

Covid-19: What Next?

A response from some residents of Orkney to the Scottish Government's Document, ['COVID-19 – A Framework for Decision Making'](#).

We welcome the publication of 'Covid-19 A Framework for Decision Making' (the Document) and the opportunity to take part in the discussion.

We also welcome that the Document states:

We will use the best available evidence and analysis.

And that:

There is no such thing as a level of "acceptable loss".

We understand that where possible, the response to Covid-19 should be co-ordinated on a 'Four' nation basis, and more importantly, internationally. It will not be possible for any nation to be free of the virus while it is uncontrolled in another part of the world because restrictions on movement can only be temporary if we are to continue to have a world economy.

Orkney is a distinct archipelago with low confirmed cases of Covid19, and there should be an island specific response to the emergency, which we will argue in this paper.

We have a fundamental concern with the first of the principles set out in the Document:

Safe - We will ensure that transmission of the virus remains **suppressed** and that our NHS and care services are not overwhelmed. [our emphasis]

Worldwide, there has been two different strategies:

1. The strategy pursued in many countries in the East/Pacific (i.e. South Korea, China, and New Zealand) which is to eradicate the virus; and
2. The strategy pursued in many states in the West (i.e. Italy, France, Spain, the UK including Scotland) which is to suppress the virus which will mean, as the

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Document explains, 'we will need to learn to live with this virus, possibly for some time to come.'

The Document assumes that before the virus can be eradicated, there needs to be a vaccine, but this has never been the case when it comes to viruses. There is still no vaccine for SARS, but we do not talk about 'living with SARS'. Covid-19 cannot survive for long outside a host, so if transmission is prevented the virus will die out. [South Korea](#) and [China](#) show that the number of domestic transitions can be eliminated to almost nil with most new cases coming from outside the countries.

A contact tracing, testing and isolation strategy should be implemented in Orkney, as well as for the rest of Scotland, immediately. Orkney has relevant facilities, staff and, it is assumed, relatively low numbers of cases and, with national support, could do this effectively.

The impact on loss of life of these two different strategies is stark and illustrated by the following table which shows the number of deaths per million in the following countries:

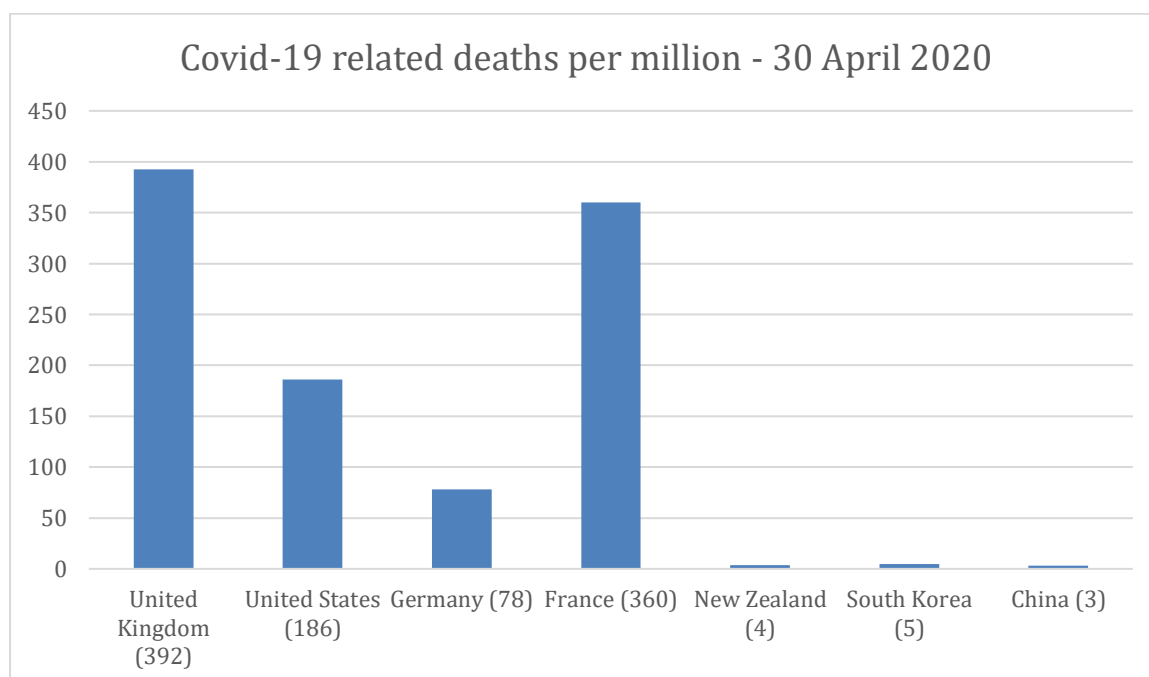


Table: statistics from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1104709/coronavirus-deaths-worldwide-per-million-inhabitants/>

There can be problems with statistics, particularly in ensuring that all deaths caused by Covid-19 are captured, with China recently revising the figures significantly upwards to capture deaths that were probably caused by Covid-19. However, the

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pattern is clear: New Zealand, South Korea and China hardly register when compared to most Western countries. The figure for the UK is taken from the officially released figures (26,097 as of 30 April 2020) so this is an understatement of what the true figure for Covid-19 related deaths is.

When to end the lockdown

The advice of the World Health Organisation (WHO) states that a lockdown should only be lifted if the following [Six WHO Conditions](#) are met:

1. Disease transmission is under control.
2. Health systems can “detect, test, isolate and treat every case and trace every contact”.
3. Hot spot risks are minimized in vulnerable places, such as care homes.
4. Schools, workplaces, and other essential places have established preventive measures.
5. The risk of importing new cases “can be managed”.
6. Communities are fully educated, engaged, and empowered to live under a new normal.

Countries that followed the advice of the WHO, including South Korea, China and New Zealand have managed to contain the virus and reduce daily cases to single figures.

The Scottish Government’s Document states:

The World Health Organisation has stated that before any decision is made to lift restrictions, transmission of COVID-19 must be controlled.

We agree with this. However, we are very concerned that the Document does not explain what it means by the transmission of Covid-19 being controlled. The Document does explain that:

The single most important measure to help us understand how fast the virus is spreading and the degree to which it is under control is the “reproduction number” or “Rn”. The reproduction number is a measure of the contagiousness or transmissibility of a virus – in other words, the number of cases each infected person passes the virus on to. To contain the virus, we must keep the R number below 1, and this means minimising the risk of spreading the virus at every turn. When R is over 1, exponential growth returns. Our best estimate is that due to restrictive measures the reproduction number could now be between 0.6 and 1.0.

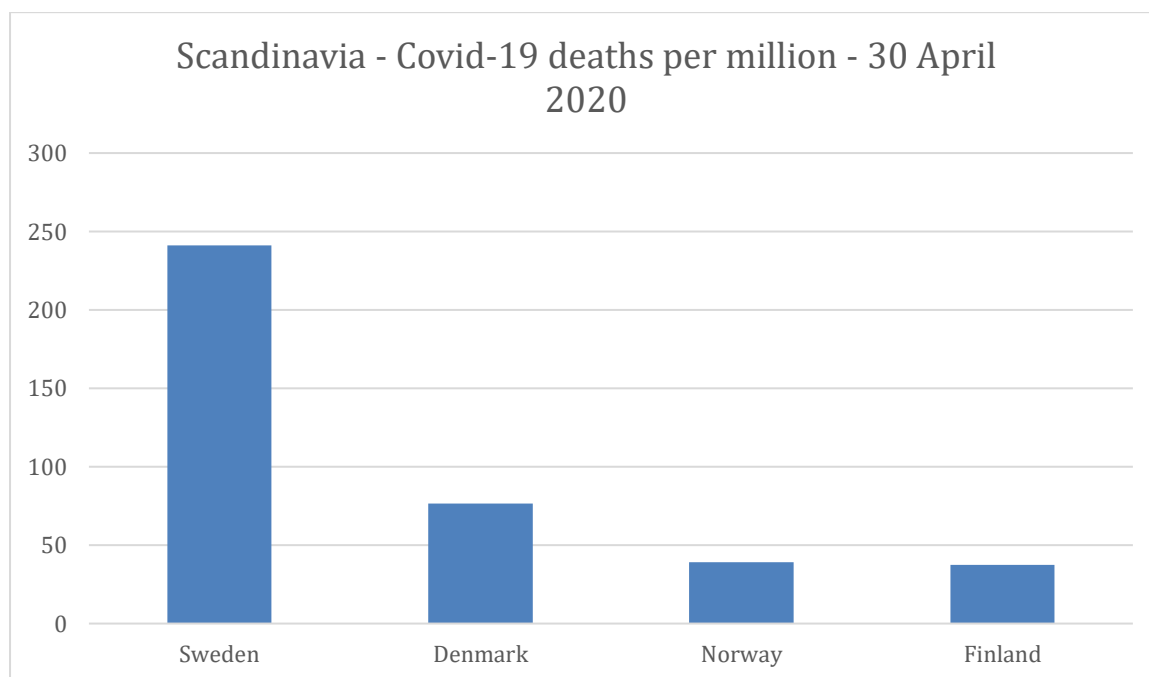
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...That means that we must see R stabilise below 1.0 and ensure that the impact of any decision to ease restrictions must maintain R below 1.0.

Reducing the “reproduction number” to between 0.6 to 1.0 is an important milestone in the roadmap to controlling the virus, but it falls far short of the WHO’s definition of control. The reason the Rn is thought to be below 1 currently is because of the lockdown. Release the lockdown without strong control measures and the Rn will rise.

We believe that the Scottish Government must confirm that it will follow the WHO advice on when to conclude that the virus is controlled and to work to persuade the UK government to do the same. The Scottish Government’s Document should be reworked to use the advice of the WHO to develop a road plan to control the virus and reintroduce some elements of normality.

It has been suggested that the UK should consider the South Korean model which fell short of China’s full lockdown as a model to tackle the virus. However, the virus is now far more established in Scotland and the UK than it ever was in countries such as South Korea. We will need the lockdown to get us into such a position as South Korea was before the six measures recommended by the WHO would be sufficient to contain the virus. The example of Sweden, which has resisted a full lockdown, illustrates this well. The numbers of deaths in Sweden per million are far higher than her Scandinavian neighbours who have had a more thorough lockdown.



<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1104709/coronavirus-deaths-worldwide-per-million-inhabitants/>

The best option Scotland has is to continue the lockdown until the number are reduced to a level where they can be controlled. For China and South Korea, they

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have understood this to be when the number of new infections is in single figures, something that we are far from achieving. The only way to shorten the time of the lockdown is to ensure that it is more effective. It is very positive that Scotland has stated that all non-essential construction work should be suspended, but all non-essential workplaces should be closed to reduce the risks of infections to their colleagues, to public transport employees helping essential staff to get to work and other essential workers.

Support for people

We must recognise that the lockdown means many people are suffering. We are not all in this together, or at least our risks from the virus and from the negative effects from the virus are not the same. The numbers from poorer communities is disproportionate. People are suffering because they do not have enough to live on, people are having mental health problems, there is a rise in domestic violence and vulnerable children are more at risk. However, this is not a case for a premature lifting or relaxing of the lockdown. Most of those with mental health problems will suffer more if they think that they are not safe from the virus. If we want to end the lockdown as soon as possible, then we need make it effective. Closing non-essential workplaces is especially important for this, people travelling to work when it is not needed puts all our lives at risk, not least, essential workers who do not have the option of staying home. The Scottish Government has issued guidance on what constitutes a safe workplace, but this guidance must be given the force of law and made compulsory. The sooner the lockdown works, the sooner we can begin to recover the economy.

It is likely that release of the lockdown will be phased, particularly for those in the high risk groups (over 70 years, and those with underlying conditions) and the Higher risk groups (those "shielding" because they are at highest risk of severe illness of developing COVID-19). To protect life these groups of people may need to remain in isolation for some time to come. Measures need to be put in place to ensure their continued health and wellbeing during extended isolation

Social inequalities mean that situations and measures put in place will have a differential impact. For example, many people experienced a sudden loss of income due to the lockdown and time taken to receive universal credits or funds from any other agencies with no savings to fall back on. Universal Credit and Statutory Sick Pay is not set at a level that people can pay their rent, pay their bills, and buy enough food. This was particularly true in the more rural areas of Orkney and in the isles where residents were expected to use local independent shops. Some families saw an increase in their weekly shopping bill of £80+ per week and with no income expected

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for some weeks struggled to feed themselves, or to pay other essential bills. There needs to be some form of guaranteed income for all set at least the equivalent of the Scottish Real Living Wage.

Resources need to be spread equitably with a rapid dissemination of information so that people know where to get assistance. Orkney Islands Council used some of the money provided by the Scottish Government to introduce food vouchers for islands which went to every member of every household (£5 per person per week) this went some way to mitigate costs. However, that still means many families do not have enough money to live on. The money went to every household because that was clearly easier and quicker to administer, and if the money had been targeted to those most in need it would have gone further. On Hoy some folk gave their vouchers to the local community council to go to those in greater need, but the community council has a dilemma because they do not know who those people are.

Some older folk in (Orkney) Mainland parishes were experiencing "convenience store" prices but were not eligible for additional help. On Mainland the argument was that they could get Tesco delivery, but the Facebook Mutual Aid group has reported that it is very hard to get registered even with a "shielding" letter and number.

Incidents of domestic violence have significantly [increased](#). France has opened-up hotels for women fleeing violence and that, along with other measures, should be considered in Scotland.

Local councils, the NHS and third sector organisations need to be given the resources they need to protect vulnerable children.

There needs to be an expanded programme to support those suffering mental health problems.

Essential workers are risking their lives to protect us and must be given all the support the need, including appropriate PPE.

A different course for Orkney

Orkney is an archipelago, there is the prospect of Orkney taking a slightly different course, and there appears to be an [appetite](#) for that locally. The number of reported cases is small and although it has been [speculated](#) that the true number is closer to 200 to 300, with comprehensive testing, these cases could all be identified, the people they have been in touch with tracked, and those infected and those contract traced. **If the WHO Six Conditions are met, certain restrictions could be eased before the rest of Scotland.**

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The restriction of travel in and out of Orkney to mainland Scotland and beyond has been effective and we would wish this to continue but with all those who travel to Orkney required to self-isolate for 14 days. An effective trace, test, isolate and support programme would, however, enable movement within the islands to be relaxed whilst still maintaining social distancing and strict observance of personal hygiene.

If Orkney is to recover economically it is imperative that we can ease lockdown restrictions within our archipelago once it is safe to do so. Inshore fishing and farming are hugely important traditional sectors to Orkney's economy. It is vital that products can be transported between the islands so it can be sold whilst still fresh. For the mental wellbeing of Orcadians, many in single person households, the easing of restrictions to movement would be a significantly positive change. For our schools too, many with small numbers of pupils the ability to restart with social distancing measures in place could be achievable.

This proposal is for a bespoke Orkney response to Covid19 by using the expertise and facilities we have in the islands and nationally to undertake an immediate programme of contact tracing, testing and isolation.

However, Orkney is not a country with a state and national health service at its disposal, it is Scotland's smallest county with a council and a local health board. We would need capacity to test and track thousands of people in a week while our current capacity to carry out tests remains in the hundreds. We would need outside expertise and national resources. Although Orkney would need national resources to do this, the lessons learned from implementing the recommendations of the WHO in Orkney would be invaluable for the rest of Scotland and the UK. Any attempt to relax the lockdown in Orkney without following the WHO Six Conditions will be resisted in the islands. However, a roadmap that followed the WHO 6 Conditions should be welcomed and provide immeasurable benefits to the county and Scotland.

Summary

We believe:

- The Scottish Government should make clear that it will only relax the lockdown when the WHO six conditions are met.
- Every effort should be done to make the lockdown effective, including closing down nonessential workplaces.
- That appropriate measures are put in place to protect people who are either in a high risk group because of the virus or are suffering because of the effects of the virus.

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- Essential workers are given everything they need to do their jobs safely, including appropriate PPE.
- The Scottish Government should recognise the unique position of Orkney and other island communities and develop, in partnership with those communities, develop strategies that are more appropriate.