

Boris Is Back as the Blame Game Begins in Britain

By [Johanna Ross](#)

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*A humble **Boris Johnson** addressed the nation last weekend after his release from hospital. The British Prime Minister had been admitted the week before after succumbing to coronavirus. In his emotional address, he spoke of the 'love' which he had received from the care workers – several of whom he named – that had enabled him to recover from his period in intensive care. He described that two nurses were at his bedside night and day, monitoring him every minute in a situation which was very much touch and go.*

This dramatic episode may have boosted Boris Johnson's popularity, as the nation for a brief time stood shoulder to shoulder with the Prime Minister, but it hasn't prevented growing criticism of the government's handling of the coronavirus epidemic to date. Indeed the very fact that the Prime Minister and his team have not been adequately protected from the virus has caused widespread concern. And the situation at the top pretty much reflects that across society, as hospital staff, care workers and other front line public service workers have not been given the necessary Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to shield them from the virus. Like lambs to the slaughter, these essential workers have soldiered on, some tragically falling victim to Covid-19. Britain's renowned Royal College of Nursing has [said](#) that staff may have to refuse to treat patients if they are not given adequate PPE. The pressure is mounting on the Health Secretary, **Matt Hancock**, to deliver, and deliver fast.

The initial surge of patriotism and unity felt across Britain when lockdown began is starting to wane. People are getting tired of the restrictions, questioning more and more when it will end as the novelty of staying at home is beginning to wear off. Initially the restrictions were to be for a period of three weeks – that time is now up and no more has been said as to when it could end. With signs that the 'curve' of the epidemic in the UK is beginning to 'flatten', opposition leader Keir Starmer is demanding the publication of the government's [exit strategy](#) i.e. how can we end the lockdown without triggering another rise in cases? It is expected that on Thursday Dominic Raab will announce a further three weeks of lockdown.

But more problematic for the government is, that as time goes on, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the country was completely unprepared for a pandemic and that when the first warning signs of such a public health crisis appeared, they were not heeded. Further still, some argue that there are matters that are still being mismanaged. Take the issue of care homes, for example. Patients moving from hospitals into care homes are still not being tested for coronavirus; an extraordinary situation when this is one of the main ways in which the disease enters the home. I myself know of a particular case where a patient was admitted to hospital from a care home, contracted the virus undetected, before returning to the home where she passed the virus on to a number of patients and staff. In England we do not in fact know the number of elderly who have died from coronavirus – it is not included in the daily death toll announcements. But [Scotland](#) has released its figures, showing that a quarter of its total deaths were elderly people in care homes – 237 to date.

As a result, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has announced that every patient now returning from a hospital into a care home would be tested. This of course does not completely exclude the possibility of an individual carrying the virus from spreading it in the home, as the test only identifies Covid-19 if someone is exhibiting symptoms, but it is a start. The Health Secretary will now be under increased pressure to follow suit, despite confirming on Wednesday that patients would continue to be transferred from hospital to care home without testing. Charities and local authorities have said the policy is '[madness](#)' and that it is effectively '[importing death into care homes](#)' as one care home owner in Devon put it.

The issue of testing is one of the main points of contention in the coronavirus debate. Early on the WHO issued advice to all countries to '[test, test, test](#)' but the UK government initially took a different stance. According to Richard Horton, editor in chief of the Lancet medical journal, the government [ignored](#) the basic public health interventions needed at the time – testing, isolation and quarantine – which were so effectively implemented by China. Boris Johnson then downplayed the necessity of testing, arguing that Covid-19 could be spread by asymptomatic carriers and not all tests could be relied upon. Indeed, back in early March Boris Johnson himself had [said](#) that coronavirus was a 'mild to moderate illness' for the vast majority, whose spread could be prevented by simply washing your hands. He then prided himself in continuing to shake hands with people. One month later the Prime Minister was in intensive care, fighting for his life.

Now the UK is having to play catch-up by trying to obtain coronavirus tests at a time when they are most sought after. It is struggling to meet 25,000 tests a day for hospital staff and patients and far off the target of 100,000 tests a day previously announced by Boris Johnson. The curve may be beginning to flatten, but Britain is certainly not out of the woods yet.

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Johanna Ross is a journalist based in Edinburgh, Scotland.

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