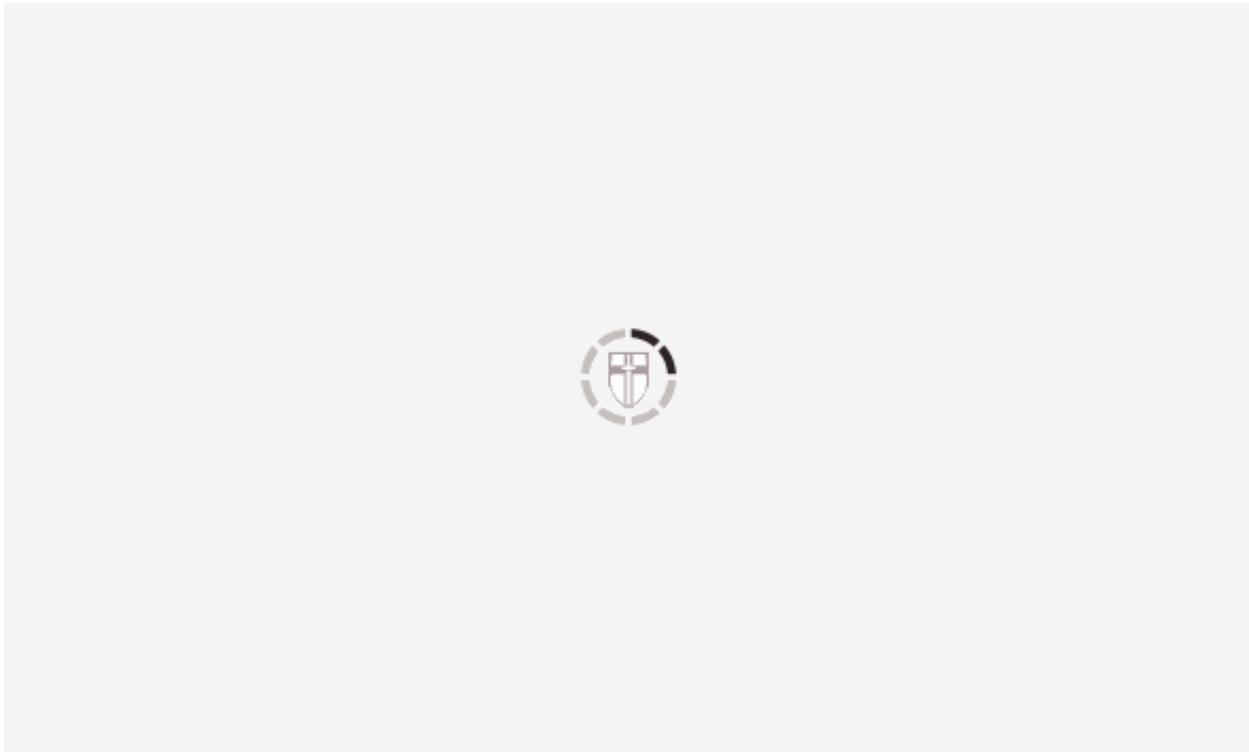
He added that the lower death rate comes alongside a drop in Covid-related hospital admissions. Recent figures show there low numbers of Covid-19 patients being admitted despite infections having increased throughout July.

More than 1,000 Britons are now testing positive for covid-19 each day and the true background figure is estimated at four times this amount.

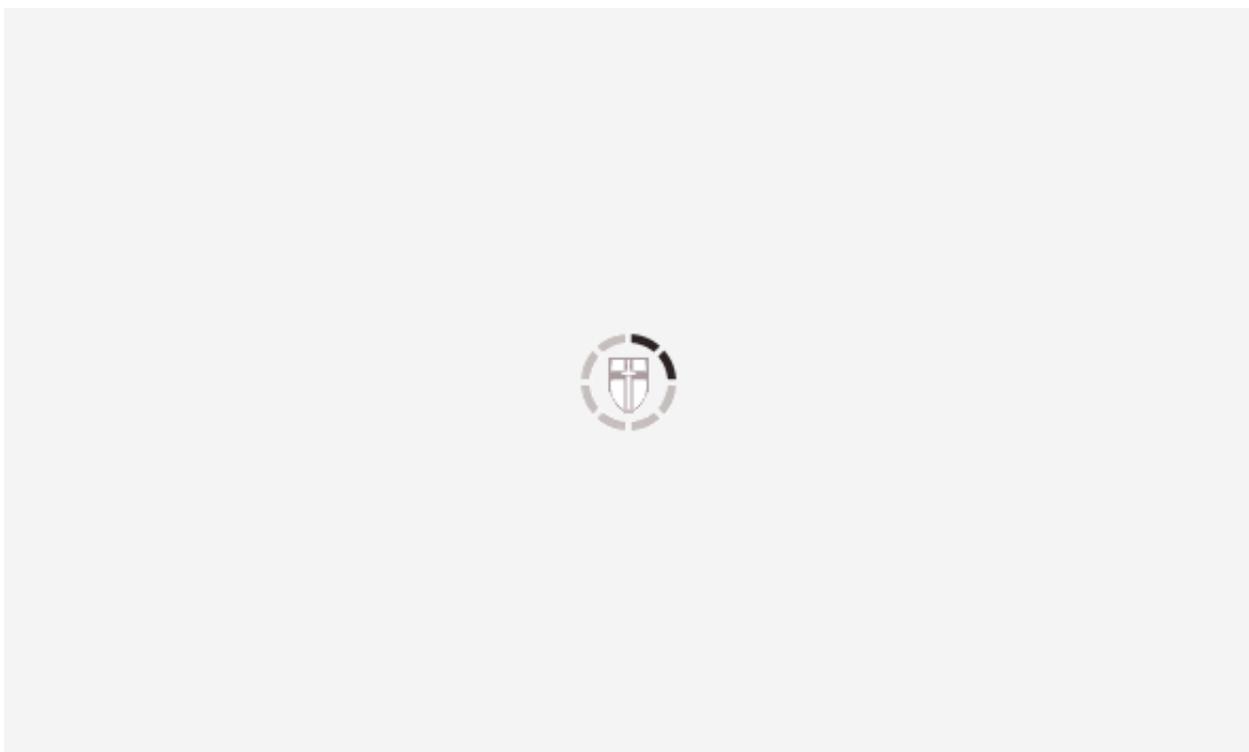
However there are currently fewer than 50 daily hospital admissions for the virus.

Professor Heneghan said: "We reset how we calculate the death rates. We now need to reset how we communicate the risks of the virus.

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Coronavirus 'not as deadly as first thought' as fatality rate plummets to 0.3 percent (Image: Getty)



There are currently less than 50 daily hospital admissions for the virus (Image: Getty)

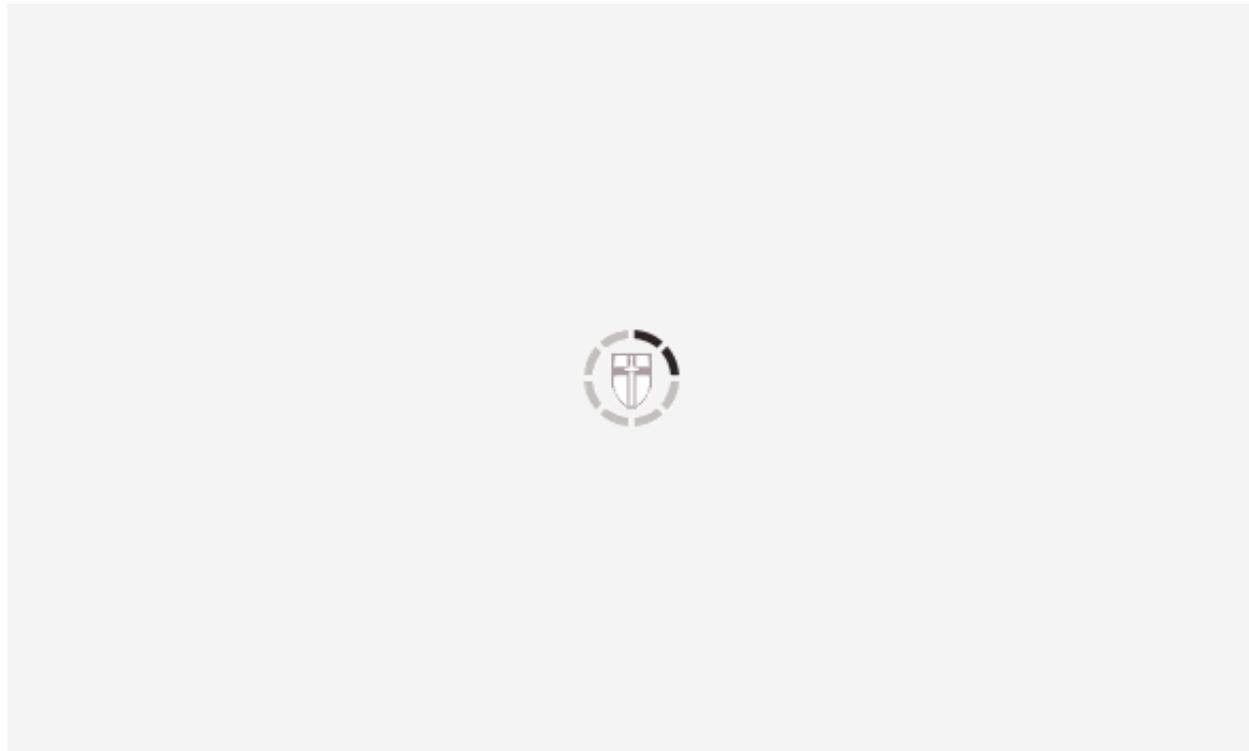
"I am concerned people have become overly frightened and throughout this pandemic, the fear instilled in people has been a real problem.

"Many people misunderstand and overestimate their risk of Covid. This uncertainty is leaving them highly anxious and affecting schools, offices and how we go about our daily lives. The government needs to intervene to explain to people their true risks."

He also called for an end to local lockdowns without better evidence of their need.

He said: "We now have more data which shows the disease is not as deadly as we first thought, and despite coming out of lockdown and the small increase in the detection of infections in certain areas we have not seen a corresponding increase in hospital admissions or critical care beds, or deaths.

"We have lost focus on the critical issue of the impact of the disease, and I don't understand why this is the case. It is becoming increasingly clear that lockdowns are harmful - during the lockdown; for instance, we saw an increase in non-covid deaths.



The Professor believes local lockdowns should no longer happen (Image: Getty)

"And when we lockdown people are forced into their homes, potentially increasing the risk of infection to other vulnerable members where they are more at risk than in well ventilated public places.

"We now need to rail back from opinion and start using an evidence-based approach.

"The lockdown policies at the moment in Preston, Oldham and Leicester have happened because more cases are detected as we have tested more in these areas.

However, an increase in infections doesn't mean the disease is getting out of control as many of these cases will be asymptomatic or not serious."

He said emerging evidence shows opening up parts of society has not necessarily led to a rise in infections as many have assumed: "For example, there are 47,600 pubs in the UK - let's say approximately 1,000 a week through the door. That's nearly 30 million people in six weeks. None wearing masks and all close to each other. Yet, these venues have not seen an upsurge in cases as a direct result of the opening.

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He called for the Government to focus on shielding vulnerable groups (Image: Getty)

"When outbreaks do occur in pubs they should currently be seen as outliers. They give us an opportunity to study them - assess why the outbreak occurred so other venues can learn and reduce their risks.

"Where they have broken the social distancing rules, this should be made clear. But we should not be punishing over 47,000 businesses just because of a handful of outbreaks.

"Nor should we be talking about trading off schools against opening pubs unless we have a better evidence to understand the policies that make a difference."

He believes coronavirus should now be seen in the context of other respiratory pathogens, all of which can cause complications.

And he called for the government to focus on shielding vulnerable groups and properly explain that the risks are minimal to those outside this group.

He said: "As a million children go back to school, and people start to go back to offices, we need to explain how the risks compare to other risks people may face in life.

"For Covid it's incredibly low. People need to understand this. Risk drives our behaviours, and if we don't understand them, then it gives rise to an overcautious - just in case - approach.

"Only if the impact of the disease worsens should we consider putting in local measures shown to slow down the spread of the disease."

He said we need to learn to live alongside Covid-19 as we can no longer eliminate it. "We need to reorientate our thinking on how to live alongside it.

"Right now, we are seeing below average excess deaths for all causes for the eighth week in a row. The messaging stay at home save lives throughout the pandemic led people to be more fearful than they have ever been, one can say it worked too well, but the current data shows it

is currently safer to go out than it has ever been."

He also said emerging evidence recently assessed by he and his colleague Professor Thomas Jefferson, also from the Oxford University Centre for Evidence Based Medicine showed covid testing is so sensitive it could pick up traces of previous infection long after recovery which could artificially inflate the numbers of positive cases.

Professor Jefferson said: "We need to de-terrorise the population. We have to explain to people the true nature of the threat - what we do and what we don't know about it."