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Covid-19: Leaders warn of “full blown second surge” as hospital admissions rise

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The NHS will face a full blown second surge of covid-19 without urgent action to reverse the sustained increase in cases and admissions to hospitals, healthcare leaders have warned.

On Thursday 8 October official figures¹ showed there were 3044 patients in hospital in England with coronavirus, up from 1995 a week ago on 1 October. Thursday's number is the highest number of daily cases since 22 June.

The most recent data available show there were 524 patients admitted to hospital with covid-19 in England on Tuesday 6 October, up from 310 on Tuesday 29 September.

Yvonne Doyle, medical director for Public Health England, said, “We’re seeing a definite and sustained increase in cases and admissions to hospital. The trend is clear, and it is very concerning. Numbers of deaths from covid-19 are also rising so we must continue to act to reduce transmission of this virus.”

The latest UK data show that there were 442 hospital patients in the UK on mechanical ventilators on 7 October, compared with 341 the week before. In the week ending 25 September, the UK as a whole saw 234 registered deaths with covid-19 on the death certificate, compared with 158 the week before.

In a joint statement, Ravi Mahajan, president of the Royal College of Anaesthetists, and Alison Pittard, dean at the Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine, said it was vital that everyone followed the guidelines.

They said, “Unless everyone follows the hands, face, and space rule and sticks to local lockdown measures we are in danger of the NHS being unable to cope and deliver the other services patients need. Given the recent spike in both the number of cases and hospital admissions we could soon be back to where we were in April if we are not all careful.”

There are also concerns that regional variation could be masking the severity of the situation in some areas, with the north of England seeing particularly high levels of admissions and cases.

Chris Hopson, the chief executive of NHS Providers, said, “Trust chief executives across the north west, north east, and Yorkshire are telling us that covid-19 related hospital admissions are rapidly rising. We need prompt action to prevent a full blown second surge. We need to make difficult decisions now, rather than later, when it may be too late.”

Hopson also expressed concern at the latest figures from England's test and trace service,² which showed that it continued to struggle on key indicators. “We need them to get better, quickly,” Hopson said.

Between 24 September to 30 September, 8173 people (23.7% of those referred to the test and trace service) were not reached, compared with 6049 people (20.8%) the week before, and 14 265 (57.8%) were reached within 24 hours, down from 13 186 (63.1%) the previous week.

¹ Coronavirus (covid-19) in the UK. <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/healthcare>.

² NHS test and trace (England) and coronavirus testing (UK) statistics: 24 September to 30 September 2020. 8 October 2020. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/925079/Test_and_Trace_Week18_v2.pdf.