

THE ANDREW MARR SHOW

21<sup>ST</sup> JUNE 2020

MATT HANCOCK, MP

HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE SECRETARY

(Rough transcript, check against delivery)

Nick Robinson: My final guest on the programme this week is the Health Secretary, Matt Hancock.

We have a lot to talk about, about how you're handling Coronavirus, but we to begin with a word about these terrible events in Reading last night. People have heard that this isn't being treated as a terrorist incident, but some of the detail may make them think sounds a bit funny. Is the government treating it that way, is COBRA going to meet? What more can you tell us?

MH: Well, obviously my first thoughts are with the family and the friends of those who've lost their lives and those who are currently being treated for the injuries that they suffered. This is not currently being treated as a terrorism incident, but of course we're closely monitoring the situation. I've spoken to the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister will be engaging with those police who are leading this on the ground later today. It's a police operational matter now, so obviously I can't go further into any of the details, but all I can say is that we will be seeking to bring the full force of the law to bear on the perpetrators.

NR: But it's something that the Home Secretary and Prime Minister need to take an interest in, not something they can simply say here's a terrible crime, but one we can leave to the police.

NH: Well, it's clearly a terrible crime whatever the motivation and we'll be making sure that the police have all the support they need to do whatever they choose to do operationally.

NR: Now, let's turn to what would have been the big news today, would have been all over the front pages and leading our news

bulletins. The sense that this is a week in which something is going to change in the handling of the Coronavirus. That we are going to see what we're told in Whitehall is being called 'our independence day' on July 4<sup>th</sup>. Is that what it is? Will July the 4<sup>th</sup> be this big moment of unlockdown?

MH: Well I think that we we're about to see another step in the plan and this week we will announce further details of the measures that we can take to relieve some of the national lockdown measures at the start of July, including on July 4<sup>th</sup>. That's part of the plan that we've been working through. We set it out last month and the plan's clearly working because the number of new infections is coming down. The number of people on ventilated beds in hospital for instance is coming down and thankfully the number of people who are dying is coming down. So the plan is working. We're working through the plan and the next step of the plan is at the start of July.

NR: Well let us move through that plan as well then. Two meters rule. Everybody's talking about it. Let's just start with the principle. Do you accept that in principle it's got to go or be amended if thousands of jobs, thousands of businesses are to be saved? You've got to find a way to do it.

MH: Well I very much hope that we can and that review will come to bear this week and we'll be setting out further details this week on the measures in that space.

NR: Just to be clear what you mean by that though. You mean if I'm watching and I'm a pub owner or a cafe owner or have a V&B I'll have the answers. It won't just be oh well wait for another review and a document and a regulation? You'll tell me this week. You can reopen without the two meter rules, providing you do this this and this?

MH: Yes. We're going to set out those details absolutely this week and look, I get the problems with the two meter rule, of course. Ultimately there are problems with the fact that there's a virus and

the challenge for the country, for all countries, is how to get as much of normal life as possible going again, all the things that we care about. You know it's Fathers' Day today, I wish I could go to the pub for lunch as I normally would on Fathers' Day with the family and I'm sure you do too. And how do we get as much of these things that people love back in a way that is safe and doesn't lead to the resurgence of the virus as we've seen in some other parts of the world.

NR: Well let's talk about what that way or ways may be. You and I are here two meters apart, there's tape all over here, we're being very careful as so many people are. If in the future we wanted to be closer so that a business could open or a restaurant, would we have to put a mask on for example, would that be necessary?

MH: Well there's all sorts of mitigations that you can put in place to be physically closer to the two meters but not have the transmission of the virus or the risk of transmission that you would otherwise have. So for instance we've seen in lots of the retail that's opened, lots of shops, Perspex screens. Obviously you can be closer than two meters with a Perspex screen and the risk of transmission is very, very low. Masks also make an impact, hence the rule that masks must be worn on public transport and in hospitals and there's other mitigations that you can put in place as well.

NR: What back to back? But it wouldn't make for a very good interview if we sat back to back.

MH: Well it wouldn't make for a very good pub lunch either, but back to back is much safer than face to face.

NR: Just so I've got clarity, before we move on, this will all be written down. If you do this, this and this, two meters it's gone.

MH: Well, we're going to set all of that out this week.

NR: Now what will worry some people listening to that, they'll think hold on a second I remember the Chief Medical Officer saying the two meter rule is going to carry on for as long as this epidemic continues. They might remember the Chief Scientific Adviser saying the risk at one meter is ten to 30 times higher than the risk as two meters. So they may be rather alarmed by this change.

MH: Well, I think there's two ways to respond to that. The first is that of course we're learning more about the virus all the time and the decisions that we take will be of course guided by the science as we have been throughout this. And the second thing to say is that the proposals that we'll bring forward are how you can safely – safely – reduce the two meters with the sort of mitigations that we've been talking about.

NR: Guided by the science is an interesting choice of phrase. Have they signed it off? Has Patrick Witty – I'm sorry.

MH: Patrick Witty, that's a combination of the two. I think they'll both enjoy that no end.

NR: Well have they joined together? Have they joined together to say yes, we agree?

MH: We've been guided by the science throughout this.

NR: You see the word 'guided.'

MH: I think guided is the best way of describing it because, you know, as the Health Secretary I am accountable and the Prime Minister is accountable for the decisions that we take and these are judgements taking everything into account, guided by the best possible scientific advice. That's been my case throughout. Always the language I try to use.

NR: So the other thing that people are desperate to know is whether kids will be able to go back to school. In numbers, in full in September. A full return is the phrase the Prime Minister used.

MH: Yes.

NR: Will the changes you're talking about to two meters down to one meter plus, is that going to be enough or are there more changes you'll need?

MH: Well, the measures that we're setting out later this week will undoubtedly help with schools, but on schools the approach that we're taking is that we must find a way to allow all schools to open for all pupils in as safe a way as possible.

NR: In Northern Ireland they've cut it to a meter, that's one of the ways they've done it.

MH: With other further mitigations in place, absolutely. Further safety measure alongside a change in the distance. That's how they've done it in Northern Ireland and I think –

NR: And that's how in England it's like to be?

MH: Well I talk a lot to my Northern Ireland counterpart who's a great man.

NR; Again, people will have worries. You know there are a lot of parents, very fearful, a lot of teachers very fearful and again they look to what you're being told by the scientific advisers. SAGE, according to the minutes of that advisory body said that reopening schools could lead to quotes: "significant transmission" and quotes: "have a large effect on the epidemic."

MH: Yes. So all of these things can be done when it is safe to do so in a way that it's safe to do. So you know the number of new transmissions has come right down and the whole strategy is to replace over time and when it's safe to do so the national measures with more targeted local measures. Whether that's an individual local outbreak that needs to be brought under control, or whether that's individuals being asked to isolate because they're more at high risk 'cause they've been traced as having been in contact with somebody who's tested positive.

NR: Now you're very clear about the fact you've got to be prepared for new outbreaks, local you hope and to deal with them

and you've talked about having a plan. You always say it's going to the plan. Can we just remind ourselves, we'll just look at a little graphic that was put up around about on the internet what the plan used to have. There is something that was produced only this week, a woman looking at a phone for the new NHS Covid-19 app and the critical word there is 'critical.' It will play a critical role in how the UK controls the spread of Coronavirus. Yet you said, at the same time as this was coming out, oh don't worry, we haven't got an app and we may never have one.

MH: I'm not sure I took quite that tone, Nick. Of course we'll get there. We'll get there with the app. Everybody knows the challenges that we've had but also I was only prepared to recommend to people that they download an app when I'm really confident in it.

NR: Were you surprised, were you angry when they said to you, look I'm really sorry, I know you promised it would come. It's not ready?

MH: No, angry is the wrong word because you know throughout this we have run a whole series of projects not knowing whether they'd come off and some have come off sooner rather than later. So you know in the same way that we have a trial with more than a dozen different drugs in it, two big trials and this week we saw Dexamethasone coming forward, that's a success. On the app it's been a bit slower than I would have wanted.

NR: But there's a bit of a pattern here Secretary of State, isn't there.

When something goes wrong you go. 'well, look let's be grown up about it, things go wrong,' and the public can understand, this is brand new. But at the time you don't say that. You don't say, 'well, look, we'll do our best, and maybe –'

MH: I do, I do.

NR: You've got the Chief Executive of the NHS said, 'it is essential as part of the strategy.' The prime minister said, 'we will develop a world beating system by the beginning of June.' The truth is you build up people's expectations but now you say, well..

MH: No, no. What I'm saying is that throughout this, from the start, we're running at things before we know whether or not they'll come off. The vaccine is another case in point. I don't know whether the Oxford vaccine will work, and nor do you and no does anyone. But I'm sure as hell going to give them every support I can to get it to work. On the test and trace the prime minister said we will have it up and running by the first of June – and we did that, early. And it will be world beating. And we will get there.

NR: Well, just one last one on the app. You said there was a problem with Apple. Apple told the BBC, 'we don't know what they mean by this hybrid model,' the one you want to deliver, 'they haven't even spoken to us about it.'

MH: Well, that's not true. We were talking at very senior levels, and obviously since the news –

NR: You have talked to Apple?

MH: We've been talking to them for weeks. And I think they'd reflect that if you asked them that now.

NR: Have you got a way of dealing with this if, against all your hopes and all the work, you can't get an app up and running successfully?

MH: Well, the human contact tracing is working well. And the technology in an app is an additional support to that. You know, I think it will be helpful when we can get it up and running.

NR: One of the things they've done in other countries is to look at who goes into a place. If you to a bar, if you go to a pub, you go to a restaurant, you have to write down your name, you have to write down your details in case there's an outbreak. Is that the

sort of approach we could have to see now because the app isn't doing that job for you?

MH: Well, I certainly wouldn't rule that out. Because that – it's not linked to the app, but it is an additional way that you can do contact tracing so that you can find people who might be at risk. And it plays into the broader strategy which is that if you can be more targeted, especially now there's a relatively low number of cases, if you can be more targeted – and then obviously you're still asking people to isolate for two weeks, which is a big ask, and whether it's because the app tells you that they've been at risk and close, or because of this sort of measure – for instance, they have in New Zealand, I think.

NR: Just describe what it would mean. I go to a pub under these new rules, we hope, in July, what would I then be required to do?

MH: Well, this is something that they've done in New Zealand, and what happens is that you simply ensure that when you take a restaurant booking, for instance, you take contact details so that if somebody tests positive and has been in that venue, in proximity, you'll be able to contact the people who might be at risk. And that then makes it safer to be able to lift other measures. As I say, this isn't – you know, there's lots of ideas out there.

NR: That's one of them, yeah. And without the app obviously the importance of testing and tracing becomes even more important. I just want to show you another graphic that's been coming up at Downing Street day after day, if I could now, which is about the issue of testing. You'll see there – that's the daily update we get each day – it gives us the number of tests, but on the people tested, unavailable, unavailable. Because in the end the guys who are in charge of statistics said the numbers we're getting are positively misleading. Why can't we know this data?

MH: So the people tested data is harder to get than the number of tests, because it's a measure of whether it's the first time somebody's been tested and so somebody could have been tested



a long time ago and then re-tested. And so I want to get these statistics right – and you had a discussion with Ian Diamond earlier on this programme – and therefore we're not prepared to publish statistics unless we're comfortable with them and confident that they are accurate.

NR: It has been a month – I mean, people understand it's difficult but it's been a whole month since that.

MH: Yes, but in that time we've also introduced much more testing.

NR: I think what worries people is it's a knock to people's confidence, and a lot of the things we've seen, it feels like a u-turn to people on the app. I know you're saying it isn't, but that's what it feels like to many people. On testing, all the figures are a bit dodgy and now they're not coming up with new figures. It makes them think, I'm not sure people are being quite straight with me.

MH: Yeah, I disagree with this. And actually I agree with Ian Diamond, the National Statistician, who said on the contrary, we're using data in this crisis like never before in terms of how we're using it to underpin the decisions that we make, in terms of the sheer quantity of information and transparency that we're putting in the public domain. Now, I strongly agree with the need for high quality use of statistics. I think it's incredibly important. And when we were building the testing programme we built it at record pace, getting up to that, you know, now 200,000, 230,000 tests we saw there, each day. Of course putting in place the data measures to be able to get high quality statistics out is another part of building that system. And it does take time.

NR: Another thing that knocks people's confidence is if they think it's one rule for you and another rule for somebody else. And there was that image, wasn't there, of you coming up in the House of Commons – here we are. Putting your hand on the back of someone.

NH: I don't – it was just totally natural. You know, this shows how difficult social distancing is. I know these rules inside out, and I hadn't seen my colleague for weeks and I really like him, so I walked up and – totally natural – and then, as you can see, we thought. oh-oh, hold on, and immediately –

NR: I'm sure understand, they think if even the Health Secretary can't obey the rules.

MH: I know, all I can do is say I'm incredibly sorry for this momentary breach. It's because I'm human and we're all human, and I'm no less determined to follow the rules because of a momentary breach.

NR: One last question, it's not in your area of responsibility but it is important for you as the spokesman, effectively, for the government today. The Community Secretary, Robert Jenrick has had criticism about overruling a planning inquiry, saying that he would give permission for a planning development, and then it was overruled. Now, the reason I raise it with you today is his defence was, look, he sat next to a rich guy, who happens to be a Tory donor, Richard Desmond, and said that he wouldn't really discuss it. We know now he had a four-minute video was played to him, which is let's got all the facts out there on this, get all the paperwork.

MH: Well, Mr Jenrick answered questions for an hour in the House of Commons this week, and I think, you know, he's put out a statement about this which is perfectly reasonable. That, you know, he was put on a table with Dr Desmond, he didn't know that that's where he was sitting before. So I think his explanation is entirely reasonable.

NR: Matt Hancock, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

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