

Prime Minister's Questions: 13 May

DISCLAIMER: This document contains a scientific fact check of the statements made at the opening of the Prime Minister's Questions Session of 13 May. This summary was compiled in near real-time (before the Hansard transcript) was publicly available so may contain mistakes or other inaccuracies resulting from misunderstanding. Our usual detail of fact-checking has not been performed due to the short turnaround time. Volunteers from Scientists for Labour have undertaken to ensure that the commentary provided in this report is accurate, but it should be taken 'as-is'. Readers are encouraged to check both the original statement made and the actual text of the source below before using this information.

Links are **orange** for news articles

Links are **green** for papers in academic journals.

Links are in **purple** for governmental statistics or advice

Question 1 - Care home statistics

Statements

- The PM states that we need to rapidly reverse the care home epidemic.
- Until 12 March the Government's official advice was that 'it remains very unlikely that people in a care home will become infected'.
- 40% of all COVID-19 deaths are in care homes.
- Was the Government too slow to prevent the spread of the pandemic in care homes?

DOES THE PM ACCEPT THE GOVERNMENT WAS TOO SLOW TO PROTECT PEOPLE IN CARE HOMES?

Relevant links:

How the UK's care homes were abandoned to coronavirus	The Government's advice was that care homes were unlikely to be greatly affected by COVID-19 until 12 March
Deaths registered weekly in England and Wales, provisional	40% of deaths in England and Wales are in care homes, ONS statistics provided
Coronavirus in Scotland: Half of deaths now in care homes Coronavirus: Third of NI deaths occurred in care homes	50% of the deaths in Scotland are in care homes, and 33% of the Northern Irish deaths are in care homes

Summative commentary:

The given quote is correct and evidence from those on the frontlines indicates that the response to the crisis in care homes was tardy.

This question was accurate, though LOTO should specify whether the 40% figure is for England and Wales only, or a calculated average across the entirety of the UK

Answer 1

CARE HOMES WERE LOCKED DOWN AHEAD OF THE GENERAL LOCKDOWN.

Statements:

- It wasn't true that the advice 'it remains very unlikely that people in a care home will become infected'.
- The lockdown came to care homes before it was applied to the general population.
- £600 million will be allocated for infection control in care homes.
- The number of outbreaks is down and the number of deaths in care homes is dropping.

Relevant links:

Care homes ban family visits to stem spread of coronavirus	It appears care homes introduced some lockdown measures before the nationwide measures were implemented, but it was done independently from government advice of any kind.
Coronavirus: Isolation for over-70s 'within weeks'	The government advised everyone over 70 to stay indoors on 15 March, 5 days before the general lockdown was announced on 20 March, but care homes were not mentioned either way.
Guidance for social or community care and residential settings on COVID-19	On February 25, the government published that "It is therefore very unlikely that anyone receiving care in a care home or the community will become infected", which has sadly proved not to be the case.
Dataset Number of deaths in care homes notified to the Care Quality Commission, England	The last day the ONS has published stats on is May 8. On the seven days before that, the accumulated death toll was indeed lower than on the previous week (1685 vs 2446), and from the maximum reached on the week between 18 April and 14 April (2745).

Summative Commentary:

The PM was incorrect in denying the previous statement and was misleading about the lockdown coming to care homes before it was implemented for everyone else (there was published advice to anyone older than 70 to stay indoors, but visits to care homes were not forbidden and were only implemented independently on an individual basis).

In fact, by the end of February the government still stated that the risk of outbreaks in care homes was minimal, something that we now know was incorrect. Claims about deaths in care homes dropping last week are true. No information could be found about the claim that the number of outbreaks in care homes is also down.

The PM was wrong to deny that the previous quote 'it remains very unlikely that people in a care home will become infected' was at some point government advice. The claim that care homes entered the lockdown earlier was also factually misleading. The statement about deaths in care homes dropping is accurate however data for the number outbreaks in care homes decreasing were not located.

Question 2 - Exposing the most vulnerable

Statements

- Daily Telegraph quotes cardiologist: we discharged known, suspected, and unknown cases into care homes.
- Care homes were not given formal warnings of infected patients, testing facilities, or PPE control transmission.
- The most vulnerable population was actively exposed.

DOES THE PRIME MINISTER ACCEPT THAT THE QUOTED CARDIOLOGIST IS CORRECT WHEN THEY SAID THAT KNOWN COVID-19 PATIENTS WERE DISCHARGED INTO UNPREPARED CARE HOMES?

Relevant links:

[Briefing note: Current UK guidance on admission and care of residents during COVID-19 is based on symptomatic cases, ignoring early international evidence and lessons from other countries.](#)

Government advice on discharging patients to care homes was based on symptoms - ignoring evidence of the prevalence of asymptomatic cases

Summative commentary:

The LOTO quoted an anonymous cardiologist (which we cannot fact check), but the other facts presented were supported by the evidence. Government guidance stated that only patients without symptoms could be discharged into care homes, which goes against WHO guidance from the same period which recommended the isolation of any suspected cases. The government does not appear to have considered the risks of asymptomatic cases as seriously as it ought to have done.

It is factually correct that COVID-19 patients from hospital were allowed to be released back into care homes according to government guidance. As such, this question was accurate in its content.

Answer 2

THE NUMBER OF DISCHARGES INTO CARE HOMES DECREASED, AND THAT THERE IS A TESTING SYSTEM IN PLACE IN CARE HOMES

Statements:

- The number of people being discharged from hospital to care homes went down in March and April.
- Testing is being ramped up in all of the care homes around the UK.

Relevant links:

Government launches new portal for care homes to arrange coronavirus testing	Government has recently launched a new portal for testing in care homes. 140,000 test kits had been delivered to care homes as of 11th May
Testing for coronavirus in UK care homes a 'complete system failure'	Testing in care homes thus far has been a notable failure - there has been significant confusion and criticisms have been made regarding the speed of test kit delivery. Requested kits have often not arrived.

Summative Commentary:

The number of tests in the UK has been increasing and a new online portal has been established to help deliver testing.

However claims that the tests being performed in care homes are being ramped up are met with numerous reports about poor organisation.. Tests have been late or failed to arrive, tests have not been returned after completion, and government figures appear to be based on tests sent out as opposed to tests returned or the number of individuals tested.

The number of tests may well be increasing, but the PM did not acknowledge the many reports of the poor execution of testing protocols in care homes to date.

Question 3 - Excess deaths in care homes

Statements

- The ONS figures state that care home deaths are typically 8,000 in April, they were 26,000 in April 2020.
- Only 8,000 of these excess deaths have been attributed to COVID-19.
- There are 10,000 additional, unexplained deaths from April 2020.

CAN THE PRIME MINISTER GIVE THE GOVERNMENT'S VIEW ON THESE UNEXPLAINED DEATHS?

Relevant links:

Estimates of the number of deaths of care home residents linked to the COVID-19 pandemic in England	Estimates from the Care Policy and Evaluation Centre at LSE indicate that deaths in care homes may be more than twice that of official estimates.
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Summative commentary:

There are a significant number of excess deaths in care homes which have not (yet) been attributed to COVID-19 throughout April. The Leader of the Opposition is correct in his statement that there has not been a clear explanation from the Government regarding the cause of these figures. *The most likely cause is of course undiagnosed COVID-19 cases.*

This question was accurate in its content.

Answer 3

THERE HAS BEEN A SUBSTANTIVE REDUCTION IN THE NUMBER OF CARE HOME DEATHS SINCE THE CARE HOME ACTION PLAN BEGAN.

Statements:

- COVID-19 afflicts some groups more than others, particularly the elderly.
- There has been a terrible epidemic in care homes.
- Since the Care Homes Action Plan began there has been a substantive reduction in the number of deaths and outbreaks.
- Solving the problem in care homes is essential for the nation to move forward with the stepped exit plan.

Relevant links:

Coronavirus (COVID-19): adult social care action plan	This action plan was published on 15 April 2020.
Number of deaths in care homes notified to the Care Quality Commission, England	There is no appreciable trend in the ONS figures to support the assertion that care home deaths have been falling since mid-April.
Ethnicity, comorbidity, socioeconomic status, and their associations with COVID-19 infections in England: a cohort analysis of UK biobank data.	Outcomes are different across various sub-populations in the UK infected with COVID-19. Including age and ethnicity.
Estimates of the number of deaths of care home residents linked to the COVID-19 pandemic in England	Estimates from the Care Policy and Evaluation Centre at LSE indicate that deaths in care homes may be more than twice that of official estimates.

Summative Commentary:

The Prime Minister is correct to state that outcomes including mortality have varied amongst different age groups. There is also not yet unambiguous evidence for his statement that deaths in care homes have declined since the beginning of the adult social care action plan.

It is not yet clear that mortality figures in care homes have fallen over this time period to the degree stated.

Question 4 - International comparisons

Statements: refer back

- Understanding the figures is the only way to solve the problem in care homes.
- The PM has not explained the 10,000 unexplained deaths in care homes.

Statements: next question

- Yesterday the government stopped publishing the international comparison of death totals.

WHY HAS THE GOVERNMENT STOPPED PUBLISHING INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS?

Relevant links:

Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19) - Statistics and Research	A wealth of data is available to make international comparison possible, such as those the Government has been making to date.
What is the total number of confirmed deaths?	Shows that the UK has the second highest confirmed death toll in the World, and the highest in Europe.
Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the UK	No international comparisons can be seen on the latest update of Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the UK on 12 May.

Summative commentary:

The Prime Minister remains unable to explain the discrepancy between deaths in care homes which have been officially attributed to COVID-19 and the higher excess deaths figures for the same setting, mentioned in the previous question.

The Government yesterday discontinued the publication of a slide which compared the official UK death toll to that of other European nations, it is unclear why this is no longer being officially communicated.

This question was accurate in its content.

Answer 4

COMPARISONS BETWEEN UK COVID-19 DATA AND OTHER COUNTRIES' COVID-19 DATA ARE PREMATURE.

Statements:

- The Prime Minister has been advised that comparisons with other nations are premature.
- Comparisons should be made when all excess death totals are provided by all countries.
- Figures for deaths and hospital admissions are going down.
- R is going down which enables the nation to relax the lockdown slightly.
- People understand what we are trying to do as a country.

Relevant links:

COVID-19: Learning from experience	What we can learn from international comparison.
Number of coronavirus (COVID-19) cases and risk in the UK	The UK has the highest death toll in Europe.
Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the UK	As presented in the Government's daily briefing, the death rate is indeed going down
Coronavirus: Key R rate of measuring COVID-19 spread rises due to care home infections, say experts	Prior to easing lockdown R (Rt specifically) has been estimated to be below 1. However some reports suggest that R may still be above 1 and may have risen recently, driven by care home outbreaks.
COVID-19: Weathering the storm	References the early mantra of "two weeks behind Italy" which was used extensively in Government communications to the public about the pandemic.
Brits split on changes to coronavirus lockdown measures	Only 35% of respondents to a YouGov poll feel they understand what they are supposed to be doing based on the new slogan.
Deaths registered weekly in England and Wales, provisional	Hospital death rates have decreased.

Summative Commentary:

There is a substantial amount of data available for making comparisons between nations. The PM claims that such comparisons are premature, as data are not yet complete, but does not explain why such comparisons were used in the early stages of the pandemic in communications to the public, and have now suddenly stopped.

These changes in communication have sown confusion amongst the British public. The prime minister asserts that the R-value is below one, however this will need to be closely monitored alongside COVID-19 death and infection rates. The claims about the death toll dropping last week in comparison with the week prior is correct, though data on hospital admissions related to COVID-19 have not been published.

The Prime Minister claimed that comparisons were premature because the data were not yet available (which is a legitimate argument as different countries report their deaths differently), but the PM gave no explanation for why the Government had been presenting comparisons up until this point. He should also explain why he feels the multiple academics making these assertions are incorrect. The claim about total deaths and deaths in hospitals dropping in recent weeks appears to be correct.

Question 5 - Further questioning on international comparisons and childcare provision

Statements: follow up

- The slides and statistics stopped being shown when they stopped being convenient.
- Prof Spiegelhalter said at the weekend the UK should use other nations to attempt to learn why our numbers are so high.
- Dropping the comparison with other nations risks dropping the chance to learn.

Statements: next question

- Childcare has become a significant concern for many people.
- Many people are unable to follow Government guidance in returning to work as there is no childcare available.

WHAT ADVICE DOES THE PRIME MINISTER HAVE FOR PEOPLE WITH CHILDCARE NEEDS WHO ARE BEING ASKED TO RETURN TO WORK?

Relevant links:

Prof. Spiegelhalter Tweet	Prof Spiegelhalter correction to PM
Committee to hear from experts in virtual session - News from Parliament	Prof Spiegelhalter before S&T Select Committee
Coronavirus (COVID-19): implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings	Government guide on child care, from 12 May 2020
New guidance launched to help get Brits safely back to work	Government guidance on getting back to work

Summative commentary:

LOTO is correct that Prof Spiegelhalter clarified his position on this matter last week, and that many in the scientific community feel that international comparisons are indeed valuable at this stage. Childcare appears to be a substantial and appreciable concern.

This question was accurate in its content.

Answer 5

INADEQUATE ACCESS TO CHILDCARE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AN IMPEDIMENT TO RETURNING TO WORK AND EMPLOYERS MUST BE UNDERSTANDING.

Statements:

- The government is closely monitoring the situation in other countries.
- In some countries relaxing lockdowns has led to signs of R going up again.
- This is being taken as a warning to not proceed too quickly or recklessly.
- Employers must be understanding when employees cannot return to work due to childcare concerns.
- Insufficient access to childcare should be considered an impediment to returning to work.

Relevant links:

As coronavirus cases resurge, lockdowns reimposed on at least three continents	In Lebanon, South Korea and Germany, the number of infections rose again after the lockdown measures were relaxed, leading to the re-implementation of said measures in some localised areas.
Confusion over when childminders can return to work	Government advice suggesting that childminders could return to work contained an error, as it only intended to refer to nannies.
Coronavirus: PM 'not expecting' flood of people back to work	The PM has stated that employers will be understanding if employees do not have access to childcare.

Summative Commentary:

There have been indeed examples of cases in other countries rising again as the lockdown is lifted, with such situations occurring in Lebanon, South Korea and Germany leading to the return of restrictions.

The Prime Minister stated that employers must be understanding when it comes to the childcare needs of employees who would otherwise return to work, and that it should be considered an impediment. However, it is unclear exactly what 'understanding' means, and whether an employer will be penalised for refusing to be 'understanding'. The Government did make this clear in past briefings.

The Prime Minister's advice to parents with insufficient access to childcare appears to be a semantic sidestep. It remains unclear whether employers will be legally compelled to be 'understanding' when it comes to parents' access to childcare.

Question 6 - Scientific Advice

Statements

- PM asks for the Nation's support for the government decisions.
- Gaining public confidence is crucial, especially after recent events.
- PM says decisions are based on science and data

[Can the PM commit to publishing the relevant scientific advice?](#)

Relevant links:

Scientific advisory committees: code of practice	CPSAC Guidelines
Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE): Coronavirus (COVID-19) response	Limited/redacted information available from SAGE so far
UK scientists condemn 'Stalinist' attempt to censor Covid-19 advice	'Censoring' of SAGE advice

Summative commentary:

Scientists for Labour agree that the publishing of advice from SAGE is vital. Minutes are not currently available, and summary papers are either redacted or too old to be directly relevant. See our policy position here: [COVID-19 | Sfl](#) .

This question was accurate in its content.

Answer 6

[THE ADVICE WILL BE PUBLISHED IN DUE COURSE](#)

Statements:

- SAGE has been involved at every stage of the crisis
- All actions are conditional and provisional
- People have worked hard to get R down, and we cannot risk a second outbreak
- Stepped process makes sense to people, and all can see what the point is
- British people will get us through using their common sense.

Summative Commentary:

We cannot verify that SAGE is involved in every stage of the planning without the evidence to support this claim, which the government has thus far refused to release.

This statement may be true, without evidence to support it (which is what LOTO is asking for), there is no way to check.

Further questions on which we have comments:

Question from William Wragg: Will the PM recognise that many patients have not been attending hospital when they should have, and how will he ensure that people can access healthcare as usual?

Answer from the Prime Minister: We did protect the NHS in this crisis, we maintained capacity in the NHS, nobody went without a ventilator and there was always space in ICUs

Commentary: Despite many concerns about the number of ICU beds and ventilators available in the country, there has not been a national shortage of either, though doctors have been overworked in ICUs ([What's happening in covid-19 ICUs? An intensive care doctor answers some common questions](#)). However there have been local shortages of both in the worst affected regions, especially in London ([London hospitals struggle to cope with coronavirus surge](#)). There is little data as to whether ICU physicians are not treating patients that they otherwise would be if the current pandemic weren't ongoing, but given the excess deaths not attributable to COVID-19 ([Thousands of unexplained extra deaths are happening per week during the Covid-19 outbreak. Why?](#)) it is possible that this is the case.

. Although there has not been a national shortage of ventilators and hospital beds for COVID-19 patients, there has been a shortage of both in the worst affected areas. There are also concerns about the impact of pandemic on the use of both for other patients, for which clear data is not yet available.