

Using lockdowns to control spread of Covid in future won't be justified and efforts should focus on protecting the most vulnerable, SAGE adviser says

- Lockdowns can't be justified as the country moves towards living with the virus
- Professor Hayward said future measures should instead target most vulnerable
- Because as Covid become an endemic, the harm the virus causes is 'much less'

By **EMILY CRAIG** HEALTH REPORTER FOR MAILONLINE

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Blanket lockdowns can no longer be justified as a way to control Covid as Britain moves towards living with the virus, one of the Government's top scientific advisers said today.

Professor Andrew Hayward, a University College **London** epidemiologist and SAGE member, said future restrictions to control outbreaks should 'target the most vulnerable', rather than involving disruptive restrictions imposed on everyone.

Covid restrictions came to an end in England last month and were eased in Scotland and Wales in the last few days, bringing an end social distancing laws and other rules.

Since Prime Minister **Boris Johnson** declared last month that it was time to learn to live with Covid, experts have hinted at what that may look like.

Yesterday, one of the country's top coronavirus experts Sir Andrew Pollard said Brits who do not have symptoms should no longer take routine tests.

Sir Andrew, chairman of the UK's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, told MPs swabs should only be offered if people are unwell to reduce the enormous disruption to daily life from mass testing, tracing and isolation.

And today, Professor Hayward said resorting to population-wide measures to control outbreaks will no longer be acceptable.

Audio from SAGE advisor: 'Future restrictions must target vulnerable'



Professor Andrew Hayward, who sits on the NERVTAG group advising the Government on respiratory viruses, said future curbs should just target the more vulnerable

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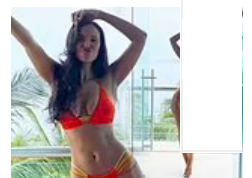
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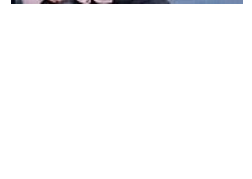


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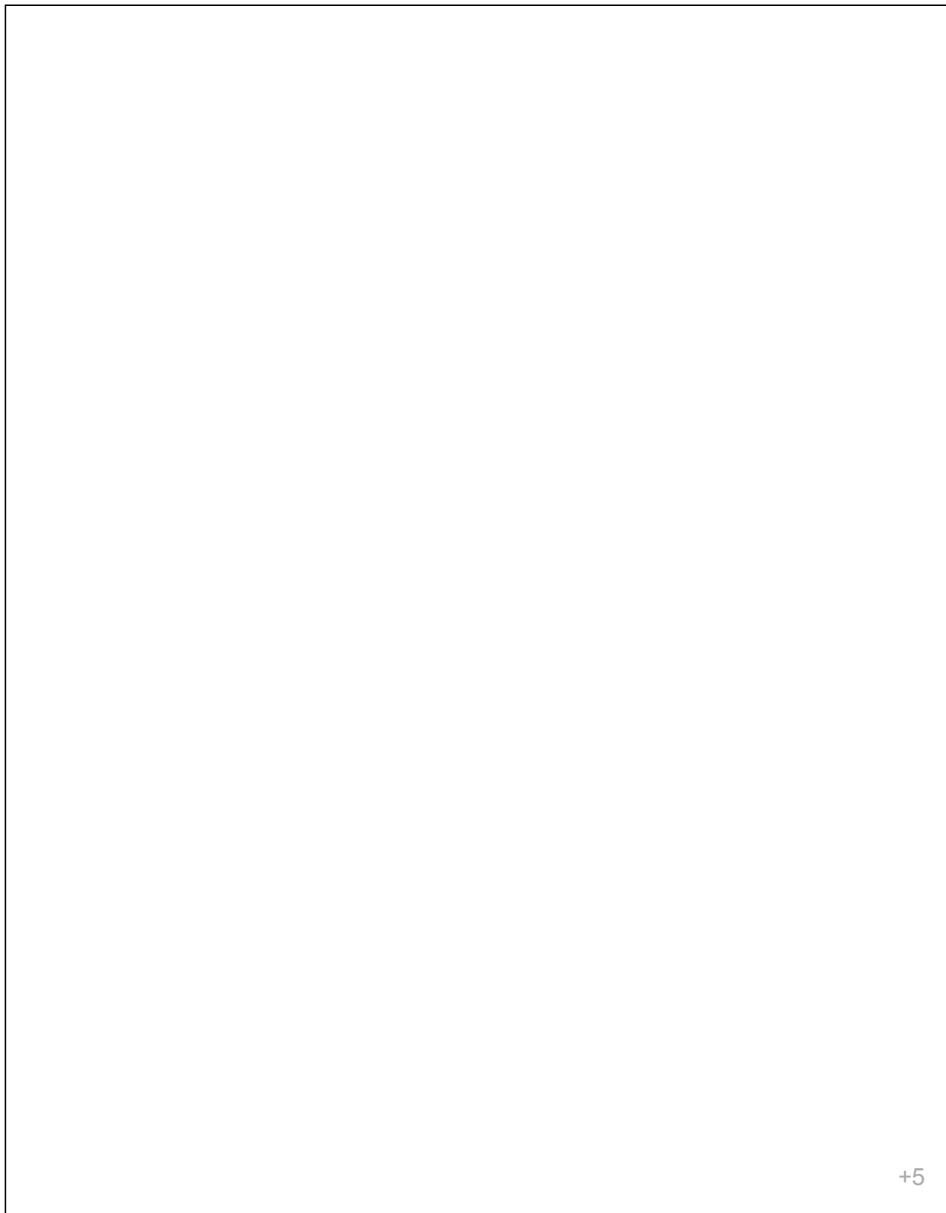
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Daily Covid infections recorded in the UK yesterday rose by 8.4 per cent compared to the same day last week, with 23,510 people testing positive. But deaths and hospitalisations are still a fraction of the numbers seen in previous waves, suggesting curbs to control the spread will not be imposed in the near future

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Asked about whether the UK could follow Germany's move to abolish free tests for asymptomatic people, Professor Hayward told BBC Radio 4's Today: 'I think as we generally move into an endemic rather than pandemic situation the potential harm that a virus can cause at a population level is much less.

'So you can't really justify such broad population-wide control measures and we tend to target the control measures more to those who are most vulnerable.

'And so I think, not only in testing but in all sorts of forms of control, as we move into a situation where we're coming to live with this virus forever, then we target the measures to the most vulnerable rather than having the more disruptive measures.'

It comes as Covid infections begin to rise across Britain once again, after cases fell for more than a fortnight.

Yesterday the UK's daily case load was 8.4 per cent up on the previous week, with 23,510 people testing positive.

But deaths and hospitalisations are still a fraction of the numbers seen in previous waves because of the success of the vaccines.

Professor Hayward's comments chime with a petition signed by more than 12,000 scientists and 115,000 members of the public in October, which called for an end to blanket lockdown restrictions.

The Great Barrington Declaration said young people should be allowed to return to life as normal while the elderly and most vulnerable are given 'focused protection'.

The declaration was written by Dr Martin Kulldorff from Harvard University, Dr Sunetra Gupta at Oxford University and Dr Jay Bhattacharya at Stanford University.

But No10 resisted the calls at the time, which came before life-savings jabs were available.

Ministers said they could not rely on the assumption that the virus would only 'rip' through younger age groups without putting more vulnerable people at risk.

Covid herd immunity not possible due to 'nature of the virus', says SAGE expert

Population immunity against the coronavirus cannot be achieved due to the 'nature of the virus', a SAGE expert said.

But Professor Andrew Hayward said if scientists came up with a vaccine more effective and stopping the spread of the virus, it could be eradicated.

It comes after Sir Andrew Pollard, a top coronavirus expert, said achieving herd immunity is 'not a possibility' because it still infects vaccinated people.

Herd immunity is when enough of the population is immune to a virus that stops it spreading to others.

Asked about these comments, Professor Hayward said immunity could not be achieved due to the 'nature of the virus'.

He said: 'The herd immunity threshold is a very changeable thing.

'It changes according to if you've got more social mixing - the herd immunity threshold will be higher.

'For more infectious variants, such as the Delta variant, the herd immunity threshold will be higher.

'But also of course the completeness of our immunity is important to consider here.

'Whilst the vaccines are absolutely excellent at preventing severe disease and hospitalisation - probably like 95 per cent effective - they are only around maybe 60 per cent effective at preventing infection.

'And for some of the other variants, maybe less than that.

'And so we think a herd immunity threshold to stop transmission of Covid would be somewhere in the high 80s, maybe even 90 per cent.

'And if you've got a vaccine that only prevents infection in about say 60 per cent, even if you've got everybody vaccinated, it's not feasible to reach

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Meanwhile, Sir Andrew, who helped develop the AstraZeneca jab, yesterday told the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Coronavirus there should be a change to the testing regime.

He insisted herd immunity is 'not a possibility' because fully vaccinated people can still get infected and instead Britain must establish a strategy for 'living with Covid'.

Sir Andrew said: 'Over time we need to be moving to clinically-driven testing... where it's people who are unwell who get tested and treated and managed, rather than lots of community testing in people who have very mild disease.'

'I think this next six months is a really important consolidation phase and in that shift from the epidemic to the endemic, which is the "living with Covid".'

He added: 'What does that mean in terms of the surveillance that we're doing, the testing that we're doing, and also how we should manage patients in hospital or even before hospital in their treatment to try and stop them getting into hospital?'

'I think this next six months is a really important consolidation phase and in that shift from the epidemic to the endemic, which is the 'living with Covid'.

'That doesn't mean that we live with it and put up with it, we still have to manage those cases of patients who become unwell with it.'

Meanwhile, it was claimed today that Britain has bought another 35million doses of **Pfizer's** Covid vaccine for next autumn's booster jab drive.

'NHS waiting lists will rise': Health Secretary Sajid Javid

that herd immunity threshold whereby the disease would be eradicated.'

He added: 'If someone could come up with a vaccine that was not only 95 per cent protective against severe disease, but 95 per cent protective against infection, then yes we would stand a chance of eradicating it.'

'Viruses change over time and so the vaccines would have to change over time. So I think it's a pretty distant prospect.'

'And we need to get used to the concept that this will become what we call an endemic disease, rather than pandemic disease.'

'So it's a disease that is with us all the time, probably transmits seasonally, a bit like influenza where we see winter epidemics.'



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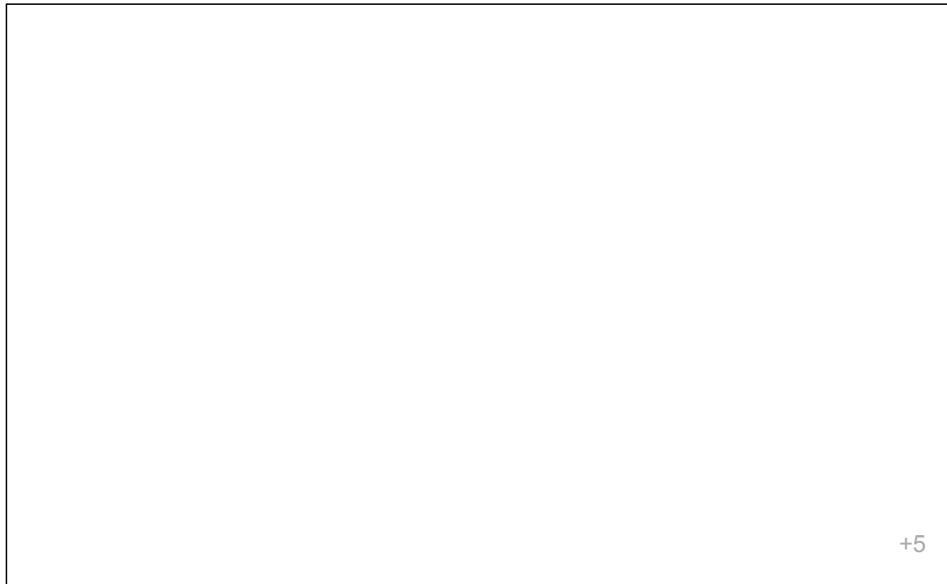


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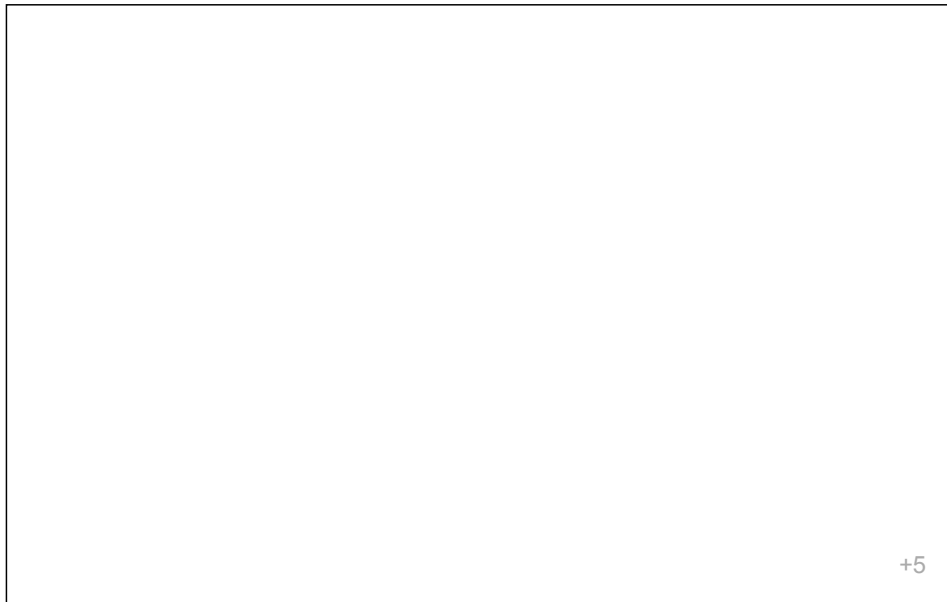


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Whitehall sources told The Times the deal will cost in the region of £1billion, after the drug giant hiked its prices by a fifth in response to demand.

Ministers already ordered an extra 60million doses for this year's campaign to give out third doses, which would be enough to give top-ups to all 54million British adults and fully vaccinate the 1.4million 16- and 17-year-olds who are now eligible.

Health Secretary **Sajid Javid** yesterday confirmed preparations were in place for the booster campaign to start next month.

But experts have repeatedly questioned whether they are even necessary.

One of No10's top scientific advisers today claimed top-ups may only be needed for anyone with a weak immune system, such as cancer patients, the elderly and transplant recipients.

Professor Adam Finn, who sits on the JCVI, said the evidence on whether all over-50s need them remains unclear.

Pfizer has insisted a third dose is necessary and BioNTech — the German firm which produces the vaccine — has said double-jabbed people need a top-up for a 'robust neutralization response'.

It comes after a study claimed Moderna's vaccine is better than Pfizer's at stopping people getting infected with the Delta variant.

One expert behind the research, by the US-based Mayo Clinic, argued Moderna's jab would be better for top-ups.

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