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Vaccines and immunisation

UK study on mixing Covid vaccines between jabs to be expanded

Researchers to examine whether mixing vaccines might give longer-lasting immunity against virus

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A healthcare worker prepares a dose of Pfizer BioNTech vaccine.
Photograph: Alessandro Barone/Pacific Press/REX/Shutterstock

A healthcare worker prepares a dose of Pfizer BioNTech vaccine.
Photograph: Alessandro Barone/Pacific Press/REX/Shutterstock

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Wed 14 Apr 2021 02.55 EDT

A major UK study examining whether Covid vaccines can be safely mixed with different types of jabs for the first and second doses is to be expanded.

Researchers running the Com-Cov study, launched in February to investigate alternating doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccines for the first and second doses, will now include a shot of Moderna or Novavax.

The study is examining whether mixing vaccines might give broader, longer-lasting immunity against the virus and new variants of it, and offer more flexibility in the administration of vaccines.

Led by the University of Oxford, the study will seek to recruit adults aged over 50 who have received their first vaccination in the past eight to 12 weeks.

Matthew Snape, associate professor in paediatrics and vaccinology at the University of Oxford, who is chief investigator on the trial, said: “The focus of both this and the original Com-Cov study is to explore whether the multiple Covid-19 vaccines that are available can be used more flexibly, with different vaccines being used for the first and second dose.

“If we can show that these mixed schedules generate an immune response that is as good as the standard schedules, and without a significant increase in the vaccine reactions, this will potentially allow more people to complete their Covid-19 immunisation course more rapidly.

“This would also create resilience within the system in the event of a shortfall in the availability of any of the vaccines in use.”

The volunteers, who will have received either the Oxford/AstraZeneca, or Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, will be randomly allocated to receive either the same vaccine for their second dose or a dose of the jabs produced by Moderna or Novavax.

The Moderna jab has started being rolled out across the UK, and the Novavax jab manufactured by GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) is under review by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

The six new arms of the trial will each recruit 175 candidates, adding 1,050 recruits to the programme. The researchers will study any adverse reactions and the immune system responses to these new combinations of vaccines.

If the study shows promising results, the MHRA and Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) would formally assess the safety and efficacy of any new vaccination regimen before it is rolled out to patients.

Prof Snape said he hoped the results of the second part of the study would be available in June or July, with the first part expected to report results next month.

He told a press briefing: “What I’m hoping is that we won’t rule out any combinations. That’s how we need to look at it – are there any combinations we shouldn’t be giving because they don’t generate a good immune response, and I’m hoping that won’t be the case.

Quick Guide

Covid vaccine side-effects: what are they, who gets them and why?

Show

What are the most common side-effects from the Covid vaccines?

[According to Public Health England](#), most side-effects from the Covid vaccines – Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford/AstraZeneca – are mild and short-lived. These include soreness where the jab was given, feeling tired or achy and headaches. Uncommon side-effects include having swollen lymph nodes.

Why do the common side-effects occur?

“The sore arm can be either due to the trauma of the needle in the muscle, or local inflammation in the muscle probably because of the chemicals in the injection,” said Prof Robert Read, head of clinical and experimental sciences within medicine at the University of Southampton and director of the NIHR Southampton Biomedical Research Centre.

“The other common side-effects – the muscle aches, flu-like illness and fatigue – are probably due to generalised activation of the immune system caused by the vaccine. What this means is that the white blood cells that are stimulated by the vaccine to make antibodies themselves have to secrete chemicals called cytokines, interferons and chemokines, which function to send messages from cell to cell to become activated.”

Are blood clots a side-effect of the vaccines?

The Oxford/AstraZeneca jab has been linked to a small but concerning number of reports of blood clots combined with low platelet counts (platelets are cell fragments in our blood that help it to clot).

These include a rare clot in the brain called cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST). In an unvaccinated population, upper estimates suggest there may be 15 to 16 cases per million people per year.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) said recipients of the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab should look out for new headaches, blurred vision, confusion or seizures that occur four days or more after vaccination. The MHRA also flagged shortness of breath, chest pain, abdominal pain, leg swelling and unusual skin bruising as reasons to seek medical advice.

Up to and including 31 March, the MHRA said it received 79 reports of cases of blood clots combined with low platelets, including 19 deaths, following more than 20m doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab. That equates to about four cases for every million vaccinated individuals.

Two cases of blood clots with a low platelet count have also been reported among recipients of the Pfizer/BioNTech jab. The European Medicines Agency is also examining three cases of venous thromboembolism blood clots involving the Johnson & Johnson jab.

The MHRA says blood clots combined with low platelets can occur naturally in unvaccinated people as well as in those who have caught Covid, and that while evidence of a link with the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine has become stronger, more research is needed.

Nicola Davis Science correspondent

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“And that will give us lots of flexibility, not just in the UK, not just in Europe where we’re looking about restricting uses of some vaccines for some age groups, but across the world, where we have, perhaps, a little bit more intermittent supply of vaccines, not as reliable.”

Prof Jeremy Brown, a member of the JCVI, said people will eventually “have to” mix Covid-19 jabs.

He told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme: “It’s practically going to have to be that way because, once you’ve completed a course of, say, the Moderna or Pfizer or the AstraZeneca with two doses, in the future it’s going to be quite difficult to guarantee you get the same type of vaccine again.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/apr/14/uk-study-on-mixing-covid-vaccines-between-jabs-to-be-expanded>

Coronavirus

Boris Johnson: easing lockdown will increase Covid infections

PM says ‘people have just got to understand’ that vaccines alone will not stop spread of coronavirus

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Shoppers on Briggate, Leeds, as non-essential shops reopened on 12 April.
Photograph: George Wood/Getty Images

Shoppers on Briggate, Leeds, as non-essential shops reopened on 12 April.
Photograph: George Wood/Getty Images

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Tue 13 Apr 2021 14.32 EDT

Easing lockdown will inevitably create a rise in coronavirus deaths, [Boris Johnson](#) has said, crediting the lockdown rather than vaccines for “the bulk of the work” in reducing recent infection rates.

While the prime minister’s comments were intended as a reminder to people to take care amid the latest loosening of rules in [England](#), they are likely to annoy some Conservative backbenchers who are eager for reopening to happen more rapidly.

On Tuesday afternoon all Tory MPs were sent a letter from Matt Hancock, the health secretary, hailing the [success in offering at least a first vaccination](#) to everyone in the first phase of priority groups by mid-April. It argued that “it is because of the success of the vaccination rollout” that restrictions can be lifted.

But in comments made at Downing Street on Tuesday amid widespread coverage of busy shopping streets and [packed pub beer gardens](#) following Monday’s reopening in England of non-essential retail and outside hospitality spaces, Johnson urged caution.

“It’s great that we have managed to achieve the target of getting everyone in the one to nine groups vaccinated by the deadline, by the timetable – a little bit ahead actually, 32 million people now have got their first dose, which is terrific,” he said. “We are going now to the 45-49 group; they are being asked to come forward.”

He continued: “Of course the vaccination programme has helped, but the bulk of the work in reducing the disease has been done by the lockdown. So, as we unlock, the result will inevitably be that we will see more infection, sadly we will see more hospitalisation and deaths. People have just got to understand that.”

A number of Conservative backbenchers, centred around the [Covid Recovery Group](#) of MPs, are calling for a faster pace of lockdown easing than planned, and are likely to be alarmed by Johnson saying vaccination alone will not be sufficient to provide some return to normality – even though government scientists have said this repeatedly.

In his comments, Johnson said there were no immediate plans to change the [roadmap out of lockdown for England](#), which is set in five-week stages.

He said: “But it is very, very important that, if we are to get there in the way that we all want, people continue to be cautious and they continue to exercise restraint and just do the basic things to stop the spread of the virus – washing your hands, giving people plenty of space, doing things in fresh air.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/13/boris-johnson-easing-lockdown-will-increase-covid-infections>

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Coronavirus

Surge testing may not be enough to curb Covid variants in UK, say scientists

Local restrictions may be needed, specialists warn, as South Africa strain is identified in London

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People take Covid-19 tests at a mobile surge testing centre in Brockwell Park, south London, on 13 April. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty Images

People take Covid-19 tests at a mobile surge testing centre in Brockwell Park, south London, on 13 April. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty Images

Nicola Davis Science correspondent
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Tue 13 Apr 2021 13.06 EDT

Local restrictions should be imposed to curb the spread of coronavirus variants when clusters emerge to avoid local or national lockdowns, scientists have said after the UK's biggest surge testing operation got under way.

In south London, dozens of cases of the South Africa variant of Covid-19 have been detected, chiefly in the boroughs of Wandsworth and Lambeth, leading to what the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has said is the “largest surge testing operation to date”.

Everyone aged 11 years and over who lives, studies, works or travels through these areas is being asked to take a PCR test for the coronavirus – even if they do not have symptoms of Covid. Positive samples are then further analysed to determine which variant is present.

The South Africa variant of the coronavirus is of concern as studies suggest it can, at least to some degree, dodge the body's immune responses including those produced by some Covid vaccines. Scientists have warned that surge testing alone is not enough to tackle the problem.

“Surge testing can work if it is broad enough and intensive, but needs to be accompanied by good adherence to at least some restrictions and isolation of contacts, in order to avoid having anything like a local lockdown again,” said Rowland Kao, a professor of epidemiology at the University of Edinburgh who contributes to the Spi-M modelling subgroup of Sage, the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies.

Kao added that should the data suggest the current clusters could be contained, “then while it is a difficult choice to make given how long restrictions have already been, yes, some continued restrictions would be in order”.

One problem, said Kao, is that the more people are allowed to move between regions, the harder it is to contain any outbreaks of variants of concern – such as the South Africa variant. That, he said, means surge

testing would be needed over larger areas than was the case earlier this year, when the country was in lockdown.

“I’d recommend working as hard as possible to stamp out these outbreaks,” said Kao. “You won’t be able to do so forever – or at least, can’t guarantee it – but anything to slow down its spread will mean more of the country can continue to have lowered restrictions.”

Gabriel Scally, a visiting professor of public health at the University of Bristol and a member of the Independent Sage committee of experts, also stressed that urgent action is needed, and backed the need for increased restrictions where clusters occur.

“We are going to be moving into an era when we do get these local flare-ups,” he said, adding these could include variants of concern.

“If you are really trying to suppress the virus in an area, you can’t afford to leave it to people to self-isolate if they get symptoms,” he said.

He said vaccinations could be an important tool since they had been shown to not only protect against serious disease but reduce the spread of the virus.

“You’d do something called ‘ring vaccination’ so you would find the epicentre of whatever outbreak it is and then vaccinate everyone around it,” he said.

Scally added it was vital there was testing of close contacts of people who had tested positive for the coronavirus, and said measures such as temporarily closing schools or other facilities should be taken – even before the full results of the surge testing had been received.

“It is never too early to impose local restrictions if we know there is an upsurge, and they do know that there are variant cases involved,” he said.

Kao said it should be possible to determine quite quickly which variants were involved in positive cases, noting the sequencing process can take less than half a day.

“Thus it should be possible to rapidly put in restrictions, intensively test and sequence and, within a couple of days at the very least, release them if they aren’t necessary,” he said. “But it all depends on resources – and … it doesn’t mean a thing if self-isolation isn’t good enough.” Indeed, earlier this month, researchers revealed that only half of individuals said they were fully self-isolating after symptoms develop.

However, surge testing deployed in parts of the UK earlier this year drew criticism from some local leaders who said it took far longer than expected for data to be provided on how many positive cases involved the South Africa variant.

Surrey county council has confirmed to the Guardian that while the number of positive cases was reported within days, the sequencing process to determine the variants involved took longer, with results coming through the DHSC after a few weeks.

A Public Health England spokesperson confirmed that genomic sequencing to detect the presence of any variants takes about two weeks to complete, but added: “We are using a genomic assay to provide a more rapid initial result to allow early public health action and investigation.”

PHE pushed back against calls for areas to go under tighter restrictions immediately, stating: “The interventions we have put in place are precautionary at this point. If the additional testing shows widespread community transmission, then we will re-evaluate the approach.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/13/surge-testing-may-not-be-enough-to-curb-covid-variants-in-uk-say-scientists>

Coronavirus

‘All very uncertain’: Lambeth reacts to South African Covid variant cluster

As surge testing is deployed in London borough, residents have mixed feelings on lockdown easing

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Danish Pervez, 33, who works for Lambeth Dry Cleaners & Laundry. ‘All the precautions should be taken before easing the lockdown,’ he says. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Danish Pervez, 33, who works for Lambeth Dry Cleaners & Laundry. ‘All the precautions should be taken before easing the lockdown,’ he says. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

[Rhi Storer](#)

Tue 13 Apr 2021 13.09 EDT

As Britain opens up its pubs, hairdressers, and gyms, optimism is in the air. But the news that a significant cluster of the South African coronavirus variant has been found in south [London](#) has cast a cloud over the reopening there.

Officials [are deploying surge testing](#) in the boroughs of Wandsworth and Lambeth after 44 confirmed and 30 probable cases were identified. Danish Perwez, 33, who works for Lambeth Dry Cleaners & Laundry, has read about it in the news and is worried about the variant spreading and the threat to his customers.

“Everybody wants businesses to go back to normal. All the precautions should be taken before easing the lockdown,” he says. “If the situation is going to get worse, the government should wait. Instead of suffering the whole year, if we only have to suffer a couple of more weeks, it will be much better.”

As part of an essential business, Perwez has been working since [the second lockdown](#) was first enforced in November. He had hoped, with hospitality operating for the first time in months, more people would get dressed up for messy nights out – and, ultimately, more dry cleaning.

However, the variant has given him pause for thought. “We should learn from our past. Because if we are going to have more mixing, and not follow the precautions, then it’s going to take even longer.”



Beth Forbes, a barista at the Parlour in Herne Hill, south London.
Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Beth Forbes, 61, works as a barista at the Parlour in Herne Hill. She says she is “confused” by the numbers of cases reported in Lambeth. But she is enthusiastic to participate in the mass testing scheme – “I would get a test. Absolutely. Why not?” – and like many of those who work in hospitality, is delighted that customers are returning. “They’re lovely, and really, really nice around here.”

But she feels concern at the possibility of another wave and potential lockdown. “Judging by what I’ve heard in Europe, they’ve got loads of cases, and they’ve been locked down again. I can understand it was the first day and people wanted a pint in the pub, but they’re all packed together like sardines, and it just doesn’t make sense.”



Ty Lamont taking a walk in Brockwell Park. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

In Brockwell Park, Brixton, Ty Lamont, 35, and Shelby Davis, 31, are taking a walk to escape the stress of lockdown. “There should be more testing. After all it’s a public virus,” says Lamont.

Davis, who is a trained chef, says the coronavirus guidelines boil down to “personal hygiene”, adding: “When you’re trained as a chef, you have your outdoor clothes and your indoor clothes. How is this not in any of the guidelines? It’s all a matter of personal hygiene.

“The fact we don’t stand 2 metres apart when introducing yourself to someone from the get go, should tell you something.”



Lina Sleptsova, 21, a student the London College of Communications.
Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Lina Sleptsova, 21, a student the London College of Communications, and Harry Cook, 23, a police officer, were also at Brockwell Park. Sleptsova is becoming more optimistic as lockdown eases: “I think I got sick when the new Covid variant came up in December. I am worried because, what if they close everything again?”

Both Sleptsova and Cook feel strongly about getting tested for the new variant. But what about their friends? “A lot of my friends will succumb to the pressure, so I feel like they will!” says Sleptsova. “They aren’t very opinionated. I think they’ll say: ‘Oh well, if I have to do it, then I guess I will.’ For my friends, if it’s right, they’ll do it.”

For Cook, it’s “difficult to say” whether he is truly worried about the effect of lockdown easing. “The cases are coming down, they’ve been coming down for a long time now. We can’t stay in lockdown forever.”

“There’s no real telling what’s going to happen is there?” he adds. “It’s all very uncertain.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/13/its-all-very-uncertain-lambeth-on-the-surge-in-the-south-african-variant>

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Wednesday briefing: Greensill lobbying row deepens

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Lobbying

Civil servant advised Greensill while working in Whitehall, says watchdog

Bill Crothers became a director of finance firm months after leaving civil service, records show



Records at Companies House show Crothers became a director at Greensill in August 2016. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

Records at Companies House show Crothers became a director at Greensill in August 2016. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

[Jessica Elgot](#), [Kalyeena Makortoff](#) and [Rajeev Syal](#)

Tue 13 Apr 2021 15.17 EDT

The scandal over [Greensill](#) Capital's influence within government has deepened as it emerged one of Britain's most senior civil servants began working as an adviser to the finance firm while still serving in Whitehall – with the approval of the Cabinet Office.

Downing Street and Cabinet Office sources were said to be “deeply concerned” at the revelation that official approval was given for Bill Crothers to begin advising Greensill in September 2015 while still employed in the civil service.

Crothers, who was the government’s chief commercial officer, left that role two months later and went on to become a director of Greensill, gaining a shareholding potentially worth \$8m (£5.8m) before the [lender collapsed last month](#).

Crothers has denied any wrongdoing and said such outside roles were “not uncommon” – a claim that has caused alarm in Downing Street.

[Labour pushes for MPs’ inquiry to head off Greensill scandal ‘cover-up’](#)
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Greensill is at the centre of a high-profile lobbying scandal after the former prime minister David Cameron, who was a special adviser to the company’s board and [partly paid in share options](#), was found to have [sent texts and emails to ministers](#) as he sought approval for policies that would benefit the lender.

On Monday Boris Johnson bowed to pressure to order an independent inquiry. The Guardian understands No 10 has ordered that inquiry to examine the approval process that meant Crothers was given leave to advise the company while still an impartial civil servant. Sources said the approval was given by the former Cabinet Office permanent secretary John Manzoni.

Crothers worked as the government’s chief commercial officer from 2012 to 2015, helping to create the Crown Commercial Service, an agency of the Cabinet Office, and earning up to £149,000 a year. He left the civil service two months after he began advising Greensill and became a director of the company in August 2016.

The detail was revealed in a letter from Crothers to an official watchdog, published on the government’s website on Tuesday. It had asked him to account for why he had not sought signoff for his 2016 appointment as a Greensill director.

In his letter to the advisory committee on business appointments (Acoba), Crothers confirmed he was “given approval to take up a part-time board advisory role with Greensill Capital starting from September 2015, whilst employed as a civil servant”.

He said Greensill was then a small firm “which did not conduct any business with UK government”. Crothers added: “This advisory role was not seen as contentious, and I believe not uncommon.”

This was questioned by one Whitehall source who said many civil servants applied for advisory roles that were neither commercial nor included a potential conflict of interest, such as positions in charities, school boards or housing associations. The Cabinet Office is understood not to keep records of how many civil servants have advisory roles to firms.

One former cabinet minister said the disclosure could severely damage the reputation of senior civil servants. “We have to be able to trust that a civil servant does not have a second job and is completely impartial, or have a public register of their interests as we have for MPs,” they said.

The company’s Australian founder, [Lex Greensill](#), had been embedded within government as an adviser on supply chain finance since 2011, brought in by the late former cabinet secretary Sir Jeremy Heywood. However, Greensill Capital did not begin to provide its own services to government until it took over an early payment system for pharmacists in 2018.

The head of Acoba, the Conservative peer Eric Pickles, has demanded to see the guidance on the conflicts of interest process that approved Crothers’ appointment. He had previously written to Crothers and the Cabinet Office to ask why Crothers did not seek the watchdog’s advice about his 2016 appointment as a Greensill director.

“The lack of transparency around this part-time employment with Greensill may have left the misleading impression that Mr Crothers had wilfully ignored the obligation to seek advice,” he wrote.

Company records show Crothers incorporated his own management consultancy in September 2015, named Commercial Common Sense – one of his catchphrases at the Crown Commercial Service, and mirroring its acronym. A December 2016 Acoba letter said “Mr Crothers’ former department had no concerns about him setting up a consultancy”.

After leaving office, Crothers held at least five meetings with a Whitehall official between 2016 and 2020.

Transparency records show he met Manzoni, who was in charge of the day-to-day running of the Cabinet Office until last year, in April and December 2016, January and May 2018 and February 2020. Transparency documents described the discussions as relating to “commercial capability”, “stakeholder relationship” and “business issues”. Crothers is not declared as having approached Manzoni on behalf of any private company.

Crothers also attended a “private drinks” meeting between the health secretary, Matt Hancock, [Cameron](#) and Lex Greensill in October 2019, according to the Times.

Hancock, asked in parliament on Tuesday about reports he met Greensill for a drink, conceded that “absolutely I attended a social meeting”. He said it was “organised” by Cameron and that “given departmental business came up, I reported to officials in the normal way”.

Though Hancock said his actions were “appropriate” and “within the rules”, it raises questions about why it was not before known that he flagged the discussion of “departmental business” with civil servants. The government has refused to explain why Hancock’s comments on the discussions with Greensill that concerned departmental business were not published as part of its quarterly transparency publications.

The Guardian revealed on Tuesday that Crothers had a stake in Greensill, which could have been worth much more if the firm had successfully floated on the stock market at the \$7bn valuation touted by the lender to potential investors last year. Instead, the company collapsed into administration in

early March, rendering shareholdings worthless and putting thousands of jobs indirectly at risk.

In a letter to Lord Pickles last week, Crothers said: “I am concerned that there may be a view that I did not follow proper process regarding my role with Greensill Capital. I assure you that I completely respect the required process and your office, took steps to comply, and believe that I did so ...

“The [Cabinet Office] approval was to be a [Greensill] board adviser, attending board meetings, with the role developing, discussed as becoming a director. This was agreed via the Cabinet Office internal conflicts of interest policy, which advises on how to address real or perceived conflicts of interest.”

A Cabinet Office spokesman said: “We have responded to the initial letter from Lord Pickles, and will respond to his further letter in due course. The [new] [Boardman review](#) into Greensill Capital and supply chain finance will be wide-ranging and will also consider the issues raised so the public can judge whether they were appropriately handled at the time.”

Labour is to force a binding Commons vote on Wednesday to establish a wide-ranging parliamentary inquiry into [Cameron](#) and the lobbying scandal, saying the government cannot “mark its own homework”. It will propose setting up a committee of MPs with the power to ask witnesses to give evidence and answer questions, including Cameron and the four cabinet ministers who were lobbied by him.

The inquiry would demand that the government publishes all communications relating to Greensill Capital between Cameron, Johnson, Hancock and Sunak, as well as special advisers and senior staff. Labour is unlikely to win the vote in the Commons if Johnson whips [Conservatives](#) to oppose it, but it would force the government to explain why it does not wish its own inquiry to be so broad.

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Lobbying

Greensill inquiry is attempt to deflect blame from ministers – Whitehall union

FDA says David Cameron and government seem to want to point finger at the late Jeremy Heywood



The then British prime minister, David Cameron, outside 10 Downing Street in February 2016. Photograph: Justin Tallis/AFP/Getty Images

The then British prime minister, David Cameron, outside 10 Downing Street in February 2016. Photograph: Justin Tallis/AFP/Getty Images

[Rajeev Syal](#)

Wed 14 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

An inquiry into lobbying launched by Boris Johnson is an attempt to deflect attention from the role of ministers in the [Greensill](#) scandal, the head of the senior civil servants' union has said.

Dave Penman, the general secretary of the FDA, told the Guardian that the investigation has no specific remit to examine whether four ministers contacted by [David Cameron](#) as he lobbied on behalf of his employer, Greensill, acted within the rules.

The chancellor, [Rishi Sunak](#), the Treasury ministers Jesse Norman and John Glen, and the health secretary, Matt Hancock, are known to have been contacted by Cameron as the former prime minister sought public funding or contracts for the finance firm Greensill and its products.

The scandal has engulfed Johnson's government after Cameron, who was an adviser to the Greensill board, was found to have sent multiple texts and emails to ministers as he sought approval for policies that would benefit the lender.

On Tuesday, it emerged that Bill Crothers, a senior civil servant who went on to serve as a director of Greensill Capital, started advising the firm [while still working in Whitehall](#), with the approval of the Cabinet Office.

Penman claims that the inquiry – to be conducted by the corporate lawyer [Nigel Boardman](#) – will focus on the conduct of civil servants including the late Sir Jeremy Heywood, the former cabinet secretary, but skate over the role of ministers.

"This smacks to me of a classic attempt to deflect attention from current ministers and how they responded to Cameron's lobbying. Yes, an inquiry has been set up and yes, of course it needs to look at supply chain finance and Greensill's role in government, but that is where the information released on the formal inquiry ends."

"There is no detail of whether it will look at the specific allegations around his lobbying of ministers," he said.

Under pressure from civil servants and ministers over the damaging row, a short statement from the Cabinet Office on Monday announced the inquiry.

It said: "The prime minister has asked Mr Boardman to conduct a review that will look into the decisions taken around the development and use of

supply chain finance (and associated schemes) in government, especially the role of Lex Greensill and Greensill Capital.

“Mr Boardman will have access to all necessary government information required to conduct the review and will engage with those involved at the time when decisions were made and will report his findings to the prime minister no later than the end of June 2021.”

Following the release of the statement, government sources told journalists that the inquiry would examine Cameron’s approaches to ministers. Penman said the statement did not mention the role of ministers and argued that off-the-record briefings should not be used to define the remit of a major inquiry.

“Can influence be bought? Can ex-ministers or prime ministers use their contacts to gain privileged access, essentially for private gain?” he asked. “This is not simply a question for Cameron, but for ministers and the regulations around lobbyists. If public trust is to be rebuilt, those issues have to be at the heart of any formal inquiry, not just vague promises in informal briefings from No 10.”

In a [lengthy statement](#) released after a month’s silence, Cameron blamed Heywood for bringing Lex Greensill into government and said the UK’s most senior civil servant did so to allow companies in supply chains to access low-cost credit.

Penman said he suspected that the government, as well as Cameron, was seeking to deflect the blame on to senior civil servants including Heywood, who died in 2018.

He said: “Civil servants, past and present should rightly be held to account for their actions and decisions – will that be true of ministers? Cameron’s statement, and now the announcement from government, seem more concerned with pointing the finger at [Jeremy Heywood](#), who is unable to answer back, than they do about scrutiny of their own actions.”

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David Cameron

Labour pushes for MPs' inquiry to head off Greensill scandal 'cover-up'

Exclusive: Opposition to force vote on investigation into Cameron and lobbying of ministers



Labour's proposed committee would have the power to ask David Cameron to face questioning. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

Labour's proposed committee would have the power to ask David Cameron to face questioning. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

*[Jessica Elgot](#) Deputy political editor
[@jessicaelgot](#)*

Tue 13 Apr 2021 07.59 EDT

Labour is to force a binding Commons vote to establish a wide-ranging parliamentary inquiry into [David Cameron](#) and the Greensill lobbying scandal, saying the government cannot “mark its own homework”.

It will propose setting up a committee of MPs with the power to ask witnesses to give evidence and answer questions – including Cameron himself and the cabinet ministers who were lobbied by the former prime minister, including the chancellor, [Rishi Sunak](#), and the health secretary, Matt Hancock.

The inquiry would demand that the government publish all communications relating to Greensill Capital between Cameron, [Boris Johnson](#), Hancock and Sunak, as well as special advisers and senior staff.

Labour is unlikely to win the vote in the Commons at its opposition day debate on Wednesday if Johnson whips [Conservatives](#) to oppose it – but it will force the government to explain why it does not wish its own inquiry, announced on Monday, to be so wide-ranging.

Labour had hoped to force Sunak to the Commons on Tuesday for an urgent question on why [Greensill](#) was given powers to offer government-backed coronavirus interruption loans, but the government sent a junior minister, arguing the remit for the loans is a matter for the Department for Business.

Opening the urgent question debate, the shadow chancellor, Anneliese Dodds, said Sunak was “running scared” over providing answers about the issue.

Responding for the government, the junior business minister, Paul Scully, said his department administered the scheme, which meant he should appear.

Scully deflected Dodds’ questions on Greensill by saying this would be examined by the government inquiry. “The government recognises the interest in the matter, but it’s right that we now let that review happen and do its work,” he said.

Labour’s proposed inquiry would also look at the effectiveness of existing legislation to prevent inappropriate lobbying of ministers and the rules governing all public officials regarding conflicts of interest, which a number of MPs and campaigners have said are unacceptably weak.

The government's independent inquiry will be led by the senior corporate lawyer Nigel Boardman and examine the use of supply-chain finance, offered by Greensill, as well as the role of its founder Lex Greensill, who was an adviser in Cameron's government. It will also look at the former prime minister's lobbying on behalf of the now-collapsed company during the past year.

Labour has said the Boardman investigation has "all the hallmarks of a Conservative cover-up", drawing comparisons with the Priti Patel bullying inquiry, when Johnson ignored the advice of civil servants and kept the home secretary in post, as well as the intelligence committee report on Russian interference.

It said those had also been held behind closed doors and resulted in little or no action.

The shadow chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster, Rachel Reeves, said: "Any Conservative who wants to stop the cronyism rampant in their party and in government must vote with Labour this week to uncover once and for all the truth behind this scandal.

"The Greensill scandal is just the tip of the iceberg in Conservative cronyism, which has been endemic during the pandemic and long before – laced through billions of pounds of contracts paid for by taxpayers and a slew of troubling senior appointments."

Labour said it would aim to have the report to the house no later than 18 October 2021 and that it should consist of 16 cross-party MPs and be chaired by a backbencher, elected by fellow MPs.

[Tories accused of corruption and NHS privatisation by former chief scientist](#)
[Read more](#)

Cameron had welcomed the government's independent inquiry and his spokesman said he would "be glad to take part".

Cameron admitted he regretted the manner of his lobbying efforts on behalf of Greensill, including [messages to Sunak](#), two junior ministers, senior civil

servants and a No 10 special adviser – but said he had broken no rules. He said he had reflected on his conduct and accepted that he should have communicated “through only the most formal of channels” and there were important lessons to be learned.

Cameron repeatedly texted Sunak and others to ask him to grant Greensill Capital access to the Bank of England’s Covid corporate financing facility (CCFF), which Treasury officials explored but ultimately did not grant.

While access to the CCFF was ultimately rebuffed, the National Audit Office is considering a request to investigate how Greensill Capital was later accredited to the coronavirus large business interruption loan scheme (CLBILS), handing it the ability to offer government-backed loans of up to £50m.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/apr/13/labour-pushes-for-mps-inquiry-to-head-off-greensill-scandal-cover-up>

Lobbying

Nigel Boardman: from GQ list to chairing Greensill lobbying inquiry

Corporate lawyer is supremely qualified, say friends, but his close connections are set to be scrutinised



Boardman was a partner at a law firm that is deeply connected to the loan scheme David Cameron sought to access. Photograph: Micha Theiner/Cityam/Rex/Shutterstock

Boardman was a partner at a law firm that is deeply connected to the loan scheme David Cameron sought to access. Photograph: Micha Theiner/Cityam/Rex/Shutterstock



Jessica Elgot

@jessicaelgot

Tue 13 Apr 2021 13.35 EDT

The corporate lawyer chosen to chair the inquiry into the Greensill lobbying scandal was once named one of [GQ's most connected men](#) in Britain – but his close connections in the world of finance and politics are set to come under scrutiny.

Nigel Boardman was a long-term partner at the international law firm Slaughter and May, a role he left in 2019, though he continues to be a senior consultant at the firm. Slaughter and May is deeply connected to the coronavirus loan scheme that David Cameron sought to access on behalf of Greensill Capital – repeatedly [texting the chancellor](#), Rishi Sunak, on its behalf.

Lawyers from the firm were “working as an integrated team with Treasury legal advisers” as the Treasury set up the Covid corporate financing facility (CCFF), announced by Sunak on 17 March 2020, according to a release [on the firm’s website](#).

[Civil servant advised Greensill while working in Whitehall, says watchdog](#)

[Read more](#)

The loans, operated by the Bank of England on behalf of the Treasury, provide lending to large companies that had investment-grade credit ratings before the Covid pandemic.

The firm is also well connected with regulation of ex-ministers' business interests. Sarah de Gay, Boardman's senior colleague at Slaughter and May, the firm's special adviser on regulatory matters, has recently been appointed to the government's [Advisory Committee on Business Appointments](#).

That body advises former ministers and senior civil servants on whether and how they can take up appointments after their time in government, intended to prevent immoral use of former contacts but regularly criticised by transparency campaigners for being in effect toothless.

Slaughter and May previously made a joint submission with other law firms, approved by De Gay, that challenged the Cameron administration when the then prime minister [proposed to change lobbying rules](#). It suggested that adopting a blanket statutory register of lobbyists "may have the effect of stifling productive, even essential, dialogue".

Friends of Boardman described him as "the most eminent banking lawyer of his generation" and said he was supremely qualified to understand the intricacies of Greensill's offer and the world of lobbying that Cameron inhabited after resigning as prime minister in 2016.

One senior lawyer said there was some surprise in legal circles that Boardman took the role given the review's limited terms of reference, though No 10 has said he will be given relatively free rein to recommend changes to lobbying rules and can examine government documents. He will have no legal power to compel anyone to give evidence, however.

Another senior lawyer said Boardman would not be a government puppet but added that, given his commercial experience, "all his instincts will be to defend financial institutions".

Boardman previously led a Cabinet Office review into the procurement process of Covid contracts early in the pandemic.

Jolyon Maugham QC, the director of the Good Law Project, which has investigated and launched [legal action over government Covid contracts](#), said: “Nigel Boardman is a man with an impressive reputation who can be relied upon to tell the truth even if that truth emerges in so coded a form that few outside the establishment will understand it. But I do have real concerns about the issues he will be asked to look at – and the stones he will be told to leave unturned.”

Son of the former Conservative cabinet minister Lord Boardman, the inquiry’s head has said he will step back as a non-executive director at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Labour said Boardman’s firm and its close connections with government raised questions over the inquiry’s impartiality. The shadow chancellor, Anneliese Dodds, said: “The man investigating why the chancellor pushed his team to give Greensill Capital access to the CCFF works for the law firm that advised the Treasury on the CCFF.

“This investigation has all the hallmarks of a Conservative cover-up, which is why Labour will force a vote in the House of Commons tomorrow to establish a full, transparent, parliament-run inquiry into the Greensill scandal.”

Boardman has been approached for comment.

A Cabinet Office spokesperson said: “Nigel Boardman is a distinguished legal expert and he was asked to lead this review following the appropriate due diligence checks. The review will examine the facts thoroughly.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/apr/13/nigel-boardman-from-pages-of-gg-to-chairing-the-greensill-inquiry>.

The Queen

Queen returns to royal duties four days after death of Prince Philip

Monarch held ceremony for the retirement of her household's most senior official, the Lord Chamberlain



The flag at Buckingham Palace has been flown at half mast since the duke's death. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

The flag at Buckingham Palace has been flown at half mast since the duke's death. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

[Nadeem Badshah](#)

Tue 13 Apr 2021 18.35 EDT

The Queen has returned to royal duties, four days after the death of the Duke of Edinburgh, to mark the retirement of her household's most senior official.

The monarch held her first in-person event to host a ceremony at Windsor as William Peel formally stood down as Lord Chamberlain. The earl had overseen the arrangements for the duke's funeral, known as Operation Forth Bridge. He had handed responsibility for the operation to his successor, former MI5 spy chief Andrew Parker, just a week before [Prince Philip](#) died at Windsor Castle.

The Lord Chamberlain's Office, led by the Queen's Comptroller, Lt Col Michael Vernon, is tasked with the practical side of the service on Saturday. But in overall charge is Lord Parker, who took up his new role on 1 April following Peel's retirement after more than 14 years in the post.

Reports have speculated that the Queen might have to sit on her own during the funeral in St George's chapel because Covid rules state that people must stay at least 2 metres apart from anyone who is not part of their household.

01:27

Prince Philip's death has left 'a huge void' for the Queen, says Prince Andrew – video

The Queen does not meet the requirements under the rules to join a support bubble because she does not live alone. However, a member of her Windsor Castle staff would be allowed to sit with her, and it seems unlikely the monarch will not have someone to accompany her at her husband's funeral.

The 30 mourners allowed at the ceremony under coronavirus rules must wear face coverings during the service and are not allowed to sing. Government rules state only one "professional" person can sing at funerals and only up to three individuals can sing "if it is essential to an act of worship".

The armed forces are stepping up preparations for the duke's funeral, which will feature servicemen and women from the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, army and RAF alongside senior military brass.

Soldiers from the Corps of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers are believed to be working to prepare the special Land Rover, which the duke helped design, that will carry his coffin on Saturday.

Meanwhile, the Princess Royal took part in her first official event since the death of her father, joining the Royal College of Emergency Medicine's spring conference via video link in her role as the organisation's patron.

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[Australian arts in focus](#)Neighbours

Neighbours: more actors come forward with allegations of racist slurs and discrimination on set

Exclusive: Sharon Johal left the Australian soap last month but says she endured a ‘painful’ four years, alleging ‘direct, indirect and casual racism’ from fellow cast members



Neighbours actor Sharon Johal has claimed she endured ‘direct, indirect and casual racism’ on set. Photograph: Hanna Lassen/Getty Images for Australian Turf Club

Neighbours actor Sharon Johal has claimed she endured ‘direct, indirect and casual racism’ on set. Photograph: Hanna Lassen/Getty Images for Australian Turf Club

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About this content

Kelly Burke

Tue 13 Apr 2021 19.00 EDT

One of Neighbours' longstanding cast members has claimed she endured "direct, indirect and casual racism" on set, including racial slurs and mockery, saying the past four years starring in the long-running Australian soapie were "painful and problematic".

In a detailed 1,500 word statement provided to Guardian Australia, Sharon Johal said she tried to "deny, bury and ultimately survive" racist taunts allegedly from some of her colleagues. She also claimed that the television show's production company, Fremantle Media, failed to take any effective action to rein in the alleged behaviour and left her feeling powerless, isolated and marginalised.

[Neighbours actor allegedly removed from set after complaints of racism by Indigenous actor Shareena Clanton](#)

[Read more](#)

Johal has since posted her full statement on her website via her social media pages.

Johal, who left the show last month after portraying the central character of Dipi Rebecchi on the Network 10 show since April 2017, alleged during her four-year tenure on the show she was repeatedly referred to as one of “you people” by another cast member when they referenced people of Indian descent.

Johal said she initially asked her colleague what was meant by “you people” and she was told “you know, Indians”.

Johal also alleges a crew member alerted her and her husband to the fact one cast member was repeatedly referring to her on set as “the black one” behind her back. The Guardian has spoken to this crew member who said “the black one” reference towards Johal was used on multiple occasions to “entertain” the Neighbours set, but never within earshot of Johal herself.

“[We’re] the crusty old television crew, and we’ve seen a bit, but...we were shocked that [the cast member] was so open and brazen with what they were saying, and we just thought...they were like holding court,” the crew member said.

“And [the cast member] called [Johal] the black one, and said ‘she had no skill or ability’ and ‘it only got the job because of...a token kind of inclusiveness’.”

Johal has also alleged a former cast member compared her to a bobble-head toy, and on other occasions, despite her repeatedly asking them to refrain from doing so, they mimicked in front of her the Indian character Apu from The Simpsons, “with accompanying Indian accent and movement of head”.

“There are many people at Neighbours who are genuinely working behind the scenes to support minorities [but from some cast members] I was not supported in these distressing moments,” she said.

Indigenous actor Shareena Clanton, who first raised allegations of racism on the Neighbours set last week, told the Guardian she witnessed first-hand a crew member and a cast member calling Johal a “cunt” on set on separate occasions, after the Indian-Australian actor confronted her coworkers over offensive comments.

“I was later told by the same cast member that the only reason [Johal] and other people of colour are hired was to fulfil the show’s diversity quota and not because they were any good,” Clanton said.

“They said ‘you just have to have a different coloured skin that’s not white and speak in a funny accent’.”

Johal said she had decided to speak out because she believed the controversy had become a human rights issue and she wanted to play a role in bringing about transformative change, not just at Neighbours but “to the screen industry more broadly”.

As a woman of colour, she said she recognised the “great strides” the television show had made in recent years and the contribution the series had made to her own career.

“But it is clear the system has failed,” she said. “It’s both heartbreaking and telling of our industry that a show considered diverse still struggles with protecting these people in reality, behind the scenes.”



Sharon Johal attending the NGV Gala 2019 at the National Gallery of Victoria on 30 November 2019. Photograph: Sam Tabone/Getty Images for NGV

Johal said she complained to Fremantle Media on a number of occasions about racist comments on the Neighbours set.

“I was sympathised with and [one] actor was reprimanded on one occasion, unfortunately causing me to be targeted further, [but] no further action was taken,” she said. “The company’s position was that I needed to come to them directly at the time each of these incidents occurred.”

Johal said she believed the production house failed to take into consideration the reticence of a victim to come forward in a workplace culture in which perpetrators were not seen to be held accountable, and in circumstances where the victim was afraid of being further targeted by the perpetrator and believed they risked losing their job if they reported the incident.

After fellow Indigenous actor Meyne Wyatt responded to Clanton’s allegations, posting on Twitter last week that he too had been the victim of racism while working on the Neighbours set between 2014 and 2016, Fremantle issued a statement.

[‘There are no more excuses’: six industry insiders on Australian TV’s problem with race](#)

[Read more](#)

“We do not tolerate behaviour that does not align to our Anti-Discrimination, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Harassment & Bullying Policy and take all complaints very seriously, investigating all allegations fairly and thoroughly,” the statement said.

The company said it would conduct an independent review into alleged systemic racism on the Neighbours set.

“We remain committed to ensuring a respectful and inclusive workplace for all employees on the set of Neighbours and take very seriously any questions about racism or any other form of discrimination,” a spokesperson from Fremantle Asia Pacific said in a statement to Guardian Australia in response to Johal’s allegations.

“We are engaging an independent legal investigation to work concurrently with [Indigenous consultancy firm] Campfire X’s cultural review and hope to work directly with the individuals that have raised concerns, following which we will take whatever next steps are appropriate.”

Network Ten, which screens Neighbours in Australia, said in a statement last week: “Network 10 does not tolerate discriminatory or racist behaviour in any form. We work closely with all our production partners to ensure everyone has access to a diverse, inclusive and safe working environment. We support ongoing education and dialogue in the fight against racism and discrimination. We will work with Fremantle, and all cast and crew, to investigate and ensure Neighbours continues to foster a fully inclusive environment.”

‘Discriminatory’ contract

Another former Neighbours actor has told the Guardian that while he did not experience any examples of overt racism on set, he believed the way he and his fellow actors of colour were treated by some senior management at Fremantle Media had been discriminatory.

Sachin Joab, who was hired in 2011 and spent two years on the Neighbours set, said he was initially thrilled when he was cast as Erinsborough lawyer Ajay Kapoor. It was only the second major role the Australian-born actor had won where he did not have to feign an Indian or Middle Eastern accent.

Joab told the Guardian it was made clear to him that the show’s production house, Fremantle Media, was looking to boost its UK ratings, and with an Indian diaspora of more than 1.4 million people, Fremantle believed the introduction of a character of Indian heritage would reel in that UK demographic.

After a tentative few episodes, Joab’s character was declared a success and he was provided with a wife (played by Menik Gooneratne), and a teenage daughter (played by Coco Cherian).

But the employment conditions offered to the Indian-Australian actor were very different to his Caucasian counterparts, Joab said.



Sachin Joab played Ajay Kapoor on Neighbours from 2011 to 2013.
Photograph: IMDB

“[The Kapoors] were shooting every single day, Monday to Friday. And other actors that were full-timers, all of whom were Caucasian, they might show up and do a scene once a day, then have a whole day off, or several days. Yet, they’d get paid weekly wages plus annual leave and sick leave and whatever else, whereas [I] wasn’t getting any of that.”

It was only after Joab’s agent threatened to start sending him to auditions for other shows due to lack of job security, that a full-time contract was finally produced – and for the minimal 12-month period, Joab said.

Contracts terminated

Shortly after the permanent contract was issued, the show had a change of producers. Joab said that when his 12-month contract expired, all three Kapoor characters were axed along with the only other remaining non-Caucasian character, played by Iranian-born actor Alin Sumarwata. The four sackings took place within a matter of weeks of each other, he said.

“We were all replaced with white actors,” he said.

Joab was told he and his on-screen daughter would be written out of the show by being “sent back to India”.

“I asked [the production company], ‘How can we go back to a country that we’re not from and haven’t been to? Both of our characters are born and raised right here in Australia’.”

[Complaints about racism increasing, Screen Australia’s top Indigenous executive says](#)

[Read more](#)

Joab said that when he confronted the production company about all four non-Caucasian actors having had their contracts terminated, a senior member of production said: “Sachin, in order to do my job, I have to be a cunt.”

The show subsequently issued a press release stating that all four departing actors had left on their own accord.

Aside from the public statements already quoted, Fremantle has refused to directly address the specific allegations made by Johal, Joab, Clanton and Wyatt.

“While we have a review underway, Fremantle/Neighbours is making no further comment,” a spokesperson said.

The cost of speaking up

Joab, who is now based in Los Angeles, said he was hesitant to speak up in 2013.

“How do we know that if we do speak up, that we never ever get hired again? And that’s the thing ... if you step out of line with all the decision makers that just coincidentally, are all Caucasian, what do you do?”

Johal is contracted by Fremantle to make a return guest appearance on Neighbours in coming weeks. She said news of Fremantle’s investigation was welcome, but the investigation needed to be widened to include all

forms of discrimination, not limited to race, gender, sexual orientation and identity.

The former Melbourne lawyer said she was a firm believer in “doing the right thing” and allowing for due process, but said she felt “morally compelled” to support the actors who had come forward with their experiences of racism, at a huge cost to themselves.

“I have tried to speak up, whilst uncomfortable (and scary), when I was employed full-time on the show through the appropriate channels,” she said.

“But when a person of minority ‘goes public’, it is often as a last resort and a cry for help, after all avenues of reporting and educating the perpetrator have failed.

“History has shown us there is no benefit to people of colour or minority to speak up … we often do it at a great cost, at the risk of our livelihoods, opening ourselves up for further vilification, bullying and victim shaming/blaming.”

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UK news

W Galen Weston, Canadian retail tycoon behind Primark and Selfridges, dies at 80

UK-born billionaire forged empire spanning luxury stores such as Fortnum & Mason and food brands including Twinings and Loblaws in Canada



W Galen Weston took his family's retail business and expanded it into a global company. Photograph: Mark Blinch/Reuters

W Galen Weston took his family's retail business and expanded it into a global company. Photograph: Mark Blinch/Reuters

Reuters

Tue 13 Apr 2021 19.05 EDT

W Galen Weston, the patriarch of one of Canada's wealthiest families and a retail titan, has died aged 80.

Weston was the third generation of his family to lead George Weston Limited, an already-prosperous retail empire founded by his grandfather, which he expanded significantly.

The company, now run by his son, Galen Weston, controls [Primark](#) and Selfridges in the UK, as well as the Canadian grocery chain Loblaws, the pharmacy chain Shoppers Drug Mart and the real estate company Choice Properties. The empire also includes the luxury store Fortnum & Mason, along with food brands including Twinings teas, Kingsmill Bakery and Dorset Cereals.

[Shutting up shop: high street names we'll see no more](#)

[Read more](#)

Weston, who had Canadian and British nationality, died peacefully at home after a long illness, a statement from his family said.

He was born in Buckinghamshire, England, and moved to Dublin at 21 to escape a domineering father, the Irish Times reported in 2014, where he met a model, Hilary Frayne. They married in 1966.

His grandmother gave him the funds to launch a line of retailers in Ireland, one of which eventually became Primark under the parent company [Associated British Foods](#), which is now listed on the London stock exchange. ABF is in turn majority-owned by Witton Investments, the family holding company that controls the whole empire, including Selfridges Group.

In the 1970s Weston returned to his family's base of operations, Canada, to revive the family's struggling Loblaws supermarket chain, and helped turn it into one of the largest food distributors in the country.

"In our business and in his life he built a legacy of extraordinary accomplishment and joy," Galen Weston said.

Alannah Weston, Weston Sr's daughter and the chair of Selfridges Group, said: "The luxury retail industry has lost a great visionary."

The Weston family are among the wealthiest in Canada, with Forbes estimating their total wealth at \$8.7bn.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/apr/14/w-galen-weston-canada-uk-retail-tycoon-primark-selfridges-and-loblaws-dies-at-80>

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Christchurch shooting

Christchurch mosque terrorist to launch legal challenge in New Zealand high court

Gunman who was sentenced to life in prison last year and was designated a ‘terrorist entity’ has requested a judicial review



Fifty-one people were killed, and dozens were injured in Christchurch in 2019 when the gunman opened fire at the al Noor and Linwood mosques

Photograph: Carl Court/Getty Images

Fifty-one people were killed, and dozens were injured in Christchurch in 2019 when the gunman opened fire at the al Noor and Linwood mosques

Photograph: Carl Court/Getty Images

Guardian staff and agencies

Wed 14 Apr 2021 01.53 EDT

The Australian man who carried out the [Christchurch mosque massacres](#) is launching a legal challenge against his jail conditions in the New Zealand high court.

Brenton Tarrant, who was last year sentenced to life imprisonment for 51 murders and one charge of terrorism, will represent himself in a hearing in Auckland on Thursday.

He has requested a judicial review, which looks at whether decisions have been made appropriately within the law. He is not appealing against his sentence and the hearing has no bearing on the outcome of the criminal case or his terrorism conviction.

Information provided to the Guardian by the court appeared to indicate that the killer wants the court to review decisions made by the Department of Corrections about his prison conditions, and also possibly his designation as a “terrorist entity” under the Terrorism Suppression Act.

The gunman is being housed at an Auckland jail, with strict conditions surrounding his imprisonment, and few lines of communication to the outside world.

Justice Geoffrey Venning is scheduled to hear the case, with the Australian-raised terrorist to represent himself.

The hearing will not be open to the public, though media will be permitted to attend.

In the attacks on 15 March 2019, the gunman killed 44 people at al Noor mosque during Friday prayers before driving to the Linwood mosque, where he killed another seven.

The 30-year-old [pledged guilty last year](#) to 51 counts of murder, 40 counts of attempted murder and one count of terrorism. He was [sentenced to life in prison](#) without the possibility of parole.

With Australian Associated Press

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Centrica

Hundreds of British Gas engineers to lose jobs in ‘fire and rehire’ scheme

Workers have refused to sign up to tougher employment terms imposed by UK’s biggest energy company



British Gas handed dismissal notices to close to 1,000 of its engineers as part of its ‘fire and rehire’ scheme. Photograph: Guy Smallman/Getty Images

British Gas handed dismissal notices to close to 1,000 of its engineers as part of its ‘fire and rehire’ scheme. Photograph: Guy Smallman/Getty Images

[Jillian Ambrose](#)

Wed 14 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

Hundreds of British Gas engineers will lose their jobs by midday on Wednesday after refusing to sign up to tougher employment terms imposed by the company’s [controversial “fire and rehire” scheme](#).

On 1 April Britain's biggest energy supplier handed dismissal notices to close to 1,000 of its engineers, who install and repair boilers and heating systems for the company's nine million service customers.

The engineers were granted a grace period of two weeks in which to change their minds and sign up to contracts that call for longer hours together with shifts over weekends and bank holidays – or lose their jobs.

In the last two weeks hundreds of engineers are understood to have signed up to the contracts, leaving 500 having refused to sign by the end of Tuesday. The company expects a final wave of 11th-hour contract signings on Wednesday morning, to leave between 300 and 400 engineers without a job.

The end of the grace period is expected to draw a line on [the bitter nine-month battle](#) between British Gas executives and trade union representatives at GMB, which has accused the supplier of “bullying” its employees.

The fire and rehire scheme is legal, but it has provoked fury among employees and the GMB. [British Gas set out the plans last summer](#) as part of a formal consultation process with trade unions to streamline its employment contracts and increase productivity to help rescue the business from the risk of financial ruin.

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Under the new contracts, full-time engineers would be required to work an extra three hours a week, or 40 hours a week in total, and would not be paid a higher rate to work when required on weekends and public holidays.

The terms were accepted by most trade unions, and employees, but the GMB has staged [more than 40 days of strike action in recent months](#) in protest against the “mass sacking” of its members.

[British Gas to bump up energy bills by £97 a year for millions](#)

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Andy Prendergast, GMB acting national secretary, said that although many of its 8,000 engineers have agreed to the new terms “under duress”, the company’s “appalling” treatment of its staff had damaged morale across the workforce.

British Gas said the company was changing the way it worked “to give our customers the service they want and protect the future of our company and 20,000 UK jobs”.

The owner of British Gas, Centrica, has lost more than three-quarters of its market value in the last five years and the supplier reported its weakest earnings on record earlier this year.

“While change is difficult, reversing our decline, – which has seen us lose over three million customers, cut over 15,000 jobs and seen profits halved over the last 10 years –is necessary,” the spokesman said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/apr/14/hundreds-british-gas-engineers-lose-jobs-fire-and-rehire-scheme-tougher-employment-terms>

Press freedom

‘Worrying picture’: Journalists in Europe face increasing risk, press freedom group warns

Reporters Without Borders speaks of pressures on press freedom after murder of Giorgos Karaivaz in Athens last week



Police block the road in a southern suburb of Athens where journalist Giorgos Karaivaz was shot on 9 April. Photograph: Yiannis Panagopoulos/Eurokinissi/AFP/Getty Images

Police block the road in a southern suburb of Athens where journalist Giorgos Karaivaz was shot on 9 April. Photograph: Yiannis Panagopoulos/Eurokinissi/AFP/Getty Images

Jon Henley Europe correspondent
@jonhenley

Wed 14 Apr 2021 00.00 EDT

The murder of a high-profile Greek journalist [last week](#) marks the fourth killing of a reporter in Europe in the past five years and has underlined growing concerns about a steady decline of press freedoms in several EU member states.

[Greek crime journalist shot dead in Athens in ‘execution-style’ murder](#)

[Read more](#)

Giorgos Karaivaz, who covered crime stories on the private Star TV channel, was [hit by at least six shots from a 9mm pistol fired by the passenger of a motorbike](#) outside his home in Athens on Friday in what police called an execution-style killing.

“It is a worrying picture,” said Pavol Szalai, head of the EU/Balkans desk at Reporters Without Borders (RSF). “Europe remains the safest place in the world to be a journalist, but the pressures on press freedoms – and the risks – are mounting.”

Karaivaz’s murder came five years after the investigative journalist [Daphne Caruana Galizia](#) was killed by a car bomb in Malta in 2017, and four years after Ján Kuciak and his fiancee, Martina Kušnírová, were discovered [shot dead outside their home in Slovakia](#).

In April 2019, the 29-year-old [campaigning journalist and author Lyra McKee](#) was shot dead while covering rioting in Derry, Northern Ireland. Paul McIntyre, 53, [has been charged with her murder](#), as well as with arson and hijacking. He [denies the charges](#).

[Seven men have admitted to or been charged with](#) the murder of Caruana Galizia, a columnist and investigator whose blog focused on political corruption, money laundering and organised crime in Malta, but it is still unclear who was behind her killing.

A former soldier was [convicted of killing Kuciak](#), who was probing tax fraud by businessmen linked to top Slovak politicians, and his fiancée, but the [alleged mastermind](#), developer Marián Kočner, was acquitted. The verdict is being appealed.

“Murdering a journalist is a despicable, cowardly act,” the president of the European commission, Ursula von der Leyen, [tweeted last week](#). “Europe stands for freedom. And freedom of the press may be the most sacred of all. Journalists must be able to work safely.”

Greek police have not so far confirmed that Karaivaz was killed because of his work, but the professional nature of his murder and the fact he was investigating organised crime makes it “very probable”, said Szalai.

RSF cites a decline in the rule of law, an increase in violent assaults and a rise in online threats as among the main concerns for media freedoms in Europe. It notes in particular a “sophisticated and methodological [assault on press freedoms](#)” in Hungary that is inspiring [similar tactics](#) in Poland and Slovenia.

[Hungarian journalists fear coronavirus law may be used to jail them](#)

[Read more](#)

In Hungary, which Szalai called “a counter-model” for press freedom in Europe, the prime minister, Viktor Orbán, has used the pandemic to assume full powers. Anyone convicted of publishing “fake news” now faces a prison term of up to five years.

The move gives authorities yet another means of pressurising independent media, RSF said in its 2020 report, which ranked Hungary 89th out of 180 countries in its world Press Freedom Index after a series of earlier moves to control the media.

RSF said in Poland, ranked 62nd in its index, the government’s control over the judiciary has harmed press freedom, with some courts now invoking article 212 of the penal code which allows journalists to be sentenced to up to a year in prison on defamation charges.

The organisation has described a veritable “crusade by the authorities against the media” in southern European countries such as Bulgaria (111th), Montenegro (105th) and Albania (84th), with journalists critical of the authorities suspended, detained and harassed.

In western Europe, RSF has been more alarmed by an increase in cases of violence against journalists during demonstrations – by both police and protesters – and in countries such as Germany, France, Spain and [Greece](#).

Several journalists in France, which ranked 34th on RSF's 2020 index, have been [beaten](#) or injured by flashball rounds and teargas grenades fired by police, and others have been assaulted by angry protesters, while supporters of far-right groups in Spain and Greece have deliberately targeted journalists for violent assault.

“This is also a trend of growing concern – violence against journalists and arbitrary arrests,” Szalai said.

The organisation also lists online threats, such as harassment, trolling and state surveillance, as undermining journalists' work across the continent, even in countries where freedom is held in high regard.

“The EU has called for media freedoms to be strengthened,” Szalai said. “But Orbán in particular has not been prevented from restricting press freedoms. It's vital Europe lives up to its responsibilities and improves protections for all journalists.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/apr/14/worrying-picture-journalists-in-europe-face-increasing-risk-press-freedom-group-warns>

Trees and forests

UK's native woodlands reaching crisis point, report warns

Drive to plant more trees will count for little if existing woods are lost, says Woodland Trust



Trees cut down at a woodland in the UK. Just 7% of the country's native woodland is in a good condition. Photograph: Woodland Trust/PA Media

Trees cut down at a woodland in the UK. Just 7% of the country's native woodland is in a good condition. Photograph: Woodland Trust/PA Media

*[Damian Carrington](#) Environment editor
[@dpcarrington](#)*

Wed 14 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

The UK's native woodlands are reaching a crisis point, with just 7% in good condition, according to the first comprehensive assessment of their health.

The [Woodland Trust's report](#) found the woods facing a barrage of threats, including destruction by development, imported pests and diseases, the impacts of the climate crisis and pollution. Woodland specialist birds and butterflies have declined by almost half since 1970, it said.

The report said the [high-profile drive](#) to create new woodlands is important, but would count for little if existing woods are lost. In any case, the report said, rates of tree planting are nowhere near what is needed and less than half of the new trees are native species.

Trees should play an important role in helping the UK tackle the climate emergency and restore wildlife in one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. They can also provide services such as reduced flooding and shade, as well as being important for many people's wellbeing.

Woodland cover has nearly tripled since 1900 and makes up 13% of the UK, but half of this is forestry plantations that support relatively little biodiversity. In December, the UK's Climate Change Committee said [2bn new trees would be needed by 2050](#), increasing the coverage to 18% of the country, and requiring a tripling of the growth rate.

[Restore UK woodland by letting trees plant themselves, says report](#)

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Abi Bunker, the director of conservation at the Woodland Trust, said: "It's reaching crisis point. The warning signs are loud and clear. If we don't tackle the threats facing our woods and trees, we will severely damage the UK's ability to address the climate and nature crises. Green spaces that are rich in wildlife, bird song and blossom are also intrinsically linked to our own health and wellbeing."

The broadcaster Clive Anderson, who is the Woodland Trust's president, said: "We remain one of the least wooded countries in Europe. Fragmentation of woods, loss of trees and the wildlife dependent on them has been brutal."

The poor condition of 93% native woodlands was particularly striking, said Chris Reid, at the Woodland Trust, citing the assessment made in 2020 by

the Forestry Commission's research agency: "I was surprised it was quite so bad – it is pretty shocking." Overgrazing and invasive species are among the causes.

The report said species including dead wood beetles, lily of the valley and the willow tit were in steep decline, with the latter down 94% since 1970. "New woodland is only going to fill up with wildlife if you have existing woodland that's in good condition and is connected," said Reid.



Bluebells in a UK woodland during spring. Photograph: Woodland Trust/PA Media

The climate crisis is changing the timing of seasonal events, with trees coming into leaf earlier, the report said. This means birds such as the blue tit are struggling to adjust their breeding times to feed on caterpillars.

Centuries-old and wildlife-rich ancient forests cover 2.5% of the UK, but at least 1,225 of these woodlands are under threat of destruction by new building development, according to the Woodland Trust.

Individual trees in fields make up 20% of all trees, the report said, and can provide important staging posts for wildlife between woodlands. But research by the trust in Norfolk and Suffolk found 85% have been lost over last 150 years.

A single oak tree can play home to more than 2,000 different species, said Bunker, but there is little data on field trees: “The fact is no one really knows and no one’s checking – a lot of the time, they are forgotten trees.”

'It's good for the soul': the mini rewilders restoring UK woodland Read more

The report also said 19 new damaging tree pests and diseases have become established in UK since 1990, compared with four in the previous 40 years. It said the 10-fold increase in live plant imports since 1990 was the likely cause. Ash dieback disease could kill 120m trees, the report said, meaning a cost of £50 for every £1 earned from importing saplings.

Nitrogen pollution from farming is another problem, causing clean air lichens to disappear from tree branches and nitrogen-tolerant grasses and plants to wipe out woodland flowers such as violets, bugle, heather and bilberry. “If you imagine every single tree branch covered in lichens, that’s a lot of carbon in itself,” said Hazel Jackson, at the Woodland Trust. “But they also slow the flow of water and are amazing habitat for lots of different insects.”

Protecting and enhancing woodlands, and founding new ones, is happening at smaller scales, said Bunker, but needs to be happening nationwide. She said the government’s environment bill must make the restoration of nature a legal requirement, as the 2050 net zero emissions goal is for climate change.

A spokeswoman for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said: “We have committed to increase woodland creation across the UK to 30,000 hectares per year by 2025, as well as protecting existing woodlands.”

“We have already announced the Nature for Climate Fund and will shortly publish our action plan for trees and woodland, which will help us meet this target by ensuring we plant new high-quality, well-managed woodlands and improve the condition and resilience of existing ones,” she said.

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Suez canal

Ever Given impounded as Suez Canal Authority pursues salvage costs

Megaship that ran aground now caught in legal row between owners and Egyptian authorities reportedly seeking \$900m



The Ever Given after it was fully floated in the Suez Canal on 29 March.
Photograph: Mohamed Abd El Ghany/Reuters

The Ever Given after it was fully floated in the Suez Canal on 29 March.
Photograph: Mohamed Abd El Ghany/Reuters

Staff and agencies in Cairo

Tue 13 Apr 2021 18.42 EDT

Two weeks after it was [freed from the Suez Canal](#), the giant container ship Ever Given is once again stuck.

This time however, the 220,000-ton megaship is not caught in the sand, but snared in [a legal row](#) between Egyptian authorities and the ship's owners over the financial impact of the accident.

The massive ship has been impounded by a court in Ismailia, as the Suez Canal Authority pursues its Japanese owners for the cost of the salvage operation and lost transit fees for the week that the canal was blocked.

About 50 ships a day pass through the canal, and more than 442 vessels were held up by the blockage.

“The vessel is now officially impounded,” Lt Gen Osama Rabie told Egypt’s state-run television. “They do not want to pay anything.”

There was no immediate comment from the vessel’s owner, Shoei Kisen Kaisha Ltd.

Rabie did not say how much money the canal authority was seeking, but the figure was reportedly \$900m (£650m). Meanwhile, prosecutors in Ismailia also opened a separate investigation into what caused the Ever Given to run aground, a judicial official said. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to brief media.

[How a full moon and a ‘huge lever’ helped free Ever Given from Suez canal](#)
[Read more](#)

Rabie said negotiations were still ongoing to reach a settlement on compensation.

Litigation could be complex, since the vessel is owned by a Japanese firm, operated by a Taiwanese shipper, and flagged in Panama.

The Ever Given ran aground in a single-lane stretch of the canal about 6 km (3.7 miles) north of the southern entrance, near the city of Suez on 23 March.

01:12

Efforts to dislodge Ever Given in Suez canal continue – video

On 29 March, salvage teams freed the Ever Given, ending a crisis that had clogged one of the world's most vital waterways and halted billions of dollars a day in maritime commerce. The vessel has since idled in Egypt's Great Bitter Lake, just north of the site where it previously blocked the canal.

The unprecedented six-day shutdown, which raised fears of extended delays, goods shortages and rising costs for consumers, added to strain on the shipping industry already under pressure from the coronavirus pandemic.

01:42

Suez canal ship freed and heading to lake for inspections – video

Rabie, the canal chief, told state-run television there was no wrongdoing by the canal authority. He declined to discuss possible causes, including the ship's speed and the high winds that buffeted it during a sandstorm.

When asked whether the ship's owner was at fault, he said: "Of course, yes." Rabie said the conclusion of the authority's investigation was expected Thursday.

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2021.04.14 - Coronavirus

- [Live Coronavirus: UK expands trial on mixing vaccines; Brazil senate probes Bolsonaro's pandemic response](#)
- [Timor-Leste Xanana Gusmão slaps mourners and sleeps in street outside hospital in Covid-19 protest](#)
- [Johnson & Johnson EU seeking 'urgent clarification' on Covid vaccine delay](#)
- [Australia National cabinet on 'war footing' after vaccine program flounders](#)
- ['A tsunami of cases' Desperation as Covid second wave batters India](#)
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Coronavirus live news: UK expands trial on mixing vaccines; Brazil senate probes Bolsonaro's pandemic response

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The Pacific projectTimor-Leste

Xanana Gusmão slaps mourners and sleeps in street outside Timor-Leste hospital in Covid-19 protest

Country's first president joins mass rally disputing government's assertion that Armindo Borges died from coronavirus



Demonstrators led by Xanana Gusmão outside Timor-Leste's national hospital. They are demanding that the body of a man the government says died of Covid be released to his family. Photograph: Antonio Sampaio/EPA

Demonstrators led by Xanana Gusmão outside Timor-Leste's national hospital. They are demanding that the body of a man the government says died of Covid be released to his family. Photograph: Antonio Sampaio/EPA

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Raimundos Oki in Dili

Wed 14 Apr 2021 02.32 EDT

The former prime minister of [Timor-Leste](#) Xanana Gusmão has been filmed slapping family members of a man who died in the capital, Dili, in what the government said was the country's second Covid-related death.

Gusmão – [the young country's first president and a national hero](#) – disputes the government's assertion that Armindo Borges, who died aged 47 on Sunday night, died from Covid-19, with Gusmão claiming he died from a stroke. Borges's body has been kept in the Covid isolation room at the Vera Cruz health centre.

Hundreds of protesters gathered outside the health centre on Monday, including Borges's son. A video shows Gusmão arriving at the centre and repeatedly slapping the son in the face and also repeatedly and angrily slapping a woman, believed to be Borges's sister. She is weeping as he hits her.

['When I woke, the house was full of water': daunting cleanup follows Timor-Leste floods](#)

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Gusmão said he had hit them because he believed their angry protests outside the hospital were not the way to get the action they wanted.

“You guys don’t scream here,” Xanana told local television channel RTTL he explained to Borges’s son. “Please be quiet, don’t make a fuss. You also don’t scream, have to be quiet. Your father is dead, and you must not scream.”

Xanana said he did not accept the government’s explanation that Borges died from Covid. “To convince the public to believe in Covid-19, the government must work well,” he said. “Otherwise the people will say we lied to them …

“I am also following the development of Covid-19 in the world, I know, but the situation that is happening here makes me disbelieve.”

Timor-Leste has recorded two deaths and just shy of 1,100 cases of Covid, according to the World Health Organization, with cases escalating dramatically since the beginning of March.



Xanana Gusmão outside the hospital. Photograph: Leste News

Gusmão spent Monday and Tuesday carrying a coffin in the street outside the national hospital in Dili, opposing the country's handling of the pandemic.

Along with other protesters, and some members of the Borges family, he spent two nights sleeping in the street outside the hospital to prevent Borges's body from being taken for burial, rather than it being returned to his village in keeping with custom.

Lourdes de Jesus, Borges's daughter said that on Sunday about 6pm, her father had suddenly had a stroke which made his face swell up, and then they had called an ambulance to take him to the national hospital.

[East Timor: Indonesia's invasion and the long road to independence](#)

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They arrived at the emergency room where medics carried out a swab test, which she said had taken 15 minutes. The results showed that Borges had Covid. Doctors immediately placed him in an isolation room, where he died.

"He got Covid-19 in just 15 minutes, and my father died right away, poor thing," the daughter said. "Now his body is swollen in the isolation room."

The government had nominated a place in Metinaro in the eastern part of Dili as a special cemetery for Covid victims and was seeking to bury him there. But the family, with support from Gusmão, have demanded he be taken to their home for the funeral.

The minister of health, Odete Maria Freitas Belo, and the country's top military commander, Lere Anan Timur, have met with Gusmão to try to convince him to allow the government to bury the body. Gusmão has maintained his view that the government should hand over the body to the family.

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Vaccines and immunisation

EU seeking ‘urgent clarification’ on Johnson & Johnson Covid vaccine delay

Company has said it is postponing deployment in Europe following concerns about blood clots in US

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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A vaccination centre offering the Johnson & Johnson vaccine earlier this month in Los Angeles. Photograph: Damian Dovarganes/AP

A vaccination centre offering the Johnson & Johnson vaccine earlier this month in Los Angeles. Photograph: Damian Dovarganes/AP

Jon Henley Europe correspondent
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Tue 13 Apr 2021 13.55 EDT

The European commission has said it is seeking “urgent clarification” from Johnson & Johnson after the company’s “completely unexpected” announcement that it is delaying the deployment of its coronavirus vaccine across Europe [following concerns in the US](#) about a small number of blood clots.

After US health agencies recommended states temporarily halt use of the shot on Tuesday, Johnson & Johnson said in a statement it had been “reviewing these cases with European health authorities” and had “made the decision to proactively delay the rollout of our vaccine in Europe”.

A commission official told Reuters the company had confirmed at a meeting on Friday it aimed to deliver 55m doses to the EU, as contracted, by the end of June. The official said the commission was “in contact with the company” to get clarification.

The EU’s drug regulator, the European Medicines Agency (EMA), which approved the [single-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine](#) last month, confirmed on Tuesday it was reviewing four cases cases of rare blood clots in women who had taken the shot.

The EMA added in a statement to Reuters that it was “currently not clear whether there is a causal association between vaccination” and the conditions. “EMA will further communicate once the evaluation has concluded,” it said.

Johnson & Johnson has committed to delivering at least 200m doses to the bloc this year. The UK has not so far approved the vaccine for use but has 30m doses on order.

“This is worrying news – sounds like it may end up the same way as AstraZeneca,” an EU diplomat said. The clotting concerns [mirror those](#) of drug agencies in Europe and Australia over the AstraZeneca vaccine, whose use has been restricted in several countries to people aged over 55, 60 or 65.

AstraZeneca also cut vaccine supplies to the bloc to 100m doses by the end of June from the 300m foreseen under its original supply contract, triggering

a dispute with the EU that remains unresolved.

The European commissioner in charge of the EU's vaccination programme, Thierry Breton, said last week the bloc was due to receive 200m doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine in the next three months, along with 35m from Moderna, 70m from AstraZeneca, 55m from Johnson & Johnson and 10m from CureVac.

The US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) earlier recommended a pause in the use of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine while investigations take place into six cases involving women who have experienced rare blood clotting events combined with low platelets in the days following vaccination. More than 6.8m doses of the vaccine have been administered in the US.

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Share your stories

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Several European countries including France, Spain and the Netherlands were taking delivery of their first batches of the Johnson & Johnson shot this week. The Dutch health minister, Hugo de Jonge, said he was not sure what the country would now do.

“I can not say at this moment, it depends on the messaging we get tomorrow, I expect tomorrow, from the EMA,” de Jonge said.

South Africa temporarily suspended the rollout of the Johnson & Johnson shot on Tuesday. [Health](#) minister Zweli Mkhize said the country “cannot take the decision by the FDA lightly. Based on their advice, we have determined to voluntarily suspend our rollout until the causal relationship ... is sufficiently interrogated.”

Reuters contributed to this report

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Health

Morrison asks national cabinet to meet twice a week after Covid vaccine program flounders

PM urges ‘move back to an operational footing’ after AstraZeneca blood clot warning throws rollout into disarray

[Australia reports second blood clot case](#)

[Bupa left in limbo about aged care staff vaccines](#)

[Pfizer vaccine is now crucial to Australia. So why the secrecy?](#)



Prime minister Scott Morrison wants national cabinet and health ministers to meet twice a week to help get the coronavirus vaccine program back on track. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

Prime minister Scott Morrison wants national cabinet and health ministers to meet twice a week to help get the coronavirus vaccine program back on track. Photograph: Mike Bowers/The Guardian

Katharine Murphy and Paul Karp

Tue 13 Apr 2021 17.34 EDT

Scott Morrison has asked the national cabinet to meet twice a week “for the foreseeable future” in an effort to get the Covid-19 vaccination program back on track.

Last Thursday, [Australia’s vaccine rollout was thrown into disarray](#) after an advisory was slapped on the AstraZeneca vaccine warning people under 50 it may cause extremely rare but potentially deadly blood clots.

On Tuesday, health authorities concluded [a second case](#) of a rare blood clot syndrome in Australia was “likely” linked to the AstraZeneca vaccine.

[Johnson & Johnson Covid vaccine to be paused in US over blood clots](#)
[Read more](#)

Morrison late on Sunday admitted [that all Australians may not be vaccinated](#) by the year’s end as a consequence of a recalibration of the program. The prime minister said in a statement uploaded to Facebook there would be no new timetable to replace the previous October target.

In a new statement issued on Tuesday night, Morrison said he had requested that national cabinet and health ministers “move back to an operational footing – to work together, closely, to tackle, head on, the challenges we are all facing with making our vaccination program as good as it can be”.

“There are issues we are trying to deal with as a federal government, and I have been upfront about those,” the prime minister said. “But amongst the states and territories, they are also tackling their own unique issues and working together we are all going to be in a better position to find the best solutions.”

Morrison said the national cabinet would gather next Monday and then meet twice a week “for the foreseeable future until we solve the problems and get the program back on track”.

[The latest Guardian Essential poll](#) indicated Australians are frustrated with the slow pace of the rollout. The new poll showed voter approval of the Morrison government's handling of the pandemic dropped eight points in a month.

More than half of voters in the Guardian Essential poll sample think the [Coalition](#) needs to step up and take more responsibility for ensuring Australians are vaccinated against Covid-19 as quickly as possible.

Voters were asked to identify which tier of government or what factors were most responsible for problems with the vaccination rollout from a list including Canberra, the state governments, international supply chain problems, and unavoidable production delays.

Canberra topped that list, with 42% of the sample identifying the Morrison government. Problems with supply chains and production were next (24% and 18%). Only 7% of the sample thought the states were responsible.

With the government battling the impact of a [string of abuse and harassment scandals](#) that have rocked the Australian parliament, as well as problems with the vaccine rollout as the second winter of the pandemic looms, the poll indicated Morrison's approval rating has hit its lowest level in 12 months.

[The Pfizer vaccine is now crucial to Australia. Why the secrecy about how much we have? | Melissa Davey](#)

[Read more](#)

The prime minister said in the new statement the government was “throwing everything at these issues” in an effort to get the vaccination rollout right “and to be open and transparent about how we are tracking”.

The new case of clotting occurred in a woman in her 40s who received the AstraZeneca Covid jab in Western Australia, according to the [Therapeutic Goods Administration](#). She is receiving treatment in hospital and is in a stable condition.

Australia on Tuesday also recorded its 910th coronavirus death – the first since 19 October. The 80-year-old man contracted Covid-19 overseas and

tested positive on day five of hotel quarantine in Queensland, before being transferred on 23 March to Prince Charles hospital, where he subsequently died.

On Tuesday, the federal health minister, Greg Hunt, said 56,000 vaccinations had occurred in the past 24 hours despite some state programs being “paused or varied” to deal with the new AstraZeneca warning.

Asked if the warning had caused a spike in vaccine hesitancy, Hunt said health authorities “had anticipated potentially a significant drop but that is not what we have seen at this stage”.

Labor has rounded on the government, accusing it of botching the vaccination rollout. The opposition leader, Anthony Albanese, said Morrison has left Australia vulnerable by not seeking a diversity of vaccine supply.

“The fact that the government hasn’t done that, has left us vulnerable,” Albanese said. “They essentially put all their eggs in the AstraZeneca basket and the chickens have come home to roost.

“Now we have a state whereby the government has given up on a timetable for the rollout. Now, that will have real consequences for business that requires certainty.”

Morrison said serious challenges in the program were caused by “patchy international vaccine supplies, changing medical advice and a global environment of need caused by millions of Covid-19 cases and deaths”.

“This is a complex task and there are problems with the program that we need to solve to ensure more Australians can be vaccinated safely and more quickly.”

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Coronavirus

‘A tsunami of cases’: desperation as Covid second wave batters India

Doctors speak of a new variant of the virus that appears to be spreading faster than ever before

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Relatives walk amid burning funeral pyres as they perform last rites for Covid-19 victims in Bhopal. Photograph: Sanjeev Gupta/EPA

Relatives walk amid burning funeral pyres as they perform last rites for Covid-19 victims in Bhopal. Photograph: Sanjeev Gupta/EPA



Hannah Ellis-Petersen in Delhi

Tue 13 Apr 2021 22.00 EDT

Dr K Senthil had feared it was coming.

He had feared it as he saw the reckless crush of hundreds of people taking part in large wedding parties over the past months, feared it as he saw the maskless faces of shoppers at the market, feared it as he witnessed thousands come together for political rallies in the ongoing elections in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, where he is the president of the state medical council.

But despite his growing sense of foreboding, the second wave of coronavirus that began to engulf India last month has confounded even Senthil's worst expectations.

"People became so complacent, acting as if the virus had vanished which was absurd," said Senthil, who is a urologist in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.

"Now we are experiencing a wave of coronavirus infections that is far worse than the first and the magnitude of the spread is getting worse and worse. In Tamil Nadu it has taken just 15 days to reach the same level of cases in

hospitals which was the peak last time. In the big cities in the state, the hospitals are already almost full.”

This week has marked a series of grim Covid milestones for India. It was this week the country once again outstripped Brazil to become the second-worst affected globally, with a total of over 13.68m cases. Each day has brought a new record for new infections; on Tuesday, the figure was 161,736. [Active cases also hit a new high](#), while deaths continued to escalate to a total of over 171,000.



Thousands come together for election campaign rallies ahead of the elections, like this one in Chennai on 4 April Photograph: Arun Sankar/AFP/Getty Images

Nightmare scenes of a country struggling to cope have begun to emerge as doctors speak of a new variant of the virus that appears to be spreading faster than ever before, affecting young people and even children this time around and pushing India’s healthcare system to the brink of collapse. States such as Maharashtra [have imposed a weekend lockdown](#) in an attempt to curb infections, while Delhi has introduced a night curfew, with a total lockdown still not ruled out.

Over the weekend bodies piled up outside the government hospital in Raipur, in the state of Chhattisgarh, because the hospital had “not expected so many people to die at once” from coronavirus and could not cremate them fast enough. In Surat, in the state of Gujarat, crematoriums became so overwhelmed with coronavirus victims that families began [burning their dead](#) on open ground.

[India deaths](#)

“This sheer tsunami of cases has already overwhelmed the healthcare infrastructure in the state,” said Dr Shashank Joshi, a member of the Mumbai Covid taskforce. “This time we are seeing younger people between 20 and 40 getting seriously affected and even children are now being hospitalised with severe symptoms. The capacity for the healthcare system to hold on is fast dwindling.”

Kshitij Thakur, a local politician in the Vasai-Virar municipality of Maharashtra, made a desperate public plea for help with an “acute” shortage of oxygen in the local government hospital, which had already led to the loss of three lives.

“The supply can run for only three hours,” said Thakur in a tweet directed at the central government and prime minister [Narendra Modi](#). “There are more than 7,000 active cases in the area and more than 3,000 people require oxygen supply daily.”



Young frontline workers wait to get vaccinated at a government hospital in Chennai
Photograph: Arun Sankar/AFP/Getty Images

Though over 108 million [people have been vaccinated](#) so far, in a country of 1.3bn it has not been enough to curb the second wave. On Tuesday, the drugs controller general of India (DCGI), Dr VG Somani, approved the Russian Covid-19 vaccine, Sputnik V, for emergency use in India, with distribution likely to begin next month, and also cleared the way for Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson to be given approval.

Just a month ago, while Europe grappled with soaring cases and stringent lockdowns, there was a widespread belief across India that the country had avoided the spectre of a second wave through a combination of herd immunity from the first wave, which eased off around November, and a speculated natural immune resistance among Indians.

In January, health minister Harsh Vardhan proclaimed that India had “successfully contained the pandemic”. Caps were lifted on social and religious gatherings, including the Kumbh Mela, a Hindu festival which on Monday [drew crowds of over a million](#). Several populous states held their elections over the past month, with prime minister Modi and home minister Amit Shah among those holding political rallies where thousands gathered

without social distancing or masks enforced. All three states are now experiencing a sharp rise in cases.

Much of the blame for the second wave has been attributed to complacency, but an increasing body of evidence, backed up by first-hand accounts from doctors on the frontline, also points to possible new variants in India which are proving to be drastically more infectious.

India cases

“The rate at which cases have increased in this wave far exceeds the rate at which cases grew the first time,” said Gautam Menon, professor of physics and biology at Ashoka University. “There is certainly evidence that it is spreading faster, suggesting that it is likely more infectious.”

Menon believed it was “new variants driving this rapid increase”, in particular an Indian variant known as B.1.617, which contains two mutations which are associated with increased infectivity and “immune escape”. Menon pointed to data from Maharashtra, the Indian state worst affected by Covid-19, where this variant has been found to be responsible for 20% of the cases.

The government has been accused of being slow in genome sequencing of Covid cases in India over the past few months and therefore failing to detect new and possibly more virulent domestic variants, as well as the virulent Brazil and UK variants. In the state of Punjab which is experiencing a severe rise in case, 80% have been found to be the UK variant.

Menon said that it was unlikely that a second wave in India could have been avoided altogether. “However, a more robust sequencing program should have acted as an early warning system, picking up the new variants of concern at an earlier stage,” he said. “This would have helped to slow down, if not actually stop, the spread.”

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Vaccines and immunisation

UK strategy of backing several Covid vaccines seems to be paying off

Analysis: buying new and existing technologies ensured alternatives if a vaccine failed or had supply issues

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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A Covid-19 vaccination centre in London on 7 April. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

A Covid-19 vaccination centre in London on 7 April. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

[Sarah Boseley](#) Health editor

Tue 13 Apr 2021 14.11 EDT

The government has said the decision by Johnson & Johnson to delay the supply of its Covid vaccine to Europe, while the US investigates reports of six cases of unusual blood clots in young women who have had the jab, will not derail the UK's vaccination programme.

That reflects well on the decisions taken by the Vaccines Taskforce, originally headed by Kate Bingham.

The UK bought 30m doses of the J&J vaccine, along with 100m doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine. But the taskforce spread its bets. As a result, any delays to the J&J order may not matter.

These two vaccines are both made with the same technology – the spike protein gene of the coronavirus is delivered via a vector, which in the case of J&J is a human common cold virus and, in the Oxford vaccine, a similar chimp virus.

Bingham and her team chose vaccines from four different technology “buckets”, as she called them.

In an interview with the Guardian last July she explained the thinking. She talked of two “hairy, scary, sexy ones” which were new and advanced technologies. The viral vector vaccines, like AZ and J&J, were one; the other was the mRNA vaccines, like Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna.

The other two technologies she characterised as “the rather boring, much more established vaccine formats, which we know much more about, but they are further behind in clinical development”.

Those more tried and tested strategies included using the whole killed virus, which is how vaccines were traditionally made.

The Valneva vaccine is one of those. Although it is still in trials, the government demonstrated confidence in February by ordering 40m more doses, to total 100m, which is as big a contract as for AstraZeneca's. The vaccine will be made in Scotland, which reduces supply issues, and should be available later in the year.

The fourth bucket is vaccines that use an adjuvant – to boost the immune system. GSK and Sanofi are trailing their vaccine designed in this way. They tweaked it after poor results and restarted trials in February.

When the taskforce was drawing up its shopping list, the key question was whether the vaccines would work at all.

It surprised everybody that so many of them had such excellent results in large-scale trials. Efficacy of 80% or 90% was hardly dreamed of in the early days – there was a general agreement that anything more than 50% effective against a brand-new virus would be amazing.

The blood clots with low platelets being investigated for links to the AstraZeneca and J&J vaccines are rare events – four in 1m for AZ in the UK, where more than 20m doses have been given, and around one in 1m for J&J in the US.

At that low rate, and with diagnosis and treatment improving, the risks are far outweighed by the deaths and damage from Covid-19.

It is unlikely there will be much of a glitch in supply as a result of the investigations, but if there is, the UK has other vaccines in the pipeline.

Unfortunately, in much of the world, where AZ and J&J are intended to be the mainstay of vaccination, that is not the case.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/apr/13/uk-strategy-of-backing-several-covid-vaccines-seems-to-be-paying-off>

Coronavirus

A gold nose pin, boxes of eggs, or a tax rebate: Covid vaccine incentives around the world

Members of the public are being offered gifts and discounts to encourage vaccine take-up

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



A man receives a dose of Covid-19 coronavirus vaccine in Dhaka
Photograph: Suvra Kanti Das/ZUMA Wire/REX/Shutterstock

A man receives a dose of Covid-19 coronavirus vaccine in Dhaka
Photograph: Suvra Kanti Das/ZUMA Wire/REX/Shutterstock



Helen Sullivan

@helenrsullivan

Tue 13 Apr 2021 22.49 EDT

There isn't much to like about having a needle stuck into your arm, so to encourage vaccinations, some countries are offering incentives to sweeten the deal. In one Indian city, residents are being offered a gold nose pin or a stick blender if they get a shot, while in China, not one but two boxes of eggs await responsible citizens.

"The eggs don't matter," one Beijing resident – a woman in her 60s – told the [South China Morning Post](#). She was queueing for her vaccination because authorities kept asking her to get the vaccine, not for the protein.

On offer for people in other parts of the city were shopping coupons and grocery vouchers. Elsewhere in the country people were given chicken wings, tissues, flour, cash prizes and free entry into parks. The last freebie was deemed "stingy" by residents, the [Washington Post](#) reported.

In the Indian city of Rajkot, Gujarat, goldsmiths have banded together to give women free gold nose pins for getting the jab, while men are offered a hand blender, the [Hindustan Times](#) reported. Indian retailers in other parts of

the country handed out snacks, discounts on car repairs, stationery, biryani, sweets and chicken dishes. North Delhi's municipality, meanwhile, offered an additional 5% tax rebate.

Russians stood to scoop free [ice cream](#), while some Israelis were offered a can of Coca-Cola, alcoholic or non-alcoholic beer, a loaf of challah, pizza, pastries or [cholent](#), a meat stew traditionally eaten on the sabbath.

Three Dubai restaurants offered 10% off the bill for your first shot, and [20% if you'd had both](#), Fortune reported.

In the US, people have been offered glazed doughnuts, [Brazilian doughnuts](#), marijuana, beer, arcade tokens, vaccine card lamination, [popcorn](#) and cash, as well as free video game, paddle board, surfboard and snorkel rentals, [Forbes reported](#). Food chain [Red Rooster](#) offered employees a \$250 bonus and two paid days off work.

Japanese minister Taro Kono, who is in charge of the country's vaccine rollout, suggested in a TV appearance that offering people free gyoza for getting the vaccine might be a good idea, [the Associated Press reported](#). As yet, the suggestion does not appear to have been taken up by anyone.

For other needle-receivers, the vibe was reward enough. In Mexico City, people waiting for their shots danced along as a band played (free) music.

Mexico City vaccine scene. Enjoy the music!
pic.twitter.com/RGmw2KwzIs

— Elisabeth Malkin (@ElisabethMalkin) [April 13, 2021](#)

Indonesian authorities believe disincentives may work better. People refusing to be vaccinated will face fines or see their welfare payments restricted, according to the [Thompson Reuters Foundation](#).

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Television & radio

Interview

‘I miss the English bants’: Parminder Nagra on ER, Bend It Like Beckham and new sci-fi Intergalactic

Coco Khan

She went from Leicester to Los Angeles – and is now bound for outer space. But Intergalactic, which was filmed in Manchester, has made the British star want to return home



‘The landscape is changing for South Asian people’ ... Parminder Nagra.
Photograph: Magnus Hastings

‘The landscape is changing for South Asian people’ ... Parminder Nagra.
Photograph: Magnus Hastings



[@cocobyname](#)

Wed 14 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

I can't tell if the pained expression on Parminder Nagra's face is because of the bad Zoom connection or the words I can't help blurting out the moment she appears on my screen. She's sitting at a table in her home in Los Angeles, the California sun streaming through sash windows into a sitting room dotted with keepsakes from her many films, and all I can think to say is: "I can't believe I'm talking to Jess from [Bend It Like Beckham!](#) I loved that film!"

We're meant to be discussing the actor's new role in Intergalactic, a dystopian sci-fi drama about a group of female high-security prisoners who hijack a spaceship and set off in pursuit of freedom. But instead we're discussing the role Nagra took on almost 20 years ago, playing Jess, a teenager who discovers herself on the football pitch, while navigating her Indian heritage and British life. Is it annoying that people still talk about Bend It? "No," says Nagra, "because it's such a huge part of my life. I've just gotten older. I keep thinking people are going to think I still look the same, when I don't. But I'm still proud of the film. It's probably what I'm most recognised for."



‘I’m still proud of it’ ... Nagra and Keira Knightley in Bend It Like Beckham. Photograph: Allstar/BSKYB/Sportsphoto

Bend It, directed by Gurinder Chadha, was a box-office smash, launching Leicester-born Nagra’s screen career, as well as those of her two co-stars: Jonathan Rhys Meyers and a then-unknown 17-year-old, [Keira Knightley](#). Bend It was particularly significant for a generation of British South Asians, myself included, who had rarely seen their lives reflected on the big screen, especially not in a project led by women. How do you top that? For Nagra, the answer was ER.

She played Neela in the medical juggernaut for six years, dealing with everything from claustrophobia to a helicopter crash, once again joining a cast of relative unknowns who would go on to be superstars: George Clooney, Linda Cardellini, Julianna Margulies. “When I started,” she says, “one of the first things they said was, ‘Can we put you in a relationship with so-and so?’ And I went, ‘Could you just not for the first year?’” She has always pushed against the sort of limiting plot lines that are often given to women and people of colour. “They asked why and I said, ‘Because then this character would be purely defined by her relationship.’ And they actually listened.”

When the final ER aired in 2009, Nagra had just wed her long-term partner James Stenson and, by the end of the year, she'd given birth to a boy. Since then, notable roles have included a CIA agent in NBC's The Blacklist and a school counsellor in Netflix's [13 Reasons Why](#). "I was up to play a headmaster the other day," Nagra says with a laugh. "My brother pointed out I've covered all the professions. I said to Mum, 'Aren't you proud? I've played a doctor, a teacher – all the things you might have wanted me to be!'"

She also played Ellen Nadeer, a reactionary senator in Marvel's Agents of SHIELD. "My son is a huge Marvel fan. I was completely nervous: I had to do an American accent. But it was my chance to do something a bit different. I enjoyed it. I've always tried to push the envelope when I've been allowed. I don't often get the chance."



'She has layers' ... in Sky drama Intergalactic. Photograph: Des Willie/Moonage Pictures Ltd & Motion Content Group/Sky UK LTD

Despite her credentials, Nagra still regularly finds herself in smaller roles with little room to explore, roles that occasionally border on pigeonholing. She's played numerous doctors, including one in Bird Box, the postapocalyptic horror film starring Sandra Bullock. Nagra was asked to deliver her lines with an Indian accent. "Why did they make Parminder Nagra have an accent?" [asked a journalist on Twitter](#). "They let the

murdering white guy keep his British accent. She's British too." Nagra replied: "Ask the powers that be."

I said to Mum, 'Aren't you proud? I've played a doctor, a teacher – all the professions you wanted me to be!'

She has mixed feelings about [Bird Box](#), which was directed by Susanne Bier, whose most recent drama was The Undoing, starring Hugh Grant and Nicole Kidman. "I wasn't thrilled about playing the doctor again," says Nagra. "But it's an amazing piece of work with an amazing director, and it's Sandra Bullock. I'd rather not have done the accent. It's hard. There are times when doctor roles come up and you want to say no, but you want to work."

It raises the question: why isn't Nagra more famous? Does she feel she's given the recognition she deserves? "I can't start dissecting it, because I'll go mad," says the 45-year-old. "I just think, life happens, work happens, and we're all at the mercy of both. Lots of things have happened in my life over the last decade that I've had to adapt to. It's meant I can't do certain things."

She's talking about her son who had earlier interrupted our interview. "Kai," she said to him sternly. "I'm in a really important interview. Can you please leave?" It's a reminder that, despite the Leicester-to-Los Angeles fairytale, Nagra is a working mother, and a single one too, having split from Stenson in 2013. "I have to juggle life as a mum versus my career," she says. "I don't want to be away all the time."



Resistant to romance ... Nagra in ER. Photograph: AF archive/Alamy

But I wonder if there's more to it. In an interview with the Guardian in 2009, Nagra talked about the lack of complex South Asian characters. Have things got any better? "I think [executives] know they can't get away with not being diverse. But I worry that they think, 'Oh, we need to have this sort of person in here, so we'll put them in this role' – to tick a box. And I don't understand why, if there's a role between 35 and 45, and not specific to a family, why I can't be seen for it. It's frustrating. People say it's getting better but I've been having this same conversation for years, and I'm bored of it. But I keep going. And the landscape is changing for South Asian people – look at Priyanka Chopra leading shows and Riz Ahmed nominated for an Oscar. Maybe we're able to tell our own stories a little more, or put ourselves in things that are atypical."

Nagra met Intergalactic director Kieron Hawkes when they worked together on Fortitude, the Arctic-set thriller from Sky Atlantic in which Nagra played yet another doctor. In Intergalactic she's Arch Marshall Rebecca Harper, a powerful police official whose daughter is among the women who break out. "She's the mother of a girl who's been wrongly convicted. So she has layers." Nagra mentions its diverse cast and her own "tomboy" tendencies toward spaceships, adding with a laugh: "And Harper is hardly an Indian name. It would be more like Harpreet."

Filmed in Manchester, Intergalactic is very much a British production with a cast that includes Craig Parkinson, best known for his portrayal of DI Matthew “Dot” Cottan, possibly Line of Duty’s nastiest bent copper yet. In recent years, British actors of colour, Idris Elba among them, have highlighted a “glass ceiling” in the UK that makes them look to the US, where they are better appreciated and afforded more opportunities. So it’s good to see this happening the other way round: Nagra, the British actor who left for the US, finding appreciation at home. Will we be seeing more of her on our screens?

“I think some of the most interesting stuff coming out right now is from England. And I’m English! So I want to be a part of that. Even with Intergalactic, just being on an English set with the banter – or the bants, as we like to say – made me miss England. I want to come back and I want to be able to work. Hopefully, I’ll have the opportunity to do that.”

Intergalactic is on Sky One and Now TV on 30 April.

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Health & wellbeing

Brain fog: how trauma, uncertainty and isolation have affected our minds and memory



‘There isn’t something wrong with us. It’s a completely normal reaction.’
Illustration: Franz Lang/Franz Lang at Heart/ The Guardian

‘There isn’t something wrong with us. It’s a completely normal reaction.’
Illustration: Franz Lang/Franz Lang at Heart/ The Guardian

After a year of lockdown, many of us are finding it hard to think clearly, or remember what happened when. Neuroscientists and behavioural experts explain why

[Moya Sarner](#)

Wed 14 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

Before the pandemic, psychoanalyst Josh Cohen’s patients might come into his consulting room, lie down on the couch and talk about the traffic or the

weather, or the rude person on the tube. Now they appear on his computer screen and tell him about brain fog. They talk with urgency of feeling unable to concentrate in meetings, to read, to follow intricately plotted television programmes. “There’s this sense of debilitation, of losing ordinary facility with everyday life; a forgetfulness and a kind of deskilling,” says Cohen, author of the self-help book *How to Live. What to Do*. Although restrictions are now easing across the UK, with greater freedom to circulate and socialise, he says lockdown for many of us has been “a contraction of life, and an almost parallel contraction of mental capacity”.

This dulled, useless state of mind – epitomised by the act of going into a room and then forgetting why we are there – is so boring, so lifeless. But researchers believe it is far more interesting than it feels: even that this common experience can be explained by cutting-edge neuroscience theories, and that studying it could further scientific understanding of the brain and how it changes. I ask Jon Simons, professor of cognitive neuroscience at the University of Cambridge, could it really be something “sciencey”? “Yes, it’s definitely something sciencey – and it’s helpful to understand that this feeling isn’t unusual or weird,” he says. “There isn’t something wrong with us. It’s a completely normal reaction to this quite traumatic experience we’ve collectively had over the last 12 months or so.”

What we call brain fog, Catherine Loveday, professor of cognitive neuroscience at the University of Westminster, calls poor “cognitive function”. That covers “everything from our memory, our attention and our ability to problem-solve to our capacity to be creative. Essentially, it’s thinking.” And recently, she’s heard a lot of complaints about it: “Because I’m a memory scientist, so many people are telling me their memory is really poor, and reporting this cognitive fog,” she says. She knows of only two studies exploring the phenomenon as it relates to lockdown (as opposed to what some people report as a symptom of Covid-19, or long Covid): one from Italy, in which participants subjectively reported these sorts of problems with attention, time perception and organisation; another in Scotland which objectively measured participants’ cognitive function across a range of tasks at particular times during the first lockdown and into the summer. Results showed that people performed worse when lockdown started, but improved as restrictions loosened, with those who continued shielding improving more slowly than those who went out more.

It's likely that in a year or two, we'll look back on some event this year and say, when on earth did that happen?

Loveday and Simons are not surprised. Given the isolation and stasis we have had to endure until very recently, these complaints are exactly what they expected – and they provide the opportunity to test their theories as to why such brain fog might come about. There is no one explanation, no single source, Simons says: “There are bound to be a lot of different factors that are coming together, interacting with each other, to cause these memory impairments, attentional deficits and other processing difficulties.”

One powerful factor could be the fact that everything is so samey. Loveday explains that the brain is stimulated by the new, the different, and this is known as the orienting response: “From the minute we’re born – in fact, from before we’re born – when there is a new stimulus, a baby will turn its head towards it. And if as adults we are watching a boring lecture and someone walks into the room, it will stir our brain back into action.”

Most of us are likely to feel that nobody new has walked into our room for quite some time, which might help to explain this sluggish feeling neurologically: “We have effectively evolved to stop paying attention when nothing changes, but to pay particular attention when things do change,” she says. Loveday suggests that if we can attend a work meeting by phone while walking in a park, we might find we are more awake and better able to concentrate, thanks to the changing scenery and the exercise; she is recording some lectures as podcasts, rather than videos, so students can walk while listening. She also suggests spending time in different rooms at home – or if you only have one room, try “changing what the room looks like. I’m not saying redecorate – but you could change the pictures on the walls or move things around for variety, even in the smallest space.”



Brain fog has resulted partly from ‘degraded social interaction’. Illustration: Franz Lang/The Guardian

The blending of one day into the next with no commute, no change of scene, no change of cast, could also have an important impact on the way the brain processes memories, Simons explains. Experiences under lockdown lack “distinctiveness” – a crucial factor in “pattern separation”. This process, which takes place in the hippocampus, at the centre of the brain, allows individual memories to be successfully encoded, ensuring there are few overlapping features, so we can distinguish one memory from another and retrieve them efficiently. The fuggy, confused sensation that many of us will recognise, of not being able to remember whether something happened last week or last month, may well be with us for a while, Simons says: “Our memories are going to be so difficult to differentiate. It’s highly likely that in a year or two, we’re still going to look back on some particular event from this last year and say, when on earth did that happen?”

Perhaps one of the most important features of this period for brain fog has been what Loveday calls the “degraded social interaction” we have endured. “It’s not the same as natural social interaction that we would have,” she says. “Our brains wake up in the presence of other people – being with others is stimulating.” We each have our own optimum level of stimulation – some might feel better able to function in lockdown with less socialising; others

are left feeling dozy, deadened. Loveday is investigating the science of how levels of social interaction, among other factors, have affected memory function in lockdown. She also wonders if our alternative to face-to-face communication – platforms such as Zoom – could have an impact on concentration and attention. She theorises – and is conducting a study to explore this – that the lower audio-visual quality could “create a bigger cognitive load for the brain, which has to fill in the gaps, so you have to concentrate much harder.” If this is more cognitively demanding, as she thinks, we could be left feeling fogger, with “less brain space available to actually listen to what people are saying and process it, or to concentrate on anything else.”

It is the cognitive equivalent of feeling emotionally distressed – it’s almost the way the brain expresses sadness

Carmine Pariante, professor of biological psychiatry at King’s College London, is also intrigued by brain fog. “It’s a common experience, but it’s very complex,” he says. “I think it is the cognitive equivalent of feeling emotionally distressed; it’s almost the way the brain expresses sadness, beyond the emotion.” He takes a psycho-neuro-immuno-endocrinological approach to the phenomenon – which is even more fascinating than it is difficult to say. He believes we need to think about the mind, the brain, the immune and the hormonal systems to understand the various mental and physical processes that might underlie this lockdown haze, which he sees as a consequence of stress.

We might all agree that the uncertainty of the last year has been quite stressful – more so for some than for others. When our mind appraises a situation as stressful, Pariante explains, our brain immediately transmits the message to our immune and endocrine systems. These systems respond in exactly the same way they did in [early humans two million years ago](#) on the African savannah, when stress did not relate to home schooling, but to fear of being eaten by a large animal. The heart beats faster so we can run away, inflammation is initiated by the immune system to protect against bacterial infection in case we are bitten, the hormone cortisol is released to focus our attention on the predator in front of us and nothing else. Studies have demonstrated that a dose of cortisol will lower a person’s attention,

concentration and memory for their immediate environment. Pariante explains: “This fog that people feel is just one manifestation of this mechanism. We’ve lost the function of these mechanisms, but they are still there.” Useful for fighting a lion – not for remembering where we put our glasses.

When I have experienced brain fog, I have seen it as a distraction, a kind of laziness, and tried to push through, to force myself to concentrate. But listening to Loveday, Simons and Pariante, I’m starting to think about it differently; perhaps brain fog is a signal we should listen to. “Absolutely, I think it’s exactly that,” says Pariante. “It’s our body and our brain telling us that we’re pushing it too much at the moment. It’s definitely a signal – an alarm bell.” When we hear this alarm, he says, we should stop and ask ourselves, “Why is my brain fog worse today than yesterday?” – and take as much time off as we can, rather than pushing ourselves harder and risking further emotional suffering, and even burnout.

People are finding themselves more sluggish – their physical and mental weight is somehow heavier, hard to carry around

For Cohen, the phenomenon of brain fog is an experience of one of the most disturbing aspects of the unconscious. He talks of Freud’s theory of drives – the idea that we have one force inside us that propels us towards life; another that pulls us towards death. The life drive, Cohen explains, impels us to create, make connections with others, seek “the expansion of life”. The death drive, by contrast, urges “a kind of contraction. It’s a move away from life and into a kind of stasis or entropy”. Lockdown – which, paradoxically, has done so much to preserve life – is like the death drive made lifestyle. With brain fog, he says, we are seeing “an atrophy of liveliness. People are finding themselves to be more sluggish, that their physical and mental weight is somehow heavier, it’s hard to carry around – to drag.” Freud has a word for this: *trägheit* – translated as a “sluggishness”, but which Cohen says literally translates as “daggyness”. We could understand brain fog as an encounter with our death drive – with the part of us which, in Cohen’s words, is “going in the opposite direction of awareness and sparkiness, and in the direction of inanimacy and shutting down”.

This brings to mind another psychoanalyst: [Wilfred Bion](#). He theorised that we have – at some moments – a will to know something about ourselves and our lives, even when that knowledge is profoundly painful. This, he called being in “K”. But there is also a powerful will not to know, a wish to defend against this awareness so that we can continue to live cosseted by lies; this is to be in “–K” (spoken as “minus K”). I wonder if the pandemic has been a reality some of us feel is too horrific to bear. The uncertainty, the deaths, the trauma, the precarity; perhaps we have unconsciously chosen to live in the misty, murky brain fog of –K rather than to face, to suffer, the true pain and horror of our situation. Perhaps we are having problems with our thinking because the truth of the experience, for many of us, is simply unthinkable.

I ask Simons if, after the pandemic, he thinks the structure of our brains will look different on a brain scan: “Probably not,” he says. For some of us, brain fog will be a temporary state, and will clear as we begin to live more varied lives. But, he says, “It’s possible for some people – and we are particularly concerned about older adults – that where there is natural neurological decline, it will be accelerated.”

Simons and a team of colleagues are running a study to investigate the impact of lockdown on memory in people aged over 65 – participants from a memory study that took place shortly before the pandemic, who have now agreed to sit the same tests a year on, and answer questions about life in the interim. One aim of this study is to test the hypothesis of cognitive reserve – the idea that having a rich and varied social life, filled with intellectual stimulation, challenging, novel experiences and fulfilling relationships, might help to keep the brain stimulated and protect against age-related cognitive decline. Simons’ advice to us all is to get out into the world, to have as rich and varied experiences and interactions as we can, to maximise our cognitive reserve within the remaining restrictions. The more we do, the more the brain fog should clear, he says: “We all experience grief, times in our lives where we feel like we can’t function at all,” he says. “These things are mercifully temporary, and we do recover.”

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How to live nowHangover cures

Sore head? 10 easy, comforting dishes to banish a hangover – chosen by chefs

Pubs have reopened in England this week. If the excitement has got too much, here are cooks' tips for the morning after, from mac and cheese to spicy chorizo eggs



'I always go for something like mac and cheese if I'm hungover,' says Masterchef judge Monica Galetti. Photograph: 4kodiak/Getty Images

'I always go for something like mac and cheese if I'm hungover,' says Masterchef judge Monica Galetti. Photograph: 4kodiak/Getty Images



Interviews by [Leah Harper](#)

@theharpsbizarre

Wed 14 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

Mac and cheese

Monica Galetti, Masterchef judge and chef proprietor of [Mere](#), London

I always go for something like mac and cheese if I'm hungover. Pasta is great for soaking everything up. I put together a cheesy bechamel sauce and add bacon lardons to the pasta too. I like to have lots of cheese – once it goes in the oven I sprinkle even more on top. It's a nice, easy dish to knock up when you don't have much energy and my daughter loves it too! In my younger days, I would also swear by drinking tomato juice – not a bloody mary, just pure tomato juice.

Spicy chorizo eggs



Photograph: kabVisio/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Sat Bains, chef proprietor of [Restaurant Sat Bains with Rooms](#), Nottingham

It's a few years since I was hungover, but my favourite thing to eat was always spicy chorizo eggs: simply saute chorizo until the oil comes out of the sausage, then crack two eggs on top. It's got grease, it's got spice, and I'd usually top it with sriracha sauce and fresh coriander. If I was staying in a hotel, I'd order a bloody mary. I like them to have lots of spices – celery salt, Tabasco, Worcestershire sauce, soy sauce – and you can add sriracha here too. It gives it an incredible kick.

Salted pork rib congee



Photograph: SherSor/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Erchen Chang, founder and creative director of [Bao](#), London

I like going to Bruno's on Wardour Street, in Soho – it's great for people-watching – and having a full English breakfast with a really big cup of tea. For me, that's one sausage, lots of beans, definitely an egg, sometimes hash browns, but always bread and butter. I only recently started drinking coffee, but if I'm hungover I'll stick to tea. If I'm at home, I'd probably put on a [congee](#) – if you have a rice cooker, it's very easy. It's quite plain but still tasty and very comforting. I like a lot of ginger in my congee and salted pork rib is an all-time classic for flavour.

A roast dinner

Andi Oliver, broadcaster and chef-owner at [Wadadli Kitchen](#), London

When I'm really hungover, I make pie. Anything with pastry - you need fats. There's nothing worse than when you order bacon and eggs and you're hungover, and they bring you back bacon – so disappointing. You want it fatty and crispy! Sometimes eggs can take you in the wrong direction, but a steamed pudding can be good. Obviously a roast dinner is really pretty great

at about 3pm – you want Yorkshire puddings, extra roasties and enormous amounts of gravy. I'd have it with a shandy or a spritzer – or I used to make a drink with almond milk, coffee, rum and maple syrup over ice, and that was really fantastic.

Dirty rice



Photograph: Marie Martin/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Harneet Baweja, co-founder of [Gunpowder](#), London

On a hangover, I'll eat “dirty rice” – reheating leftover biryani and topping it with a fried egg. You've got to have a little bit of chilli on it too, to help sweat out the alcohol. It's that or a bun kebab sandwich. I'm a tea drinker – nothing beats a good assam or darjeeling tea. That said, if I want to be “proper” and leave the house, I like to go to a tiny place called Shreeji Newsagents on Chiltern Street, Marylebone – they do coffee and a fantastic pain au chocolat. You wear shades and a heavy coat, so no one can see you're still in pyjamas.

Steak and eggs



Photograph: rebeccafondren/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Andrew D'Ambrosi, chef at [D'Ambrosi Fine Foods](#), Stow-on-the-Wold, the Cotswolds

Steak and eggs are my hangover go-to. I have it with A1 Sauce – which isn't big in the UK, so I keep a stash of it. To cook my steak, I get a pan smoking hot, season the steak generously on both sides and once it starts to brown, I turn the heat right down and allow a crust to form. If my butcher gives me a cut with extra fat, I like to slice it off, render the fat in a pan and use it as my cooking oil for the steak. I serve it with two fried eggs and a cup of coffee – I'm not a hair of the dog person.

A McNugget BLT

James Cochran, chef proprietor of [12:51](#), London

I make my notorious McNugget BLT, every time. You'll need six chicken nuggets (preferably from McDonald's) and while you're waiting for them to be delivered – because, let's be honest, you're not leaving the house – get two slices of cheap bread buttered (Warburton's gets my vote), fry up some bacon, slice tomatoes, shred lettuce, and use to construct your sandwich,

along with a good splodge of mayo and a crack of black pepper. When your nuggets arrive, crush them in there with all that BLT goodness and enjoy.

Coffee with Campari

Jacob Kennedy, chef patron of [Bocca di Lupo](#), London

When I was working at Moro, we would order a round of fried egg and bacon sandwiches from the greasy spoon across the road, open them up, and add in a drop of our harissa. I've always liked spicy foods for a hangover, although the only thing that really helps is drinking more. I live above a pub, so I'd probably go for a Sandford Orchards Devon Mist cider, which is delicious. My ex-head chef introduced me to a drink which we call an Albertino – a corretto coffee [espresso with added alcohol] with a shot of Campari in it. Every Italian I've described it to looks at me aghast – but when they try it they're like: "That's really good!"

A focaccia sandwich



Photograph: Tigrom/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Anna Barnett, chef, food writer and host of [The Filling](#) podcast

I am obsessed with sandwiches, and the [St John](#) focaccia, specifically. They do something that makes the bread extra crunchy and light, with rosemary going through it, lots of olive oil and little heaps of salt. On a hangover, I'd fill it with an amazing mortadella, layered with melted taleggio, tomato chutney and, potentially, Torres black truffle crisps for crunch. I would really get serious about it; you can tell so much about someone by their sandwich preferences. To drink, I'd want a pint of sparkling water with three limes squeezed into it and loads of ice – that's my go-to.

A fried egg butty



Photograph: Graham Franks/Alamy

Tom Brown, chef-owner of [Cornerstone](#), London

It's very simple – and depending on how hard you've gone I'm not promising miracles – but a fried egg butty is my go-to. I use thick white Hovis – not toasted, you want it soft – and put three (yes, three) eggs into a hot pan of veg oil. Don't flip them but make sure the white is cooked through and you have a golden crispy bottom. Season with salt and pepper, then put your eggs between slices of the generously buttered bread – the yolk is the only sauce you need. If you're really suffering, wash it all down with a Camden Hells lager.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/apr/14/sore-head-10-easy-comforting-dishes-to-banish-a-hangover-chosen-by-chefs>

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George Floyd

Families of George Floyd and Daunte Wright join together in grief: ‘The world is traumatized’



Philonise Floyd, left, brother of George Floyd; Chyna Whitaker, Daunte Wright’s girlfriend, center; and the Floyd family lawyer Ben Crump, at a press conference on Tuesday. Photograph: Kerem Yucel/AFP/Getty Images

Philonise Floyd, left, brother of George Floyd; Chyna Whitaker, Daunte Wright’s girlfriend, center; and the Floyd family lawyer Ben Crump, at a press conference on Tuesday. Photograph: Kerem Yucel/AFP/Getty Images

Shared sorrow outside the court seems distant as Derek Chauvin’s defence seeks to tell different story



[Oliver Laughland](#) in Minneapolis

[@oliverlaughland](#)

Wed 14 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

As court broke for lunch on the 12th day of the Derek Chauvin murder trial, the grounds of Hennepin county government center filled with grieving families.

In a poignant news conference, distraught relatives of [Daunte Wright](#) and George Floyd took turns talking about the parallels between the two cases of fatal police violence and the grief they were experiencing in the aftermath. Snow fell and wind whipped the microphones.

“The world is traumatized, watching another African American man being slain. Every day I wake up, I never thought that this world could be in so much disorder like it is now,” said Philonise Floyd, George Floyd’s brother, who [testified in court on Monday](#). “Minneapolis, you all can’t sweep this under the rug any more. We’re here and we will fight for justice for this family, just like we’ll fight for justice for our brother.”

To sit through this and watch a video of your loved one dying a thousand times ... nothing prepares you

Philonise Floyd

The civil rights attorney Benjamin Crump, now representing both families, was incredulous.

“It is unbelievable, something I cannot fathom, that in Minneapolis, Minnesota, a suburb 10 miles from where the Chauvin trial regarding [George Floyd](#) was taking place, that a police officer would shoot and kill another unarmed black man,” Crump said.

He continued: “If ever there was a time where nobody in America should be killed by police, it was during this pinnacle trial of Derek Chauvin, what I believe is one of the most impactful civil rights, police excessive use of force cases in the history of America.

But inside the trial room that day, [as Chauvin’s defence began](#) calling its first witnesses, the indignation and profound sorrow over fatal police force seemed distant, despite the few hundred feet separating the court from the assembled mourners.

The snow is pounding down as Ben Crump talks about the Daunte Wright case and the shared grief the Floyd and Wright family feel.
pic.twitter.com/L0LJS03ivS

— Oliver Laughland (@oliverlaughland) [April 13, 2021](#)

Chauvin’s defence lawyer, Eric Nelson, attempted to place George Floyd front and centre by showing evidence of drug use from a 2019 arrest. The defence has alleged that Floyd ingested pills during the incident that ultimately led to his death – essentially, an insinuation that Floyd was responsible for his own demise.

The afternoon’s witness, Barry Brodd, a use-of-force expert, told jurors that Chauvin’s use of a knee-to-neck restraint for nine minutes and 29 seconds was justifiable and did not amount to deadly force. He argued that officers are “allowed to overcome your resistance by going up a level to gain control”.

Derek Chauvin trial: defence opens its case with ex-police officer Read more

He told the jury calmly: “I felt that Derek Chauvin was justified, and was acting with objective reasonableness, following Minneapolis police department policy and current standards of law enforcement, in his interactions with Mr Floyd.”

Jurors have already been told by a number of senior officers in the Minneapolis police department, including the chief of police himself, the exact opposite.

Brodd had testified in defence of Jason Van Dyke, the former Chicago police officer who shot Laquan McDonald, a Black teenager, 16 times in 2014. During that testimony, according to local media, Brodd testified that each of Van Dyke’s 16 gunshots was justified. In October 2018, the former officer, who is white, was found guilty of second-degree murder.

Speaking after the earlier news conference, Philonise Floyd told the Guardian about the pain of watching the trial. He winced when asked about what it had felt like to sit through the defence’s case and cautioned that Wright’s family would probably feel the same if the death of the unarmed 20-year-old made it to a trial. “To sit through this and watch a video of your loved one dying a thousand times,” he said. “Nothing prepares you.”

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[The Pacific project](#)[Prince Philip](#)

‘His spirit lives on’: Vanuatu’s Tanna island mourns Prince Philip as its own



Jack Malia, in the foreground, is the paramount chief of Yaohnanen village on Tanna island, Vanuatu. He believes that Prince Charles will succeed his father Prince Philip to become the focus of their faith. Photograph: Dan McGarry/The Guardian

Jack Malia, in the foreground, is the paramount chief of Yaohnanen village on Tanna island, Vanuatu. He believes that Prince Charles will succeed his father Prince Philip to become the focus of their faith. Photograph: Dan McGarry/The Guardian

Villagers believe Duke of Edinburgh was born on Tanna and left it to woo and wed the Queen

- [Queen returns to royal duties four days after death of Prince Philip](#)

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[Dan McGarry on Tanna](#)

Tue 13 Apr 2021 20.08 EDT

Days after the [news of Prince Philip's death](#) reverberated around the world, a young woman and her mother selling snacks in a marketplace on the Vanuatu island of Tanna heard it for the first time.

Sophie, who declined to provide a family name, visibly flinched as the information registered. She quickly recovered the reserved demeanour so common on the island but the news clearly touched her deeply.

“Sorry,” was all she said.

[Philip's death leaves Prince Charles as patriarch of royal family](#)

[Read more](#)

This simple pronouncement was repeated again and again at the weekend across the island. But it was spoken most eloquently by Albi, paramount chief of Yakel village. “Lamopo, lamopo,” he said. I am so, so sorry.

Albi received a framed copy of the portrait of the Duke of Edinburgh released by Buckingham Palace. He held it in his hands for several minutes,

motionless. No one spoke.

But his message to the Queen is that she should not despair. Her husband's spirit will live on.

The death of [Prince Philip](#) has had a profound effect on the island of Tanna, in the tiny south Pacific nation of Vanuatu.



Chief Albi of Yakel village on Tanna stares at a portrait of Prince Philip.
Photograph: Ginny Stein/The Guardian

It's a popular misconception that the kastom tribes of Tanna worship Prince Philip as a deity. They don't. They revere him as one of their own. According to local belief, he was a man who was born on Tanna, and a great spirit inhabited his body.

According to lore, Philip left Tanna before the second world war to seek his fortune. He travelled to the UK where he met, wooed and wed the most powerful woman in the world.

[Tanna map](#)

Tanna kastom, they contend, came to reside at the very heart of the British empire. A quest by this tribe to reconnect with Philip was documented on

Channel 4's Meet the Natives, which saw a delegation of Tannese men travel to the UK to conduct what the show's creator called reverse anthropology. In the final episode, they had a private meeting with Prince Philip.

Chief Lalu, from west Tanna, said: "Prince Philip was a man who connected Tanna to London. Our fathers and our grandfathers told us this."

Prince Charles is considered Man Tanna, as they say. "Prince Philip's family is Tanna's family," he said.

Willie Lop is the highest-ranking chief on the island. He is equally unequivocal: "I want to tell the world that Prince Philip came from Tanna."

"I want to send the English nation a sympathy message from the island of Tanna. We send this message to the government and the people of England. We send our sympathy for the loss of Prince Philip."

Only a few kilometres from a newly constructed highway, the people of Yakel village eschew all modernity, living as they have for thousands of years.

A short walk down the rutted, dusty roads lies Yaohnanen, considered the birthplace of the Prince Philip movement. There, paramount chief Jack Malia was more pragmatic about the loss of their spiritual leader.

"When the prince died," he said, "it didn't weigh heavily on us, because the spirit that lived in him was with us here in the *nakamal*." He was referring to the village meeting place, a broad sandy expanse sheltered under the boughs of an ancient banyan tree.

"He was here with us," he said.



Children of Yaohnanen village play as the Union Jack flies at half mast. Yaohnanen is widely considered the birthplace of the Prince Philip movement. Photograph: Dan McGarry/The Guardian

Mourning in [Vanuatu](#) lasts 100 days. The entire island will observe the rite, but Yaohnanen, the duke's birthplace according to its inhabitants, remains the focus. Already, chiefs from the surrounding villages are meeting, conducting delicate negotiations to answer a question that lies at the core of their living, still-mutable religion: Who will succeed Philip?

Malia says Prince Charles was anointed to the role during his 2018 visit to Vanuatu. Most people agree with him. But in Yakel, Albi is less sure. Prince Philip's spirit lives on, he says, but it will take time before we know in whom it will choose to reside.

Every evening the men of the Prince Philip tribes will gather to drink kava, a ceremonial drink with a mildly intoxicating effect, to listen to the wisdom it brings, and to remember the man they claim left their island to stand at the right hand of the Queen.

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[Amazon Alexa](#)

Amazon Echo Dot (4th gen) review: Alexa's new small budget ball

Smart speaker ditches puck shape but keeps solid sound and function with or without LED clock display



The spherical Echo Dot is gives Alexa a new budget home, inheriting the winning qualities of its predecessor in a fresh design. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The spherical Echo Dot is gives Alexa a new budget home, inheriting the winning qualities of its predecessor in a fresh design. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

[Samuel Gibbs](#) Consumer technology editor

Wed 14 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

Amazon's fourth-generation Echo Dot has evolved from its predecessors' puck-like appearance into a small ball, shaking up the idea of what a small smart speaker can look like.

The new Echo Dot is priced the [same as the last one](#), costing from £50, although it will be frequently available at a discount at various retailers, and looks like the [full-sized £80 Echo](#) hit with a shrink ray.

It has a fabric top and front, hard plastic sides and back, and Amazon's traditional four-button array for turning the volume up and down, muting the microphones and an action button.



The fourth-generation Echo Dot (left) next to the third-generation (right).
Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

It is a cute little ball that doesn't look like a speaker or its competition. But while it takes up the [same footprint as its puck-shaped predecessor](#), it is about twice its height which makes it slightly less discreet in your home.

The power cable plugs in the back next to a 3.5mm analogue audio socket for connecting external speakers but the Echo Dot has Bluetooth too.

The light ring lights up at the bottom making it look like the speaker is glowing when Alexa is active or to show alerts or when adjusting the

volume.

Specifications

- **Dimensions:** 100 x 100 x 89mm
- **Weight:** 338g
- **Connectivity:** wifi 5 (ac), Bluetooth, 3.5mm analogue audio
- **Controls:** voice, top-mounted volume, action and mic mute
- **Speakers:** single 1.6in speaker

Small ball of sound



The speaker projects sound forward through the mesh, rather than 360-degrees like its predecessor, while a silicone rubber foot keeps the ball from vibrating or rolling around. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The Dot is larger and produces slightly fuller and wider audio because of it, despite having the same sized speaker as the third-generation model.

It sounds surprisingly good for its size and price. The Dot lacks real bass, but it is otherwise pleasant to listen to music, the radio and Alexa's voice with enough volume to fill a small room. Two can be paired for stereo sound and the Dot can be grouped with other Alexa-enabled speakers for multi-room audio.

Alexa natively supports music streaming services from Spotify, Apple, Deezer or Amazon, or you can stream tunes to it via Bluetooth. Radio services are handled by TuneIn, or using BBC Sounds and other individual station "skills" you can install like apps using the Alexa app on your phone.

Just like any other Alexa speaker it will read the news headlines, tell you the weather, answer questions, set alarms, timers and control smart home devices, too.

Clock or not?



The display shows time in 12 or 24-hour format, and will also display the current outside temperature among other things on command. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The Dot comes in two versions: a regular Echo Dot and an Echo Dot with Clock for £10 more, which as the name suggests has an LED time display

hidden behind the mesh at the front.

They are functionally identical apart from the display, which shows the time, the outside temperature when asked, timers, the volume when adjusting it and the time of the alarm when setting it. A little white dot next to the time shows when an alarm has been set or a timer is active.

As [with its predecessor](#), the clock turns the Dot into a good bedside accessory. The brightness of the display automatically adjusts based on ambient light, but you can customise how bright that adjustment is. On its most dim setting it is slightly brighter than the outgoing model and produced enough light to create shadows on the wall at night. You can turn the display on and off with the Alexa app or via voice.

Sustainability

The speaker is generally repairable. It contains 100% post-consumer recycled fabric, 100% recycled die-cast aluminium and 50% post-consumer recycled plastic. Amazon has [also pledged to offset](#) the electricity used by Echo devices with renewable energy. Amazon also [offers trade-in and recycling schemes](#).

Observations



As with all smart speakers, you have to trust the manufacturer with your data, but the mute button and the light ring at the bottom glow bright red when the mics are silenced so you can easily see privacy mode has been enabled from across the room. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

- You can tap the top to snooze an alarm, but I wish you could do it to just dismiss it too.
- You can change the wakeword from Alexa to Amazon, Echo or computer, but you still can't change the gender of its voice, unlike competitors.

Price

The fourth-generation Amazon Echo Dot costs [£49.99](#) or [£59.99](#) with the LED clock.

For comparison, the [third-gen Echo Dot](#) has been reduced to [£39.99](#), the [standard Echo](#) costs [£79.99](#), [Google's Nest Mini](#) costs [£49](#) and [Apple's HomePod mini](#) costs [£99](#).

Verdict

The fourth-generation Echo Dot is a cute, ball-like redesign that breaks the mould of the traditional puck or pincushion-like speakers.

Bought with or without an LED display, the Dot continues to sound better than you'd expect – ideal for small rooms or background listening – and provide all of Alexa's features in a good-value package costing £50 or less in Amazon's frequent sales.

It may look more interesting, but it is slightly harder to place at home than the previous lower-profile design. The Dot with Clock's screen is a little brighter at its dimmest setting, which some may find irritating.

Pros: Good value, Alexa, loud enough for small rooms, Bluetooth, 3.5mm socket, can be paired, frequently discounted, good mics, can be bought with or without LED clock, fresh design.

Cons: no real bass, less discreet shape, clock display brighter than predecessor, potential privacy implications of having mics.



The Dot is about the size of a softball or a large orange. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Other reviews

- [Amazon Echo 2020 review: the best-sounding smart speaker under £100](#)
 - [Google Nest Mini review: better bass and recycled plastic](#)
 - [HomePod mini review: Apple's smaller and cheaper smart speaker](#)
 - [Amazon Echo Show 5 review: smaller, cheaper Alexa display](#)
 - [Google Nest Hub \(2nd gen\) review: wearable-free sleep tracking smart display](#)
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Smartphones

Phone wet and won't turn on? Here's what to do with water damage (hint: putting it in rice won't work)

While many smartphones are advertised as ‘water resistant’, this doesn’t mean they’re immune from water damage



Putting your wet device in rice won’t fix a water-damaged phone, but there are other steps you can take to try and repair it
Photograph: Carlos Fernandez/Getty Images

Putting your wet device in rice won’t fix a water-damaged phone, but there are other steps you can take to try and repair it
Photograph: Carlos Fernandez/Getty Images

Ritesh Chugh for the Conversation

Tue 13 Apr 2021 21.08 EDT

If you've ever gotten your phone wet in the rain, dropped it in water or spilt liquid over it, you're not alone. One study suggests [25% of smartphone users](#) have damaged their smartphone with water or some other kind of liquid.

Liquid penetrating a smartphone can affect the device in several ways. It could lead to:

- blurry photos, if moisture gets trapped in the camera lens
- ruffled audio, or no audio
- liquid droplets under the screen
- an inability to charge
- the rusting of internal parts, or
- a total end to all functionality.

While new phones are advertised as “water resistant”, this doesn’t mean they are waterproof, or totally immune to water. Water resistance just implies the device can handle *some* exposure to water before substantial damage occurs.

[iPhone 12 Pro Max review: Apple's longer lasting superphone](#)
[Read more](#)

Samsung Australia has long defended itself against [claims](#) it misrepresents the water resistance of its smartphones.

In 2019, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) took Samsung to the federal court, alleging false and misleading advertisements had led customers to believe their [Galaxy phones](#) would be suitable for:

Use in, or exposure to, all types of water (including, for example, oceans and swimming pools).

Samsung Australia subsequently [denied warranty claims](#) from customers for damage caused to phones by use in, or exposure to, liquid.

Similarly, last year Apple was [fined €10m](#) (A\$15.5m) by Italy's antitrust authority for misleading claims about the water resistance of its phones, and for not covering liquid damage under warranty, despite these claims.

How resistant is your phone?

The water resistance of phones is rated by an “ingress protection” code, commonly called an IP rating. Simply, an electrical device’s IP rating refers to its effectiveness against intrusions from solids and liquids.

The rating includes two numbers. The first demonstrates protection against solids such as dust, while the second indicates resistance to liquids, specifically water.



Here are the various ingress protection ratings. The numbering changes based on the level of protection. Photograph: Element Materials Technology

A phone that has a rating of [IP68](#) has a solid object protection of 6 (full protection from dust, dirt and sand) and a liquid protection of 8 (protected from immersion in water to a depth of more than one metre).

Although, for the latter, manufacturers are responsible for defining the exact depth and time.

The popular [iPhone 12](#) and [Samsung Galaxy S21](#) phones both have a rating of IP68. However, regarding exposure to water, the iPhone 12 has a permissible immersion depth of a maximum of 6m for 30 minutes, whereas the Galaxy 21's immersion limit is up to 1.5m, also for 30 minutes.

While IP ratings indicate the water-repellent nature of phones, taking most phones for a swim will land you in deep trouble. The salt content in oceans and swimming pools can corrode your device and cost you a hefty replacement.

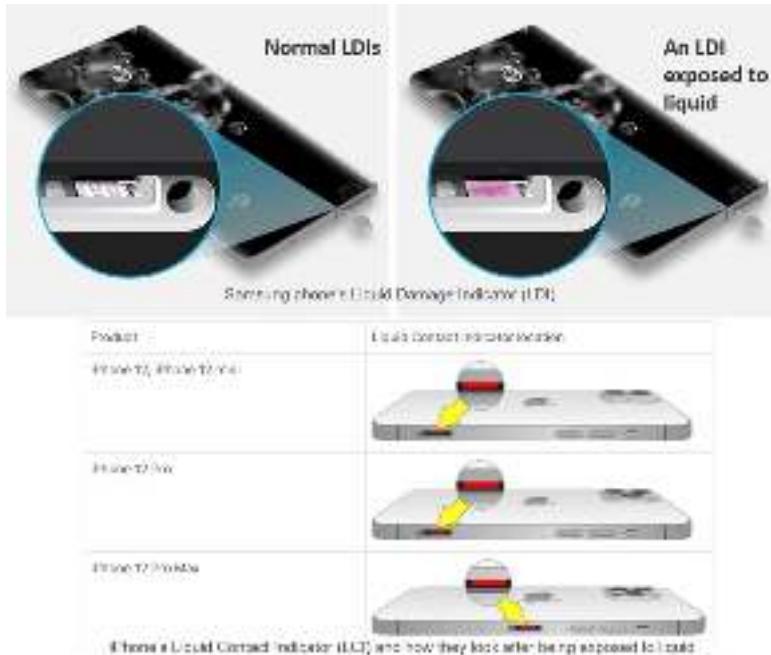
Moreover, phone manufacturers carry out their IP testing in fresh water and Apple [recommends](#) devices not be submerged in liquids of any kind.

Luckily, water-resistant phones are generally able to survive smaller liquid volumes, such as from a glass tipping over.

Checking for liquid damage

Exposure to water is something manufacturers have in mind when designing phones. Most [Apple](#) and [Samsung](#) phones come with a liquid contact/damage indicator strip located inside the SIM card tray.

This is used to check for liquid damage that may be causing a device to malfunction. An indicator strip that comes in contact with liquid loses its usual colour and becomes discoloured and smudgy.



Samsung and Apple phones have liquid contact/damage indicators.
 Photograph: Samsung/Apple

A discoloured strip usually renders your phone ineligible for a standard manufacturer warranty.

If you have any of the more recent smartphones from [Apple](#) or [Samsung](#), then your device will be able to detect liquid or moisture in its charging port and will warn you with an alert. This notification only goes away once the port is dry.



New-generation Samsung and Apple phones have a moisture/liquid alert notification. Photograph: Samsung/Apple

But what should you do if this dreadful pop-up presents itself?

Fixing a water-logged phone

Firstly, do not put your phone in a container of rice. It's a [myth](#) that rice helps in drying out your phone. Instead, follow these steps:



Putting your phone in an airtight container with silica gel may help if it gets wet. Photograph: bbbrrn/Getty Images/iStockphoto

1. Turn off the device immediately and don't press any buttons.
2. If your phone is water resistant and you've spilt or submerged it in a liquid other than water, both [Apple](#) and [Samsung](#) recommend rinsing it off by submerging it in still tap water (but not under a running tap, which could cause damage).
3. Wipe the phone dry with paper towels or a soft cloth.
4. Gently shake the device to remove water from the charging ports, but avoid vigorous shaking as this could further spread the liquid inside.
5. Remove the SIM card.
6. Use a compressed aerosol air duster to blow the water out if you have one. Avoid using a hot blow dryer as the heat can wreck the rubber seals and damage the screen.
7. Dry out the phone (and especially the ports) in front of a fan.
8. Leave your phone in an airtight container full of [silica gel](#) packets (those small packets you get inside new shoes and bags), or another drying agent. These help absorb the moisture.
9. Do not charge the phone until you are certain it's dry. Charging a device with liquid still inside it, or in the ports, can cause further damage. Apple suggests waiting [at least five hours](#) once a phone appears dry before charging it (or until the alert disappears).

If the above steps don't help and you're still stuck with a seemingly dead device, don't try opening the phone yourself. You're better off taking it to a professional.

- *Ritesh Chugh is a senior lecturer in information systems and analysis at CQUniversity Australia*
 - *This article originally appeared in the Conversation*
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The age of extinctionEnvironment

Eat, roam, repeat: Can the bison's big appetite stop Spain's forest fires?

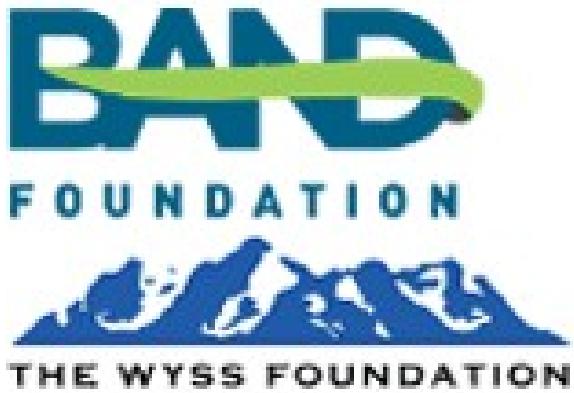
Conservationists hope the return of the near-extinct herbivore – ‘a living strimmer’ – will clear the undergrowth that fuels fires



Reintroducing bison could help fill the grazing gap left by a decline in sheep farming. Photograph: agefotostock/Alamy

Reintroducing bison could help fill the grazing gap left by a decline in sheep farming. Photograph: agefotostock/Alamy

The age of extinction is supported by



About this content

[Stephen Burgen](#) in Barcelona

Wed 14 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

As the temperatures begin to rise, Spain is braced for another summer of the forest fires that over the past 10 years have destroyed about [741,000 hectares \(1.8m acres\)](#) of forest.

Last year, fires consumed 45,000 hectares according to government estimates, the year before [60,000 hectares](#), and there are signs that, as in California and Australia, the fires are becoming more frequent and more intense.

Climate change and rural depopulation are among the factors driving an increase in Spain's forest fires, says Mónica Parrilla, who is responsible for Greenpeace's forest fire campaign.

At the same time, a decline in sheep herding is leaving [Spain](#) without a large herbivore to clear the undergrowth that fuels the fires.

Step forward the European bison, driven to extinction in Spain 10,000 years ago, but now growing in numbers due to a programme to reintroduce the species.

The bison opens up dense parts of the forest, which lets in light and allows grass to grow instead of scrub

Fernando Morán

Fernando Morán, a veterinarian who is director of the European Bison [Conservation](#) Center of Spain, describes the bison as “a living strimmer”. The animals, which weigh up to 1,000kg, eat around 30kg of vegetation a day made up of about 30% wood fibre and 70% shoots and leaves.

“The European bison delivers immediate biodiversity,” Morán says. “It opens up dense parts of the forest which lets in the light and allows grass to grow instead of scrub, which lowers fire risk and, in turn, benefits numerous species through food and freedom of movement.”



A bison is depicted in a painting in the Altamira cave, in the historic town of Santillana del Mar, Cantabria. Photograph: Jesus Martin Rodriguez/Alamy

Fossils and cave paintings indicate that bison roamed the Iberian peninsula for an estimated 1.2m years before they became extinct. They lived throughout Europe until the last wild animals were shot in Poland in 1919, and Russia in 1927.

About 50 survived in captivity and all 8,400 European bison now living are descended from just 12 of these. There are 18 centres breeding bison in Spain and over the past 10 years their numbers have grown from 22 to 150.

Morán says forest engineers were impressed by the first project that began in 2010, when seven bison were released into 20 hectares of oak forest. Bison were doing the forestry work, clearing the undergrowth, even leaving straight saplings to grow while eating the bent ones, perhaps because the latter are easier to reach. Forest clearance of this type costs approximately €3,000 (£2,602) a hectare – and the bison were doing it for free.



A herd of European bison in Spain, where there are now 18 centres breeding the animal. Photograph: Yvonne Kemp/Handout

The work of the centres receives no government support and is funded by donations and volunteers. As they have been extinct for so long, bison are not recognised by the Spanish authorities as an endangered species and so there is no funding available.

This is the case throughout the EU, says Morán. Poland and Romania are the only EU countries that have a state-sponsored bison programme.

“Pasturage is vital for forest management,” says Parrilla. “The role of the bison could be interesting but we should also do more to help native species

that are vital for the ecosystem and to educate people about the importance of woodland for our own survival.”

Sonia Roig Gómez, a professor at the school of forestry and environment at the Polytechnic University of Madrid, points out that it is human intervention, particularly in the form of sheep herding, that until recently minimised fire risks.

“In the Mediterranean, pasturage has been key to how the landscape has developed,” Roig says. “Species have emerged as an adaptation to pasturage and its decline has led to more fires.”

[Wildfires are ruinous - so how to stop them happening in the first place?](#)

[Read more](#)

Since the 1950s, there has also been a steady drain of population from rural to urban areas, leading to more areas of highly flammable scrubland as farms are abandoned.

The pandemic has led to a small but significant migration in the other direction, but Roig says that if this only means that people will sit at their computer screens in rural surroundings nothing will change. What’s needed is people who want to work in agriculture, sheep herding in particular.



A male bison in Spain, where the animals are not recognised as an endangered species. Photograph: Fernando Morán/Handout

As for the bison, for now it is illegal to release the animal into the wild because it is not recognised as an indigenous species. All the schemes in Spain will be on private land or enclosed spaces of national parks. Bison must have an owner who is responsible for them.

“We are encouraging and helping landowners to develop a project with bison because it’s good for the land and also saves money, as well as encouraging ecotourism,” Morán says.

And while Roig worries about the impact of introducing a creature as large as the bison when it has no competitors, Morán believes it will simply reclaim the niche it occupied for more than a million years.

Find more [age of extinction coverage here](#), and follow biodiversity reporters [Phoebe Weston](#) and [Patrick Greenfield](#) on Twitter for all the latest news and features

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[**Opinion**](#)[**Politics**](#)

Britain believes it's free of corruption. But there's still the stench of decay

[**Rafael Behr**](#)



David Cameron's political afterlife reveals a zone where accountability dissolves; in its place flow money and access



‘The spectacle of what David Cameron has become distracts attention from what he always was.’ Photograph: Nathan King/Alamy

‘The spectacle of what David Cameron has become distracts attention from what he always was.’ Photograph: Nathan King/Alamy

Tue 13 Apr 2021 12.30 EDT

If you are pulled over for a traffic offence in Britain, the fine is not usually settled with a wink and a roll of banknotes for the police officer. In court, judges do not rule in favour of the highest bidder. I have spent enough time in countries where cash bribery lubricates every cog of the state to believe that the UK is not, by global standards, corrupt.

Transparency International’s [2020 index](#) of perceived corruption ranked Britain 11th in the world. For European context, that puts us eight places behind Finland, 12 above France and 118 clear of Russia, where the barrier between politics and theft has collapsed and the most prominent campaigner on the issue, Alexei Navalny, was jailed earlier this year.

British prime ministers do not build palaces with plundered national resources, for which restraint we can be grateful. But pride at having relatively clean politics invites complacency about behaviour that offends a spirit of public duty without breaking any laws. So it is with David Cameron

[contacting ministers](#) on behalf of Lex Greensill, a financier whose business went bust last year. Greensill previously had an ill-defined advisory role in Cameron's government. His company seems to have enjoyed extraordinary licence to straddle the boundary between public and private sectors. One senior Whitehall official from the Cameron era was [hired to advise](#) the Greensill board while still formally employed as a civil servant.

The former prime minister has broken no rules, although he [acknowledges](#) that, "to avoid misunderstanding", contact with the current cabinet should have been conducted "through only the most formal of channels". But access to the least formal channels is presumably a reason why Greensill had him on the books. Cameron also pleads extenuating circumstances in a national emergency. He was promoting financial bridges in a pandemic, when small businesses were falling into credit gaps.

Wartime expediency has also been the government's defence against [allegations of cronyism](#) when awarding public contracts in the battle against coronavirus. Corners were cut and friends of the Tory party might have benefited, but apparently there was no time for proper procedures. The virus moved too fast.

That cover story can't apply to non-Covid cosiness. There was no pandemic in November 2019, for instance, when newspaper tycoon Richard Desmond attended a Tory fundraising dinner and [buttonholed](#) Robert Jenrick, the housing minister, over a property scheme for which he needed, and was later granted, planning permission. The decision was overturned in court. Jenrick said the two men had been seated together "inadvertently".

It is hard to measure the impact of any single story on public opinion. There has been a steady corrosion over many years of the idea that politicians serve their electors foremost. Ordinary folk are in the queue for attention, but the rich get backstage passes.

These things are partly cyclical. After a long incumbency, sleaze stories collect like bags under the eyes of a haggard government. Ministers get arrogant from the habit of power, and wield it lazily.

Boris Johnson is not a man to lose sleep over lapses in probity. But he remembers the putrescence of the John Major years and its deep contamination of the Tory brand. He should fear any return of the whiff. Downing Street has [ordered a review](#) into Greensill Capital's involvement in government, including Cameron's lobbying. It will be conducted by Nigel Boardman, a corporate lawyer and non-executive director at the Department for Business.

The immediate purpose of such an inquiry is deflection of awkward questions. Ministers can withhold comment pending the investigator's report. A bonus function is that the present prime minister gets to hang a steaming cauldron of ignominy over the head of an old rival. The [competition](#) between them, dating back to Eton school days, is without ideological content but thick with national consequence, since it put them on opposing sides of the Brexit debate.

There is something pitiful about the slide in Cameron's status from running the government to sending it needy text messages. But the spectacle of what he has become distracts attention from what he always was. This is a man born into the trade of establishment favours. He is a distant cousin of the Queen. His first job interview at Conservative headquarters was supported by a [caller from Buckingham Palace](#) who has never been identified but is reported to have flagged up the aspiring researcher as "a truly remarkable young man".

Maybe Cameron deserved that accolade. It takes skill to maximise opportunities that come past on a journey up the elite escalator. "I think I'd be rather good at it," he said once, when asked why he wanted to be prime minister. Events should have disabused him of that notion. But he is no better equipped for realistic self-appraisal than Johnson, in whom no one suspects altruistic motive for seeking high office. For both men, the glamour of power is only temporary compensation for the privations of a ministerial salary – a fraction of what their privileges might parlay out of the private sector.

Cameron acknowledges that a line was crossed with [Greensill](#), but only because a ray of media attention illuminated that line's existence. There

would be no qualm if the whole business had been kept in its proper place, behind heavy oak-panelled doors.

It was all meant to stay in the enchanted realm of informal power, beyond Westminster station's platform [nine and three-quarters](#), accessed via the serene sense of entitlement to be there. It is a place with its own codes of patronage and mutual assistance that are so woven into the political fabric that we treat them as decor, not decay. One example: prime ministers reward friends, advisers and financial benefactors with peerages because it is the custom. Other countries use a different word when seats in parliament's upper chamber are handed out as prizes for loyalty to the leader.

What we glimpse in Cameron's political afterlife is that shaded zone in British public affairs where chains of accountability dissolve; where a liquid fusion of money and social pedigree flows unimpeded between state institutions, parliament and the Tory party.

British politics is not riddled with corruption. But it is decadent in many ways, rotten in places, and has been this way for so long that we hardly react to the smell.

- Rafael Behr is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionCoronavirus

The science of hugging, and why we're missing it so much during the pandemic

Susannah Walker

To understand why so many are craving human touch we can look to our evolutionary history – and the secrets of our skin

- Dr Susannah Walker is a reader in behavioural neuroscience at Liverpool John Moores University



‘The release of oxytocin is context-dependent: only when a hug is wanted will the comforting and rewarding effects be felt.’ Paddington station, London, August 2020. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

‘The release of oxytocin is context-dependent: only when a hug is wanted will the comforting and rewarding effects be felt.’ Paddington station, London, August 2020. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

Wed 14 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

“What I miss,” said one colleague last spring, during one of our weekly online team meetings, “are hugs, great big man-hugs, like I share with my dad and close male friends.” The sense of touch has long been a shared fascination for our research group of neuroscientists and experimental psychologists. During the pandemic, everyone else has started to talk about touch too – and the negative impact of its loss.

Twelve months later, hugs are still at the forefront of many people’s minds. One [recent survey](#) put hugs fourth on a list of 30 things people are most looking forward to after lockdown, just behind visiting friends and relatives (who they will no doubt be hugging) and eating out in restaurants. Refraining from touching or hugging our friends and family has proved really difficult over the last year, and the sight and sound of a loved one over Zoom rarely feels enough. To understand why we crave hugs and the touch of other humans, we need to look to our evolutionary and social history – and our skin.

Humans are born helpless; from birth we are reliant on others to feed us, keep us warm and comfort us when we are distressed. Like all mammals, we are innately predisposed to seek physical contact to ensure our own survival. Touch plays a major role in early nurturing interactions. Skin-to-skin contact between a mother and her infant helps regulate the infant’s heart and breathing rate, reduces levels of stress hormones, promotes growth and shapes the developing brain.

The more reliable and sensitive this early care-giving is, the stronger the benefit will be to a child’s health and wellbeing later in life. Touch sends a signal to babies that support is available and they are safe. As we grow older, touch plays an important role in the formation and maintenance of adult social relationships. When distressed, we revert to our earlier experiences of touch, relying on non-verbal support such as handholding, hugs and caresses.

The comforting, rewarding benefits of touch are rooted in our skin, which is innervated with a variety of sensory receptors that inform us about what is happening on the surface of our body. A fly lands on our nose, we get an itch; we stub a toe, we feel the warmth from the sun, someone squeezes our hand. These signals are combined in our brains alongside contextual

information, such as how we feel and who we are hugging, to generate the rewarding, pleasurable sensations that many of us currently crave.

Until relatively recently, neurobiologists studying our sense of touch have focused on the sensory nerves that allow us to detect and explore surfaces, textures and objects. These sensory receptors, found most densely in the skin of our hands and fingers, rapidly send signals to regions of the brain that process this aspect of touch. But researchers are now becoming increasingly interested in a subset of touch-sensitive nerves in core regions of the body, such as the back, which have only recently been discovered.

This second type of sensory nerves send signals to areas of our brains that deal with emotional processing. They are most responsive to skin temperature and gentle, stroking touch. Observational studies find that when people are asked to caress their infant, or their romantic partner, they spontaneously use the slow stroking speeds that these nerve fibres prefer. This touch is subjectively perceived as pleasant; it calms and soothes us physiologically, reducing heart rate and buffering against the effects of stress.

When stimulated, these nerves send signals via the spinal cord to the brain where they release a cascade of neurochemicals. One of the most notable chemicals among these is oxytocin, a hormone released by low-intensity skin stimulation such as hugs. Oxytocin is known to play important roles in social bonding, and can reduce stress and increase our tolerance to pain.

The release of oxytocin during social interactions is context-dependent: only when a hug is *wanted* will the comforting and rewarding effects be felt. When touch is desired, the benefits are shared by both partners in the exchange. Notably, these partners don't have to be human. Oxytocin levels increase in both a dog and their owner when the animal is stroked and petted, perhaps in part explaining why, when so many of us have been starved of touch during lockdown, the number of people owning pets has risen.

Over the past year, Covid restrictions have had a significant negative impact on many people's wellbeing, causing loneliness and distress. At the same time, we have had to inhibit our natural instincts, programmed over millions

of years of evolution, to use touch to calm, soothe and show we care. Released from lockdown restrictions, we'll rapidly start displaying the behaviours that we're predisposed to share. Though perhaps we will now appreciate them a little bit more.

- Dr Susannah Walker is a reader in behavioural neuroscience at Liverpool John Moores University
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OpinionLong Covid

As the UK inches towards normality, those with long Covid must not be forgotten

[Frances Ryan](#)



The impact of this condition is already being felt, not just by sufferers – many of them young – but society as a whole



‘The vaccination program will likely do wonders to reduce hospitalisations, but long Covid will also require a focus on minimising transmission.’
Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

‘The vaccination program will likely do wonders to reduce hospitalisations, but long Covid will also require a focus on minimising transmission.’
Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Wed 14 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

From the vaccine rollout to the reopening of pubs, this stage of the pandemic could be characterised as the hope of a return to normal. I can’t help but think of one group who are struggling with that: the estimated [1.1 million](#) people in the UK who, according to the ONS, have been suffering from long Covid recently.

Long Covid is defined as experiencing symptoms four weeks or more after first getting coronavirus. It’s important to stress that not everyone who experiences long Covid will go on to have long-term chronic illness, but almost 700,000 people said that their symptoms were adversely affecting their day-to-day activities, and 70,000 people have had it for at least a year.

The condition is also a wide umbrella term: the most common symptoms are fatigue, breathlessness and pain, but patients report others including partial

hearing loss and numbness. And yet the message of the ONS figures is dauntingly clear: hundreds of thousands of people in this country are experiencing debilitating illness, all at once, with very little idea how to treat it, or when or if it will end.

Ministers appear to be sleepwalking into a public health crisis. It took health secretary Matt Hancock [until last week](#) to go on BBC Radio 4 to warn about the issue of long Covid, one year on from the first wave. The risk of long-term disability, meanwhile, has been nonexistent in coronavirus health messaging, in part because few politicians or scientists understand it. The focus throughout the pandemic has understandably been on the number of deaths and hospitalisations from coronavirus, but the long-term impact of illness from the virus should have received as much attention.

Long Covid is not just an issue for individuals but for society at large, particularly because of its effect on the workforce. There are already reports that patient care in the NHS is being hit because many of the [healthcare staff](#) struggling with the condition are able to work only part-time, if at all; this is an issue that will probably hit teaching and other key professions in the coming months.

Disabled people have long campaigned for flexible working patterns, and long Covid may be the trigger for employers to finally make more adjustments to help their chronically ill staff stay in work. The normalisation of [working from home](#) shows that change is more than possible when there is the will.

The government, for its part, must ensure a proper safety net for those unable to work at all. The social security system is too often ill-equipped to support people with long-term conditions, and this is even more the case for those with fluctuating symptoms such as fatigue.

Few steps will be more important than providing sufficient healthcare. In October, with much fanfare, NHS England [announced a network of clinics](#) for long Covid patients. But a recent survey revealed that about [90% of people](#) with long-term symptoms have been unable to access clinical help, and there are many reports of a “postcode lottery” regarding the availability of support.

Long Covid must play a bigger part in both public health messaging and planning. A cross-party group of MPs and peers have rightly [urged Boris Johnson](#) to start regularly publishing data on the number of people with long Covid, so it can help shape future government policy towards the pandemic. The vaccination programme is likely to do wonders to reduce hospitalisations, but long Covid will also require a focus on minimising transmission. After all, many of those now struggling with chronic symptoms had only a [mild form of the virus](#) to begin with.

Part of this means targeted messaging to young people. “Don’t kill your granny” campaigns in the first and second wave in some ways falsely suggested coronavirus mainly hurt older people, and yet the ONS data shows long Covid rates are highest among 25- to 34-year-olds. Under-30s worried about very rare blood clots from the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab must be [reassured by officials about its safety](#), and led to understand how vital it is that they be protected.

Much of the commentary around long Covid suggests this is an entirely new phenomenon, but the truth is millions of people have suffered from similar chronic illnesses for decades with little support. As the conversation around long Covid grows, we must ensure any help that comes is offered to those with all chronic illnesses. This is about attitudes as well as resources. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence’s [recent announcement](#) that people with chronic pain that has no known cause should not be prescribed painkillers, is an insight into how patients with invisible or undiagnosed conditions are too often disbelieved and denied proper treatment.

The NHS requires both training and increased funding to meet this growing need, not least at a time when it is dealing with the [vast backlog](#) in care caused by the pandemic. The risk is of a two-tier system developing, where those with the means can turn to private doctors, physios and therapists for rehabilitation and those without will be left to fend for themselves.

The tendency among scientists and politicians has been to focus on the short-term urgency of saving lives over the long-term impact on public health. But as we work to reduce deaths, we must also strive to protect people’s quality of life. It is likely that unless we act, a growing proportion

of the UK's population will suffer from a long-term health condition we don't understand or know how to treat, and all without sufficient financial support. As the country enjoys the hope of a return to some normality, those with long Covid cannot be forgotten.

- Frances Ryan is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionInternet

Chet Hanks keeps calling for a white boy summer – and he really needs to stop

[Arwa Mahdawi](#)



In a clumsy attempt to create a new trend, the son of Tom Hanks has created a range of merchandise and laid out his ‘rules and regs’. But no one actually knows what he means



Chet Hanks ... ‘Bottom line here, gentlemen, is it’s time for us to evolve, OK.’ Photograph: Axelle/Bauer-Griffin/FilmMagic

Chet Hanks ... ‘Bottom line here, gentlemen, is it’s time for us to evolve, OK.’ Photograph: Axelle/Bauer-Griffin/FilmMagic

Wed 14 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

First there was hot girl summer, then there was Christian girl autumn, now we’ve been cursed with white boy summer.

If you found that sentence completely incomprehensible then allow me to congratulate you on being a member of the exclusive “brain not yet completely broken by the internet” club. Those of us not in that club will immediately know [that hot girl summer](#) was a 2019 meme started by the rapper Megan Thee Stallion about having a carefree summer. This was followed by Christian girl autumn, a meme [poking fun at “basic” women](#) who like pumpkin spice lattes and Instagramming themselves apple-picking. Meme-based seasons were cancelled during the pandemic when days blurred into one another and time ceased to have any meaning. Now that there’s hope, the worst could be over. However, Chet Hanks, the 30-year-old son of Hollywood actor Tom, is clumsily trying to revive the trend. “I just got this feeling man ... it’s about to be a white boy summer,” Chet Hanks [told his](#)

Instagram followers a couple of weeks ago. Not in a racist kinda way, he clarified. But in a white male rapper sort of way. “You know what I mean?”

Nobody had the foggiest idea what he meant, so Hanks has been helpfully dishing out “rules and regs” for white boy summer. There’s “no calling girls ‘smokeshows’” apparently. And guys should stop getting “drunk and sweaty” and getting in people’s personal space with booze breath. “Bottom line here, gentlemen, is it’s time for us to evolve, OK,” Hanks said. “It’s time for us to go from a Pikachu to a Raichu.” I don’t know what that means, but apparently evolving Hanks-style involves avoiding plaid shirts or anything salmon-coloured. Instead you should wear clothes from his White Boy Summer merchandise collection; these, rather awkwardly, have been criticised for utilising a Gothic-style font that many on social media are saying is close to one white supremacists are fond of.

After four years of Donald Trump emboldening white supremacists, I don’t think now is the time to be calling for a white boy summer. However, I can heartily endorse a hot boy summer. I think it’s important, in the name of equality, that men get a season of their own to strut their stuff. Particularly as lockdown has apparently got men experimenting with micro shorts and skirts. Let those legs be free, boys! In the meantime, I’m going to enjoy my cranky woman spring.

- Arwa Mahdawi is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Global health](#)

Neglected tropical diseases are the landmines of global health

Albert Picado and John H Amuasi

They are 20 disparate diseases that, like mines, unduly affect the world's poorest people. Now there's a plan to eradicate them by 2030



A child plays in the Povoado slum in Angola's capital, Luanda. Neglected tropical diseases 'slowly kill, blind, disfigure and debilitate their victims'. Photograph: Luke Dray/Getty

A child plays in the Povoado slum in Angola's capital, Luanda. Neglected tropical diseases 'slowly kill, blind, disfigure and debilitate their victims'. Photograph: Luke Dray/Getty

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[About this content](#)

Wed 14 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

In January the World Health Organization launched a [new strategy](#) for eradicating neglected tropical diseases, boldly setting targets to eliminate 20 of them by 2030.

But what are neglected tropical diseases (NTDs)? There is no easy answer. The concept was first proposed in the early 2000s to bring to light a group of diseases that disproportionately affect poor people yet, despite their collective impact, do not attract as much attention as diseases such as HIV/Aids, malaria or tuberculosis.

[WHO's Covid warnings were not heeded. Now the world has a new chance to beat the virus](#)

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The common denominator of poverty and the dearth of prevention efforts is largely what binds these diseases together, even though they may be extremely disparate in presentation and approaches to solutions – snakebite v schistosomiasis, for example. Currently, the [WHO identifies 20 NTDs](#) and

the differences between them make it difficult to talk about them all together.

How can we succinctly describe 20 different conditions that are caused by parasites, bacteria, viruses, fungi and toxins? How can we summarise complex transmission cycles involving multiple vectors – mosquitoes, sandflies or dogs? And routes – oral, , through the skin or congenital? How can we explain in a simple way the diversity of control strategies, including mass drug-administration campaigns, multiple vector-control tools, active screening of cases, dog vaccinations and facilitating the use of footwear? Most vitally, how can we illustrate the devastating impact that NTDs have on individuals and communities across [Africa](#), Latin America and Asia?

And how can we explain to funders, governments, researchers, aid organisations and the public why we should invest money, time and effort to control and eliminate them?

Here's an analogy that might help.

Neglected tropical diseases are the landmines of global health. Landmines have been described as “indiscriminate weapons of mass destruction in slow motion” and are well known thanks to movies and international awareness campaigns.

NTDs killed more than 80,000 people and caused the loss of more than 18m disability-adjusted life years

Albert Picado and John H Amuasi

Landmines are designed to incapacitate, injure or kill their victims, and especially affect poor rural communities, where people are trying to make a living through activities that place them in direct contact with the ground, expose them to the elements and ultimately to pathogens, vectors and animal reservoirs; such as herding, farming or collecting water.

Landmine survivors often suffer permanent disability, with physical, mental, social and economic consequences. Landmines have a dire impact on victims' caregivers, families and communities. Children are often the

victims of landmines and women and girls are more likely to give up their jobs or drop out of school to take care of the injured. As Michelle Bachelet, the UN high commissioner for human rights, [said at the 2019 mine ban convention](#): “Landmines continue to kill, burn and damage limbs and other body parts in horrific ways. They cause lifelong impairments, including visual and auditory impairments. They destroy livelihoods [...] and even impede national economic recovery.”

Similar language can be used to describe the impact of NTDs. Though medically diverse, NTDs can slowly kill, blind, disfigure and debilitate their victims. They cause untold suffering to victims and caregivers in the poorest communities and contribute to perpetuating a cycle of disease, stigma and poverty.

[Surge of Aids-related deaths feared as Covid pandemic puts gains at risk](#)
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Collectively, NTDs killed more than 80,000 people and caused the loss of more than 18m [disability-adjusted life years](#) (a measure of the burden of disease burden, expressed as the years lost to ill health, disability or early death) in 2019 alone. Unfortunately, these staggering figures, which are grossly underestimated, still do not get NTDs the kind of attention they deserve.

The 1997 mine ban treaty represents an international commitment and responsibility to eliminate landmines around the world. The roadmap for NTDs sets a similar goal – to “control and eliminate the NTDs by 2030”.

Nonetheless, the resources allocated to help people suffering from NTDs [remain scarce](#). Despite recent successes (for example, 33 countries have eliminated at least one NTD since 2012) and communication efforts (30 January has been declared World NTD Day), we have largely turned a blind eye to these conditions.

A clear and powerful message on the terrible impact that NTDs have on individuals and communities would help to raise awareness and engender the required international commitment to control and eliminate these “slow-motion, indiscriminate weapons of mass destruction” by 2030.

- Albert Picado is senior scientific officer for the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics in Switzerland. John H Amuasi is executive director of the African Research Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases in Ghana
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The nature of ... Animals

A donkey: ‘Better to be born a limpet in the sea than a load-bearing donkey’

[Helen Sullivan](#)



Donkeys can grow so sick from mourning the loss of a companion that they die



‘No donkey can cart, what weighs down your heart’. Photograph: INTERFOTO/Alamy

‘No donkey can cart, what weighs down your heart’. Photograph: INTERFOTO/Alamy

Tue 13 Apr 2021 13.30 EDT

When a donkey brays it is as though every rusted gate nearby is opening and closing at once; as though the iron seesaws and swings and roundabouts in one hundred abandoned playgrounds have begun to move by themselves: squeaking, creaking, screeching.

“Better to be born a limpet in the sea than a load-bearing donkey,” they say in Sicily. But the first load I ever heard of a donkey bearing was rather grand: Christ himself, riding a beast of burden into Jerusalem. People grabbed their cloaks, cut branches from palm trees “and strawed them in the way” for the donkeys to walk on. “Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.”

[Daddy longlegs: there is one piece of information every child will know | Helen Sullivan](#)

[Read more](#)

This was what they taught us in school. This was how you knew he was a good guy: just a donkey for me, thanks. It was the late 1990s, I was younger than 10, and South Africa's democracy was brand new. The country's flag was brand new and we felt like we were the first children getting to draw it.

Outside of school I watched a show called [Kideo](#): like a rainbow nation Sesame Street, but the characters were an anxious tortoise, Molly Metronome, and a donkey named Mr Chinwag. (In 1996 it won third place in Germany's Prix Jeunesse, beating Sesame Street). [Mr Chinwag](#) was ever cheerful. He wore a green hat decorated with vegetables and operated a fruit stall shaped like an apple.

But there was Eeyore too, I suppose. And this was a better preparation for the lesson donkeys teach: gloomy and resigned to your fate. "It's all for naught", says Pooh's companion. The Philosophical problem "Buridan's Ass" imagines a hungry, thirsty donkey needing to choose between a bale of hay and a bucket of water. It dies.

I listened to [Adam Curtis talking about his documentary Can't Get You Out of My Head](#) recently. It is about individualism, feeling helpless and the very state of the world. He described the internet as a modern ghost story: the algorithms determined to show you things based on your past behaviour and the past behaviour of others – so you are haunted by these previous clicks and word searches, and it is impossible to escape. Doomed, doomed, doomed. The ass hee-haws from its paddock. It is the pitiful, wretched cry of a beast that [can grow so sick from mourning the loss of a companion](#) that it dies. Benjamin in Animal Farm: "Life would go on as it had always gone on - that is, badly."

Even Christ's donkey, GK Chesterton imagines, turns bitter in its old age:

*Fools! For I also had my hour;
One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
And palms before my feet.*

Everything is terrible. Even the donkeys might be terrible. They hold a strange power over people. A [2003 story in the Guardian](#) reported that the

UK charity Donkey Sanctuary “took in £13m” in a single year. “In donations, it receives more than Age Concern, Mencap and the Samaritans.” [In 2017 it was £38.3m](#). Then again, who can blame these donors, when here is a donkey foal wagging its tail as it rocks in a hammock.

In Lebanon I once stayed at a centuries-old house that had a retired donkey living in the garden. It lay in the sun like an old dog and wore a light blue collar decorated with small flowers made from beaten tin. And there were those ears. Those hopeful, ridiculous ears, with their tuft of fur in the middle.

We have been [riding on donkeys’ backs for 5,000 years](#). “No donkey can cart / what weighs down your heart,” goes an [East African proverb](#). But there is something about how profoundly sad they sound that either jolts you out of your own sorry state – or, well: misery, company and so on.

“I see their knavery: this is to make an ass of me; to fright me, / if they could,” says Bottom – his head transformed into a donkey’s – in Midsummer Night’s Dream: “But I will not stir / from this place, do what they can: I will walk up / and down here, and I will sing, that they shall hear / I am not afraid.

“[The Nature of ...](#)” is a column by Helen Sullivan dedicated to interesting animals, insects, plants and natural phenomena. Is there an intriguing creature or particularly lively plant you think would delight our readers? Let us know on Twitter [@helenrsullivan](#) or via email: helen.sullivan@theguardian.com

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/commentisfree/2021/apr/14/a-donkey-better-to-be-born-a-limpet-in-the-sea-than-a-load-bearing-donkey>.

[Opinion](#)[Northern Irish politics](#)

The Belfast violence shows young working-class people have been failed again

[Stephen Donnan-Dalzell](#)

A Northern Irish generation was supposed to inherit peace and prosperity – instead they got secondhand trauma



‘On either side of the Lanark Way peace gates you will find two of the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland.’ Lanark Way in Belfast, Northern Ireland, on 7 April. Photograph: Peter Morrison/AP

‘On either side of the Lanark Way peace gates you will find two of the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland.’ Lanark Way in Belfast, Northern Ireland, on 7 April. Photograph: Peter Morrison/AP

Tue 13 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

It's 23 years since the signing of the Good Friday/Belfast agreement, which effectively brought the conflict in Northern Ireland to a halt but didn't deliver on the promises of peace, prosperity and stability. It would be easy to attribute the [recent violence](#) in Belfast and elsewhere to Brexit, to the Northern Ireland protocol, to the perception of policing between the two communities among other things, but that would be a simplification of issues that run as deep as the [Lagan](#) river.

In 1998, when I was 10 years old, my generation was told that peace was within reach, that the new [Northern Ireland](#) assembly would finally allow the people of this place to govern themselves. The devolution of policing and justice arrived after a number of false starts, and for a while, all seemed calm – yet much of it was held together by naivety and hope. The conflict may have ended, but the fighting didn't. The fight for jobs, education, mental health and addiction support, for housing and investment continued on and on, with the political establishment across these islands simply equating the absence of violence with success of the peace process.

Except there was no process – there was war and then there was peace – the transition between the two didn't manifest as a benefit to working-class communities across Northern Ireland in any real or meaningful way. Paramilitaries still exist, deprivation is still rife, educational underachievement and health inequalities still pervade in the most economically inactive parts of the country.

Brexit and the Northern Ireland protocol are only a small part of a larger tapestry among loyalism and working-class unionists who now see themselves, whether rightly or wrongly, as being steamrollered by both their own political representatives and the British government. The anger about the trade agreement between the UK and the European Union, which established checks on goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, was palpable from the very early days of Theresa May's draft withdrawal agreement, and that anger has only increased.

At different stages during the pandemic, lockdown restrictions have placed the Police Service of Northern Ireland at odds with republicans, loyalists and civil rights activists who have each been accused of breaking Covid-19 regulations for varying purposes.

The decision by the Public Prosecution Service not to pursue cases against a number of Sinn Féin officials in the [aftermath](#) of the [Bobby Storey funeral](#) in June 2020 has prompted the first minister, Arlene Foster, to call for the resignation of the PSNI chief constable, Simon Byrne. To say that mainstream unionism has effectively [pulled the rug out](#) from under the concept of policing by consent would be an understatement. That is an incredibly dangerous sentiment that has played out on the streets of Belfast over the past week.

[Despair fuels the flames of young loyalist anger in Northern Ireland](#)
[Read more](#)

Water cannon and rubber bullets being used once again on young people is reminiscent of a time that those young people don't even remember. They were supposed to be the generation that inherited the peace, and instead they got secondhand trauma that hangs all around them in the murals, in the flags, in the memorials to the murdered and those who took life.

Working-class loyalists feel left behind and ignored. I am not here to debate the merits of that, or the so-called siege mentality of loyalism. However there is a deep-rooted anger there that has been both been ignored by mainstream unionism and used time and again by the DUP and the Ulster Unionist party for political machinations when it suited them. The fear of a united Ireland and what that will mean for unionism is amped up at election time, and tensions are stoked by both political unionism and "[stakeholders](#)" within loyalism, such as the Loyalist Communities Council. And for what? What has fundamentally changed, or got better for working-class loyalist communities in Northern Ireland? They deserve better than being lied to and led up the hill, then abandoned when violence erupts.

The scenes over recent nights at [Lanark Way](#) and on the interface between the [New Lodge and Tiger's Bay](#), dividing lines between the two communities in Belfast, have attracted the attention of the chattering classes around the UK: subsequently we've been delivered an all-you-can eat buffet of ill-informed opinions from commentators and politicians alike confidently declaring that this all dates back to Brexit. That is an insult to people on both sides of those peace walls who have been struggling to survive under the weight of their own trauma for long enough.

These are the same communities that were devastated by the conflict, and have been left to rebuild and recover without the attention and support that they deserve. On either side of the Lanark Way peace gates, you will find two of the most deprived areas in the whole of Northern Ireland. That deprivation is measured in income levels, employment, health and disability, education, crime, access to services and living environment. Those young people throwing petrol bombs over the wall at each other are the same in so many ways, and have been utterly let down by the political establishment here.

- Stephen Donnan-Dalzell is a writer and human rights activist based in Belfast
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Opinion**Air transport**

France's ban on short flights should be a wake-up call for Britain

[Leo Murray](#)

Instead of stopping unnecessary air travel, the UK is considering measures that would make it cheaper



Air France planes at Paris-Orly airport. Photograph: Kenzo Tribouillard/AFP/Getty Images

Air France planes at Paris-Orly airport. Photograph: Kenzo Tribouillard/AFP/Getty Images

Tue 13 Apr 2021 10.37 EDT

This week the French national assembly voted to [ban domestic flights](#) on routes that could be travelled via train in under two and a half hours. The new rule, which is the result of a French citizens' climate convention established by Emmanuel Macron in response to the gilets jaunes (yellow

vests) movement, will capture 12% of French domestic flights. Though it's more moderate than the convention's initial proposal, which sought to ban all domestic flights on routes with rail alternatives of less than four hours, this is the first time any major economy has prohibited domestic air travel for environmental reasons. It's also far more drastic than anything the UK has done to curb flight emissions.

The huge blow the pandemic has dealt to the aviation industry could be an opportune moment to rethink the future of flights. Before Covid, air travellers rated [around half of all flights as unnecessary](#). Apart from a few exceptions in particularly remote regions, domestic flights in small countries must be among the least necessary of all. Just [over half a million](#) flights were taken every year between London and Manchester before the pandemic, a journey that takes around two hours by train. Because so much of the pollution from any given flight takes place during take-off and landing cycles, the emissions produced per kilometre for each passenger on [a domestic route](#) are 70% higher than long haul flights – and six times higher than if the same journey was [made by rail](#).

But here in the UK, we're not exactly seizing the moment. Government measures to address aviation emissions are limited to funding speculative techno-fixes via initiatives such as the “jet zero” council, a partnership that aims to deliver the first [zero carbon long haul flight](#) by 2050. Such programmes may be necessary, but they are not sufficient. And the aviation sector has a worryingly poor track record when it comes to delivering on sustainability promises. In 2019, [airlines used 50m litres](#) of alternative [jet fuel](#) – less than 1% of the International Air Transport Association's [goal for 2020](#). Indeed, the UK Climate Change Committee (CCC) advises that zero-carbon aviation is “[highly unlikely](#)” to be feasible by 2050, and that the development of novel fuels “is highly speculative and should not be relied upon”.

Even if we can develop some technological solutions to aviation emissions, the CCC still finds that deliberate policies to limit the demand for flights will be needed to reach climate targets. There are easy ways to do this, including introducing some form of [frequent flyer levy](#), scrapping air miles and banning private jets. But instead of limiting the demand for flights, the

Treasury is consulting on a plan that would have the opposite effect: halving tax on domestic flights by [cutting air passenger duty](#).

APD is a tax charged on all outbound flights from UK airports, so domestic passengers effectively pay twice for return journeys (as both legs of a domestic trip are classed as outbound flights). The Treasury has suggested cutting APD on domestic flights and raising it on international flights. The aviation lobby deeply resents APD, and have waged a longstanding campaign (of which Grant Shapps, the secretary of state for transport, [is a supporter](#)) against the tax. But cutting APD on domestic flights will make them cheaper, boosting demand and driving up domestic emissions as a result. Meanwhile increasing APD on long-haul flights is likely to have little effect on emissions, since demand for these flights is far less influenced by small changes in ticket prices.

As air travel is already zero rated for VAT (alongside wheelchairs and baby clothes) and jet fuel is exempt from fuel duty by international treaty, slashing the only tax that *is* applied to domestic flights seems a confused priority for the government – particularly while it’s gearing up to host the crucial Cop26 global climate summit. Moreover, the [Treasury consultation on this scheme](#) features a section dedicated to explaining why it has no intention of introducing a frequent flyer levy either (its rationale is that a levy would be too complex).

We shouldn’t overstate the impact of the French domestic flight ban – or the extent to which its politicians are listening to its citizens’ concerns about the climate crisis. After Macron initially promised to present recommendations from France’s citizens’ climate convention to parliament “without filter”, his team then spent months [watering down the proposals](#). Now, only flights between Paris and airports such as Bordeaux, Lyon and Nantes will be affected by the new rule, yet [most French domestic flights](#) are between Paris and the south, such as Toulouse, Marseille and Nice. Connecting flights will also be exempt.

To round off the cynic’s perspective on this announcement, it is instructive to note that the French government’s €7bn Covid bailout to Air France last spring [came with a condition attached](#): ending flights on routes with rail alternatives of under two and a half hours. At the time, the partly state-

owned airline complained that the ban should apply to other airlines too – and now it will. It's a happy coincidence for Air France bosses, who are unlikely to be losing much sleep over the new conditions for another reason too; pre-pandemic, the company's domestic network was [operating at a €200m annual loss](#).

Nevertheless, the French bill still compares favourably with the efforts of the UK government when it comes to aviation emissions, by virtue of this key distinction: the ban recognises that we can't tackle climate change without some actual curbs on air travel. Up until now, the idea that there might be hard limits to consumption in a carbon-constrained world has been anathema to politicians everywhere. This ban is an important step towards accepting that curbing consumption is essential for driving down emissions. Finding fair ways to impose these limits in practice will be difficult. But banning unnecessary domestic flights should be the easiest place to start.

- Leo Murray is co-founder and director of innovation at climate charity Possible

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Myanmar

Ousted Myanmar ambassador says his relatives ‘forced into hiding’

Exclusive: Kyaw Zwar Minn says he feels unsafe at London residence and family at home fear reprisals



Kyaw Zwar Minn was removed from his UK post by Myanmar’s regime.
Photograph: Teri Pengilley/The Guardian

Kyaw Zwar Minn was removed from his UK post by Myanmar’s regime.
Photograph: Teri Pengilley/The Guardian

[Archie Bland](#)

Tue 13 Apr 2021 11.22 EDT

Myanmar’s ousted ambassador to the UK has said that friends and relatives at home have been forced into hiding after the country’s military regime removed him from office for declaring his loyalty to the deposed civilian leader [Aung San Suu Kyi](#).

In his first major interview after he was unceremoniously [locked out of the embassy](#) by his deputy last week, Kyaw Zwar Minn said he no longer felt safe at his north London residence and had contacted the police after members of his former staff delivered a letter ordering him to move out by Thursday.

“The Foreign Office said that if they invaded our residence the British police could not do anything,” he said. He added that he was still waiting for British officials to set out what support they would give him to stay in [London](#).

In recent days, he said, loved ones at home – whom he has not visited in five years – had feared reprisals as a result of his stance. “Some friends and relatives, they are hiding, staying away from their places. They are not able to show their face in public because of me.”

Urging the Foreign Office (FCDO) to strengthen security measures, he did not call for further [sanctions](#) but said his situation would be viewed as a litmus test of the UK’s commitment to democracy around the world.

“People are watching very closely the British government’s next step,” he said. “They got a lesson from the [Myanmar](#) army … now they have to give a lesson back to the army. They have to show their strength.”

The FCDO said that it last week “reiterated UK plans to ensure that Ambassador Kyaw Zwar Minn can live safely in the United Kingdom while he decides his long-term future” in a meeting with the Burmese regime’s chargé d’affaires, Chit Win, who has not been recognised as ambassador.

While a spokesperson did not respond specifically to Kyaw Zwar Minn’s fear that the residence could be “invaded”, it is understood that officials are seeking to broker a solution and do not anticipate events reaching such a crisis.

Kyaw Zwar Minn, a diplomat under Aung San Suu Kyi after a long career in the army, spent a night in his car outside the embassy last week after his then deputy, Chit Win, and military attache Soe Aung took the extraordinary step of locking him out, on orders from the regime. He had stayed in the hope

that the UK government would secure his re-entry. One ally said that he “had the military impulse to remain at his post”.



Kyaw Zwar Minn waits outside the Myanmar embassy with his diplomatic car after being refused entry last week. Photograph: Equinox Features/Rex/Shutterstock

Fears he might be removed from his post had escalated when a source in Myanmar’s foreign ministry warned him that his staff were spying on him. “My friend told me, your people are telling me about you. People in the embassy are sending back reports,” he said.

He remains in limbo, with his additional status as non-resident ambassador to Ireland, Sweden and Denmark yet to be revoked.

When he spoke to the *Guardian* at his home his mood slipped between concerted good cheer and moments of despondency. He is holed up with his wife, son and two golden retrievers in the faded grandeur of their multimillion-pound official residence in Hampstead, where gold-trimmed furnishings and pictures of him meeting the Queen stand in surreal contrast to a rusty bathtub in the garden and a gate secured only by a padlock.

Though he appeared to have accepted he was unlikely to be able to retain control of the property, he warned of the symbolic significance of his

probable eviction. “This is the last building I have,” he added. “We had seven buildings and six have been lost. I will give it back to the government – to the legitimate government. How can I give it to the military?”

Asked what risks he would face if he went back to Myanmar, he laughed and said: “If you’d like to see what happens when I go back, I will make you a mask that looks exactly like my features, and give it to you, and you wear it like in Mission Impossible. Then you go to Yangon and you can see what happens.” Still, he noted: “The point is people are dying in my country. They lost more than me. Their life. Their life. And their families suffer more than me.”

[Activists say](#) more than 700 people have been killed since the 1 February coup.

The former ambassador, whose home was protected on Monday only by a single member of his household keeping watch, described his alarm at the arrival of two of his former staff on Sunday.

“They put a letter from Naypyidaw [the capital of Myanmar] down,” he said. “They showed their faces in front of our gate. It’s a kind of threat.” Over lunch his wife said he had been treated “like a dog” and staff had been very rude. “Why are they bullying us?” she asked.

For some activists seeking the return of civilian government in Myanmar, Kyaw Zwar Minn is a complicated figure. He was “one of the few ambassadors around the world to speak out against the coup and call for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and the president [Win Myint]”, said Mark Farmaner, the director of the Burma Campaign UK. “He deserves credit for that.”

But Farmaner noted that the diplomat had for weeks “refused to support the civil disobedience movement and join the CRPH” – the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, Myanmar’s parallel civilian government.



Kyaw Zwar Minn meeting the Queen. Photograph: Teri Pengilley/The Guardian

“It was only the day after the lockout that he finally did the three-finger salute that protesters in Myanmar have been using,” he said. And he said that as ambassador Kyaw Zwar Minn had “defended genocide of the Rohingya and other human rights violations by the military and government”.

Kyaw Zwar Minn acknowledged that the “Rohingya issue is very, very important” and claimed he had “great sympathy for these people”. Referring to a set of notes, he said: “This is not a good time for discussing this item. We need to see the release of Daw Suu Kyi, and the president, negotiations, and an end to the killing. Then we can go back to the Rohingya.”

His critics should show more understanding of his dilemma, he said. “I was in a big sandwich,” he said. “I could not join the CRPH as ambassador. Now I am free.” This was why he had only now given the three-fingered salute, he said. He wished to join forces fully with the opposition “if they received me as a comrade”. He added: “I’m going to shake their hand, not kneel down and say accept me.”

He reserved particular contempt for his successor as ambassador, Chit Win, who once co-authored an [academic paper](#) about Myanmar calling for “a wide-ranging democratisation of how post-dictatorship politics is conceived”. Chit Win had voiced support for the CRPH even as he told the military regime that he would back it, he said. “Of course he is an ambitious, educated man, he would like to get a high-level position. He’s climbing. It is not only a betrayal; he’s like a villain.”

At times, he appeared able to hold contradictory views, armed by his hope that he can act as a fair broker and clinging to the belief both sides want the best.

Without talks between the two sides, he said, he feared the crisis would “head to civil war”. “You can see the military government is not going to step back,” he said. “More people will die, and the economy is going to collapse. Then anything can happen in our country.”

He said: “Children are dying. People are dying. Of course they are innocent. They don’t have arms, they went out on the street to protest – this is their right.”

This article was amended on the day of publication (13 April 2021). An earlier version said activists had two weeks ago given a figure of 500 for the number of people killed since the 1 February coup. While the article was correct about this, it was not up to date; activists say the total is now 700.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/13/ousted-myanmar-ambassador-says-his-relatives-fear-reprisals-kyaw-zwar-minn>

Insects

Indian jumping ants have ability to shrink brain and re-grow it — study

Colony does not perish when queen dies as ‘chosen’ workers shrink brains and expand their ovaries



Jumping ant (*Harpegnathos saltator*) guarding pupae and larvae at the nest.
Photograph: Martin Dohrn/naturepl.com

Jumping ant (*Harpegnathos saltator*) guarding pupae and larvae at the nest.
Photograph: Martin Dohrn/naturepl.com

[Natalie Grover](#)

Wed 14 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

Few species in the animal kingdom can change the size of their brain. Fewer still can change it back to its original size. Now researchers have found the first insect species with that ability: Indian jumping ants.

They are like catnip to researchers in the field. In contrast to their cousins, Indian jumping ants colonies do not perish once their queen dies. Instead, “chosen” workers take her place – with expanded ovaries and shrunken brains – to produce offspring. But, if a worker’s “pseudo-queen” status is somehow revoked, their bodies can bounce back, the research suggests.

Typically, whether an ant will be a worker or a queen is decided at the larval stage. If fed generously and given the right hormones, the ant has the chance to become a big queen. If not, then it is stuck with a career as a sterile worker deprived of the opportunity to switch – unless it’s part of a species such as the Indian jumping ant.

“They have this ability to completely transform themselves at the adult stage, and that makes them interesting to try to understand,” said lead author Dr Clint Penick from US-based Kennesaw State University.

Social insects such as ants typically inhabit a caste-based society – the queen reigns as the sole reproducer by secreting pheromones that thwart female worker ants from laying eggs. The other ants work hard: foraging and hunting for food, cleaning, caring for the young and defending the nest.

But unlike typical colonies that wither away on the death of their queen, Indian jumping ant colonies are functionally immortal.

Within hours of the queen’s death, a frenzied “ritualised combat” commences, in which workers engage in fierce duels that involve jamming antennae into each other’s faces. While this tournament persists up to a month – the chosen workers are the multitaskers who can duel and activate their ovaries. These pseudo-queens – usually five to 10 in a colony of about 100 ants – then produce that pheromone that compels the rest to treat them like royalty. Eventually, these reproductive workers get on with the process of mating with their brothers, and prolonging the life of the colony.

The pseudo-queens (formally called gamergates – not be confused with the [2014 hashtag campaign](#) ostensibly founded to protest about perceived ethical failures in games journalism) see their life-expectancy increase from about six months to up to five years. Their ovaries swell to five times in size filling up the entire abdomen, and their brain shrink by anywhere from 20% to

25%, which researchers suspect is a process designed to divert limited resources to egg production.

In this study, Penick and his team experimentally induced gamergates to return to their original normal worker status – to assess whether the physiological and behavioural changes were reversible, [they wrote](#) in the Royal Society's journal Proceedings B.

Using a sample of 30 colonies, the researchers marked two mature reproductive workers from each colony. One from each pair was left to isolate for three to four weeks in a plastic box and fed periodically, while the other remained in its nest.

[Animals vote, too: how different species choose – or depose – a leader](#)

[Read more](#)

The researchers hypothesised that the lack of social interaction and care would reduce the isolated gamergate back to worker status when reintroduced to its former nest. Sure enough, within a day or two those gamergate's were no longer producing eggs and over the course of several weeks they started displaying normal worker-like behaviour, Penick said.

Roughly six to eight weeks later, Penick was left with the unenviable task of dissecting the small insects to check whether their internal organs had reverted to ordinary worker proportions – which they did.

“It opens up opportunities now to dig into the mechanisms that control whether a brain region grows or shrinks in size,” he said.

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Massachusetts

US climate research outpost abandoned over fears it will be devoured by sea

National Weather Service station in Massachusetts evacuated on 31 March due to fears it could fall into the Atlantic Ocean



‘We were a couple of storms from a very big problem,’ said Andy Nash, meteorologist in charge at the National Weather Service’s Boston office. Photograph: Miguel Roberts/AP

‘We were a couple of storms from a very big problem,’ said Andy Nash, meteorologist in charge at the National Weather Service’s Boston office. Photograph: Miguel Roberts/AP

*[Oliver Milman](#)
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Wed 14 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

Twice a day for the past half a century, a weather balloon to measure atmospheric conditions was released from a research station situated on Cape Cod, [Massachusetts](#). Faced with advancing seas that are set to devour it, the outpost has now been abandoned.

On 31 March, the handful of workers who operated the National Weather Service station in Chatham were evacuated due to fears the property could fall into the Atlantic Ocean. A final weather balloon was released before they left, with a demolition crew set to raze the empty site this month.

Until recently, the weather station had a buffer of about 100ft of land to a bluff that dropped into the ocean, only for a series of fierce storms in 2020 to accelerate local erosion. At times, 6ft of land was lost in a single day, forcing the National Weather Service to order a hasty retreat.

“We’d know for a long time there was erosion but the pace of it caught everyone by surprise,” said Andy Nash, meteorologist in charge at the National Weather Service’s Boston office. “We felt we had maybe another 10 years but then we started losing a foot of a bluff a week and realized we didn’t have years, we had just a few months. We were a couple of storms from a very big problem.”

A parking lot next to the weather station has already been torn up due to the crumbling land, with the building now just 30ft from the edge of the bluff. Nash said his greatest fear was that a researcher, while looking up at a weather balloon as they released it, would inadvertently topple over the edge to their death.

“We got to the point where we ran out of a lot of space and if you were concentrating on the balloon near the edge, oh, that would not be a good situation,” Nash said. “The balloon is fairly big and full of helium but it’s not big enough to hold someone up. It would not save you.”

The weather station was established in 1970, initially releasing weather balloons to gauge temperature, humidity levels and wind speeds as well as operating a weather radar, which was later decommissioned.

The loss of the station will not compromise overall weather monitoring but does leave something of a gap – research sites such as Chatham are scattered about 200 miles apart along the US east coast.

Natural processes have reshaped what is now Cape Cod over millennia. Up to about 11,000 years ago, a much larger land mass jutted out into the Atlantic, only for its coastline of sand and mud to be winnowed away by the tides. More recently a favoured vacation spot for the rich and famous, Cape Cod now resembles an arm flexing its biceps, with Chatham perched at the tip of its elbow.

Andrew Ashton, an associate scientist at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, based on Cape Cod, said that while the cape has naturally shifted shape for centuries, the rising seas and stronger storms spurred by the climate crisis will quicken the pace of change.

“It’s an extremely dynamic environment, which is obviously a problem if you are building permanent infrastructure here,” he said. “We are putting our foot on the accelerator to make the environment even more dynamic. What’s happened with the station is an indication of what we will see along the whole coast. In a way we are unprepared for how much worse things will be with climate change.”

Nash said a new weather station will be installed on Cape Cod, this time on higher ground further from the coast. “This is something communities up and down the coast are facing now,” he said. “The way I look at it is that again we have proof that mother nature is in charge here.”

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[Japan](#)

Second chance: clock stopped after Japan tsunami starts ticking a decade later

The century-old temple clock has come back to life when an aftershock of the 2011 quake hit the region



Junior high school students return home amongst rubble on 30 March 2011 in Yamamoto, Miyagi, Japan. Photograph: The Asahi Shimbun/Asahi Shimbun via Getty Images

Junior high school students return home amongst rubble on 30 March 2011 in Yamamoto, Miyagi, Japan. Photograph: The Asahi Shimbun/Asahi Shimbun via Getty Images

[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo

Wed 14 Apr 2021 00.52 EDT

For almost 10 years, the clock hanging in Bunshun Sakano's temple was a reminder of the day nature's force came close to destroying his community.

The clock, which is thought to be about 100 years old, stopped ticking after the north-east coast of [Japan](#) was struck by an [earthquake and tsunami](#) that killed more than 18,000 people on 11 March 2011.

Fumonji temple, which lies a few hundred metres from the tsunami-hit coast in Yamamoto, a town in Miyagi prefecture, was hit by the waves, with only its pillars and roof spared by the deluge.

Sakano rescued the clock, cleaned it and wound the spring, but its hands refused to budge.

被災の古時計、先月の地震で復活 宮城・山元の普門寺
<https://t.co/H5mGKkpZgU>

— 河北新報オンラインニュース (@kahoku_shimpo) [March 13, 2021](#)

Then late on 13 February this year – just weeks before the [10th anniversary of the disaster](#) – the same region was struck by another powerful earthquake, described by seismologists as an [aftershock](#) of the March 2011 quake.

[Japan marks 10 years since triple disaster killed 18,500 people](#)
[Read more](#)

The following morning Sakano, the Buddhist temple's head priest, went to check the main hall for any damage when he heard a ticking sound. The clock, which had remained silent even after being repeatedly cleaned, was moving again.

Two months later, it is still ticking.

“Maybe it’s pushing me to move forward with new determination,” Sakano, 58, told the [Mainichi Shimbun](#) newspaper. “It’s like a sign of encouragement that the real restoration is yet to come.”

The clock, which Sakano had bought at an antique shop in neighbouring [Fukushima](#) prefecture several years before the 2011 disaster, appears to have been shaken back into action by the force of February's earthquake.

A representative of Seiko, the clock's manufacturer, told the Mainichi: "It's possible that the pendulum, which had stopped, started moving again with the shaking of the earthquake, or that dust that had built up inside came loose."

The clock was a silent source of inspiration for Sakano as he set about helping the local community in the aftermath of the tsunami, bringing together volunteers and, a year later, opening a cafe for people whose homes had been destroyed.

Recently, with neighbourhood meetings and volunteering put on hold by the coronavirus pandemic, Sakano had started to wonder if the time had come to end his community activities.

But when the clock started ticking again, he said, it was as if it was imploring him not to give up and to "start moving again".

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/14/second-chance-clock-stopped-after-japan-tsunami-starts-ticking-a-decade-later>

Business live

Business

World stocks rise to fresh record highs as bond yields ease – business live

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US military

Biden to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan by September 11

- Biden expected to make formal announcement on Wednesday
- About 800,000 troops have served at least once in Afghanistan



A US soldier in Kandahar province. More than 2,300 have been killed, and 20,000 wounded in Afghanistan. Photograph: Yuri Cortéz/AFP/Getty Images

A US soldier in Kandahar province. More than 2,300 have been killed, and 20,000 wounded in Afghanistan. Photograph: Yuri Cortéz/AFP/Getty Images

[Julian Borger](#) in Washington and [Dan Sabbagh](#) defence and security editor
Tue 13 Apr 2021 16.59 EDT

Joe Biden will withdraw all the remaining US troops from [Afghanistan](#) by September 11, the 20th anniversary of the al-Qaida terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, a senior administration official has confirmed.

[Secretary of state Blinken hits out at China over Taiwan and Covid](#)
[Read more](#)

The president is expected to make a formal announcement on Wednesday. There are currently about 2,500 US troops in the country, serving alongside 7,000 other foreign troops as part of a Nato coalition. Most, if not all, Nato allies are likely to withdraw in coordination with the US.

“We will remain in lockstep with them as we undergo this operation. We went in together, adjusted together and now we will prepare to leave together,” a US official said.

The drawdown of US troops will begin by 1 May, the withdrawal deadline the Trump administration agreed with the Taliban last year, and will be completed by the 9/11 anniversary.

“We went to [Afghanistan](#) to deliver justice to those who attacked us on September 11th and to disrupt terrorists seeking to use [Afghanistan](#) as a safe haven to attack,” a senior administration official said.

“We believe we achieved that objective some years ago. We judge the threat against the homeland now emanating from Afghanistan to be at a level that we can address it, without a persistent military footprint in the country and without remaining at war with the Taliban.”

The only remaining [US military](#) presence after September 11 this year will be security for the US embassy, a task normally carried out by marines. The Biden administration has said it will negotiate with the Afghan government over the precise security arrangements for the diplomatic mission in Kabul.

About 800,000 US soldiers and other military personnel have served at least once in Afghanistan since the US invasion in 2001, launched in the wake of the September 11 attacks. More than 2,300 have been killed, and 20,000 wounded.

Nearly 50,000 Afghan civilians have died in the conflict since 2001. Although the overall civilian death toll decreased last year, there has been an increase in targeted killings. The number of women killed in 2020 rose last year and according to the UN, 65 journalists, media professionals and human rights defenders were killed between 1 January 2018 and 31 January 2021.

[Afghans dread the ‘danger hours’ as fragile gains of 20 years slip away](#)
[Read more](#)

Peace talks between the Kabul government and the Taliban have been under way since September, but they suffered a setback this week when the insurgents said they would not attend a US-backed peace summit in Turkey due to begin in a few days.

A Taliban spokesman, Muhammad Naeem, [tweeted on Tuesday](#) that the Taliban would not take part in any such conference “until all foreign forces completely withdraw from our homeland”.

Fawzia Koofi, an Afghan politician and women’s rights activist [said on Twitter](#): “No war will end with war … The next few months should be used to reach peace. The Taliban wanted a US exit, they got it. What we want now from Taliban is peace and life in dignity and harmony.”

The US military orthodoxy until recently has been that any withdrawal from Afghanistan would have to be “conditions-based”, meaning it was dependent on the security situation and the threat posed by the Taliban to the democratic and social gains of the past 20 years.

The senior US official briefing reporters on the decision said: “The president has judged that a conditions-based approach, which has been the approach of the past two decades, is a recipe for staying in Afghanistan forever.”

Biden pledged to continue the withdrawal from Afghanistan in his presidential campaign. Interviewed during the campaign on the CBS programme Face the Nation, Biden was asked if he would feel any responsibility if Afghan human rights, particularly of women, were harmed as a result of the withdrawal.

“Do I bear responsibility? Zero responsibility,” Biden replied. “The responsibility I have is to protect America’s national self-interests and not put our women and men in harm’s way to try to solve every single problem in the world by use of force.”

The administration says it will keep sufficient forces in the region to react if al-Qaida or other terrorist groups re-establish training camps inside Afghanistan, but the dispersal of the terrorist threat meant it no longer made sense to keep a permanent force in the country.

“This is not 2001, it is 2021,” the senior official said. “And in 2021, the terrorist threat that we face is real and it emanates from a number of countries indeed a number of continents, from Yemen, from Syria, from Somalia, from other parts of Africa. And we have to focus on those aspects of a dispersed and distributed terrorist threat.”

Britain has about 750 troops in Afghanistan in non-combat roles, and while no final decision has been made as to what will happen to them, senior defence sources recently indicated that the UK is likely to largely withdraw in parallel with the US. “If they go, we’ll all have to go. That’s the reality of it,” one British source said.

Combat operations for UK troops lasted until 2014, and 454 forces personnel or civilians employed by the Ministry of Defence were killed while serving. Some UK insiders fear that if the Taliban were to regain control following the withdrawal it could raise a simple question in the minds of the public – “what was it all for?” – although there is a growing belief that the terror threat to western countries is finally reducing.

US officials said there would be a decisive response to any Taliban attacks on US and allied troops during the withdrawal. However, attacks on Afghan troops and civilians have continued despite the peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

A suicide car bombing on Tuesday killed a child and at least two other civilians in Farah, western Afghanistan. It exploded as residents broke their fast on the first day of Ramadan. At least 10 members of the Afghan security forces were killed in the north of the country.

The imminent announcement of withdrawal drew criticism from Republican leaders and a few Democrats.

“Foreign terrorists will not leave the US alone because our politicians have grown tired of taking the fight to them,” the Republican Senate minority leader, Mitch McConnell, said, adding that Biden “needs to explain to the American people why he thinks abandoning our partners and retreating in the face of the Taliban will make America safer”.

Jeanne Shaheen, Democratic senator from New Hampshire, said on Twitter that the withdrawal “undermines our commitment to the Afghan people, particularly Afghan women”.

“I urge the Biden admin to make every effort between now and September to safeguard the progress made and support our partners in the formation of an inclusive, transitional government,” Shaheen wrote.

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George Floyd

Derek Chauvin trial: defence opens its case with ex-police officer

Defence attempts to show George Floyd had history of failing to cooperate but he comes across as frightened in video

- [Chauvin trial – live coverage](#)



A painting of George Floyd is seen outside the Hennepin county government center in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Photograph: Chandan Khanna/AFP/Getty Images

A painting of George Floyd is seen outside the Hennepin county government center in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Photograph: Chandan Khanna/AFP/Getty Images

[Chris McGreal](#)

Tue 13 Apr 2021 13.50 EDT

The defence in the Derek Chauvin murder trial [opened its case on Tuesday](#) by attempting to show George Floyd had a history of failing to cooperate with the police while under the influence of drugs.

[Chauvin's defence faces uphill battle after prosecution undercuts case](#)

[Read more](#)

Scott Creighton, a former [Minneapolis](#) police officer, testified that he stopped a vehicle in May 2019 in which Floyd was a passenger and found him incoherent and unable to obey orders.

But the picture that emerged from the testimony and body-camera video may be of limited help to the defence. Floyd comes across as frightened and not threatening, pleading with the police not to shoot him while Creighton and other officers give contradictory orders and rapidly escalate the situation.

One officer tells Floyd to put his hands on the dashboard while another orders him to put them on his head.

“You’re not going to get beat up or nothing if you’re just going to do what we’re asking you to do,” Creighton says to Floyd at one point.

A paramedic who treated Floyd after his 2019 arrest, Michelle Moseng, said he told her he had swallowed opioid pills.

The judge permitted the video and testimony on the grounds it provided medical evidence of Floyd rapidly ingesting drugs when he was stopped by the police, similar to the situation the defence says happened on the day of his death in May last year. But he warned the jurors that they should not use Creighton’s evidence to judge Floyd’s character.

Chauvin, 45, denies charges of second- and third-degree murder, and manslaughter, over the 46-year-old Black man’s death which prompted mass protests for racial justice across the US and other parts of the world. The former officer faces up to 40 years in prison if convicted of the most serious charge.

The focus on Floyd's alleged intoxication is part of the defence attempt to introduce the idea he may have died from "[excited delirium](#)" which caused his heart to fail, a controversial theory that proponents say can be brought on by drugs.

Chauvin's lawyer, Eric Nelson, called a use of force expert, Barry Brodd, who claimed that the way Floyd was pinned to the ground in a prone position was "not a use of force" and was reasonable in part because of his suspected drug use.

A succession of prosecution medical experts testified last week that Floyd was unable to breathe because he was crushed between the police officers on top of him and the ground, including Chauvin who had his knee on Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes.

Brodd said Chauvin was justified in keeping Floyd on the ground in a prone position for "safety reasons" because if he were to get up and run while handcuffed he could trip and fall.

Asked whether the failure to put Floyd on to his side in the recovery position was justified, Brodd said it was because of a lack of space, though they were in the street.

Prosecutors showed Brodd the video of Floyd writhing on the ground, which other witnesses have testified was evidence of his struggle to breathe. Brodd said he interpreted it as evidence that Floyd was still resisting arrest. But under cross-examination, Brodd conceded that Chauvin's actions did not adhere to his police department's policies.

Nelson has claimed that Chauvin was distracted from paying full attention to Floyd by angry bystanders. Brodd acknowledged that initially there were only three people watching at some distance and that none of them interfered. He also agreed that a supposed threat from bystanders was not a justification for maintaining the level of force used against Floyd.

Shawanda Hill, who was in the vehicle with Floyd when police arrested him last year, said she met him in a shop a few minutes earlier and he appeared

alert, friendly and talkative. But he fell asleep in the car before police banged on the window.

[Chauvin's lawyer, Eric Nelson](#), attempted to establish from Hill that Floyd behaved in a way that indicated he was under the influence of drugs. But she described her friend as more confused than threatening.

Hill said she repeatedly tried to rouse Floyd and when he finally came round he became frightened when he saw the officers who wanted to question him about an alleged attempt to spend a counterfeit \$20 bill. She said he was very startled when an officer pulled a gun.

"He instantly grabbed the wheel and was like, 'Please, please don't kill me. Please, please don't shoot,'" she said.

Hill also said Floyd did not exhibit trouble breathing or complain of chest pains before his arrest.

[Minneapolis: police and protesters clash for second night over death of Daunte Wright](#)

[Read more](#)

The prosecution spent 11 days putting its case but the defence [is expected to wrap up in four](#). Closing statements are scheduled for Monday and the case will then go to the jury.

The three other officers at the scene are not expected to give evidence. They are scheduled to be tried later this year on charges of aiding and abetting murder and manslaughter.

The authorities have brought in hundreds of national guard troops after the police killing of yet another Black man, Daunte Wright, in a Minneapolis suburb on Sunday [stoked tensions further](#).

Officials claim the officer who shot him, Kim Potter, accidentally pulled out her gun when she meant to reach for her Taser.

The trial continues.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/apr/13/derek-chauvin-trial-defence-george-floyd>

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Trees and forests

Noisy environments can have detrimental effect on plants, study finds

Persistent noise from natural gas wells in New Mexico disrupted birds that feed on and distribute pinyon seeds



California scrub jays bury pinyon seeds and sometimes forget about them, which keeps forests regenerating. Photograph: Jon Lord/Alamy

California scrub jays bury pinyon seeds and sometimes forget about them, which keeps forests regenerating. Photograph: Jon Lord/Alamy

[Natalie Grover](#)

Tue 13 Apr 2021 19.01 EDT

As humans proliferate, we have penetrated deeper into wildlife habitats, creating a pervasive rise in environmental sound with our gadgets, traffic and industry. A growing body of research has shown how [noise pollution](#)

adversely affects animal behaviour – but a study suggests the detrimental effects have trickled down to plants as well.

To investigate the long-term ecological effects of persistent noise, researchers chose the Rattlesnake Canyon habitat management area in New Mexico. Dominated by woodland plants, the area in the US south-west contains a high density of natural gas wells, some of which are coupled with compressors that run continuously and generate chronic noise at up to 100 decibels. That is as loud “as being next to the speakers at a Black Sabbath concert or standing right next to the train tracks as the train goes by”, said Dr Jenny Phillips, who was lead author of the study while at California Polytechnic State University at San Luis Obispo. Other wells are devoid of compressors.

The vegetation and human activity across both types of wells are similar – so in 2007 one set of researchers compared vegetation in both contexts, finding that noise pollution disrupted the natural community in two ways: seedling dissemination and germination (known as recruitment) of the woodland species – pinyon pine – was reduced as the community of animals that feed upon and disperse the plant’s seeds were adversely affected. Hummingbirds, meanwhile, thrived amid the noise, which led to increased flower pollination.

Twelve years on, researchers sought to assess the long-term ecological impact of this noisy ecosystem. They resurveyed the plots following initial data collection to determine whether the previously reported patterns for pinyon seedlings persisted, but also included analyses of another tree species, the Utah juniper, as well as other flora. However, out of those 115 plots initially surveyed, some had changed from noisy to quiet because compressors had been removed, and vice versa.

In terms of the pinyon – the researchers found seedlings were found less in noisy areas (in line with the 2007 findings) and the saplings (plants between two and 12 years old) had also grown more slowly in the persistently loud environment. The same pattern was observed in the juniper plants.



Compressor stations on natural gas wells run continuously and generate chronic noise at up to 100 decibels. Photograph: Paul Ratje/AFP via Getty Images

However, when looking at plots that were previously noisy but turned quiet, they saw more recruitment for juniper than for pinyon, according to the study [published](#) in the journal [Proceedings of the Royal Society B](#).

This disparate rate of recovery could be attributed to the different seed dispersers for each plant, said Phillips.

The California scrub jay eats the seeds of the pinyon, but they also bury them to save for later. Then they forget about the seeds and that is what keeps the forest regenerating.

[Mammal Photographer of the Year award 2021 – in pictures](#)

[Read more](#)

“What we think is potentially happening … is that jays are smart birds, they have episodic memory and they can remember negative experiences. So if they did explore an area a couple of years ago and if it’s noisy, then they would remember that and not go back to that area,” she said.

Juniper seedlings were more often dispersed by mammals and other birds for which the noise was not quite as disruptive, she added.

“We don’t really have the ability to say how severe the impacts [of noise pollution] are, especially if we’re looking at the ecosystem level,” said Sarah Termondt, who was a study co-author while at Texas A&M University.

“If you’re changing the ability for a seed to grow in some place because a bird is no longer dropping said seed there, that could change the habitat for a whole plethora of species.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/apr/14/noisy-environments-have-detrimental-effect-plants-new-mexico-study-finds-persistent-noise-natural-gas-wells>

[Twitter](#)

Just say no: negativity is secret of political tweet success, study finds

Want to go viral on Twitter? Steer clear of positive terms, Spanish researchers say



The research focused on tweets about the Catalan independence referendum.

Photograph: Matt Rourke/AP

The research focused on tweets about the Catalan independence referendum.

Photograph: Matt Rourke/AP

[Natalie Grover](#)

Tue 13 Apr 2021 06.02 EDT

You've treated your [Twitter](#) followers to a pithy 280-character comment about the government's latest gaffe – but what gives your tweet the fuel to spread like wildfire? It's how negative the tweet is, say researchers, that raises its chances of going viral, at least in the political context.

Previous studies have suggested that the main factors affecting the virality of a tweet are user features (such as the number of followers), specific tweet features (number of URLs, hashtags and so on), and aspects of the tweet topic – but few have investigated the importance of a specific type of sentiment as an overarching link among these factors.

The latest study – conducted by researchers from the University of Jaén in Spain – focused on a divisive political subject from 2017: the independence referendum called by the Catalan regional government, a vote that was [declared illegal by the Spanish government](#) and the country's constitutional court.

They assembled 46,962 Spanish tweets across 25,847 accounts disseminated over the week of 1 October 2017 using the hashtags #CatalanReferendum and #ReferendumCatalan. The researchers hypothesised that most Spaniards disagreed with Catalonia's independence, which would create experimental conditions in which a greater dissemination of tweets with negative content was expected – while fewer positive tweets were anticipated to spread – irrespective of other features which contribute to tweet diffusion.

By controlling these other features – such as the follower count, verified accounts and the use of multimedia in tweets – the authors set out to assess whether the use of sentiment terms affected the probability of retweets. To quantify the effect of negativity and positivity they employed three Spanish sentiment lexicons.

Negative sentiment, at least when it comes to the subject of politics, increased the chances of retweets, the authors found, but acknowledged that other features did play a role in predicting tweet virality.

The inclusion of positive terms contributed to a lower average of retweets and the use of negative terms corresponded with a higher virality, confirming the hypothesis, the authors [wrote](#) in the journal Royal Society Open Science.

“The conclusions obtained in the context of the study denote that negative tweets have greater virality than positive ones, but this could change depending on the topic,” Salud María Jiménez-Zafra, Antonio José Sáez-

Castillo, Antonio Conde-Sánchez and María Teresa Martín-Valdivia said in an emailed response to the Guardian.

Dr Esmeralda Bon, a research associate from the Cathie Marsh Institute for Social Research at the University of Manchester, said the study results should not be taken to mean that there was more value in being negative than positive on social media.

“The researchers suggest that positive tweets were shared less due to the negativity surrounding the referendum. Therefore, these tweets would have resonated more. In a sense, negative tweets about this topic were mainstream,” she said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/apr/13/just-say-no-negativity-is-secret-of-political-tweet-success-study-finds>

[Australia news](#)

Truck driver Mohinder Singh jailed for at least 18 years for killing four police in Melbourne crash

Judge says collision into officers who had pulled over Porsche driver Richard Pusey on Eastern Freeway ‘shocked the public conscience’



Mohinder Singh arrives at the Melbourne court for sentencing on Wednesday. The truck driver was jailed for at least 18 years and six months over the Eastern Freeway crash that killed four police while he was on drugs. Photograph: Luis Ascui/AAP

Mohinder Singh arrives at the Melbourne court for sentencing on Wednesday. The truck driver was jailed for at least 18 years and six months over the Eastern Freeway crash that killed four police while he was on drugs. Photograph: Luis Ascui/AAP

Australian Associated Press
Tue 13 Apr 2021 21.52 EDT

Truck driver Mohinder Singh has been jailed for at least 18 years and six months for hitting and killing four police officers on Melbourne's Eastern Freeway.

Singh was short on sleep and high on drugs when he crashed a 19-tonne semi-trailer into the officers who had pulled over Porsche driver Richard Pusey on 22 April last year.

Constable Lynette Taylor, senior constable Kevin King and constables Glen Humphris and Josh Prestney died at the scene.

The 48-year-old was jailed in Victoria's supreme court on Wednesday for 22 years, with a non-parole period of 18 year and six months.

['Shattered' truck driver apologises to families of police officers he killed in Melbourne freeway crash](#)

[Read more](#)

Justice Paul Coghlan said the crash had “shocked the public conscience” and described footage of the incident as chilling.

“The grief of those close to the victims is profound and life-changing,” Coghlan told the court.

“Such grief is heightened by the sudden and unnecessary nature of the deaths. We can only hope ... as time goes by, some amelioration of their suffering can come about.”

Singh had been using and trafficking drugs in the lead up to the crash, and was “talking nonsense” about being chased by witches earlier that day.

He previously pleaded guilty in Victoria's supreme court to four counts of culpable driving causing death, three charges of drug trafficking and one of possessing drugs.

King's widow, Sharron MacKenzie, told the court her life had been reduced to an “ocean of tears and sleepless nights”.

“I still feel the devastation and absolute heartbreak when I told my children their father and hero would not be coming home,” she said.

[Truck driver faces families of police officers killed in Melbourne freeway crash](#)

[Read more](#)

“For the first time in my life I understood the feeling of choking pain – deep and utter despair.”

Taylor’s husband, Stuart Schulze, said he would never forget the “dreadful spectre” of three officers at his door that day.

Humphris’ partner, Todd Robinson, said Singh took away the most important person in his life, while Const Prestney’s brother, Alex, said his sibling died “without dignity”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/apr/14/truck-driver-mohinder-singh-jailed-for-at-least-18-years-for-killing-four-police-in-melbourne-crash>

Headlines tuesday 13 april 2021

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- [Live UK Covid: third wave could still happen despite vaccine rollout, expert warns](#)
- [Coronavirus 4.6m people missed out on hospital treatment in England in 2020](#)
- ['One big whirlwind' The artist denied access to cancer treatment](#)

Vaccines and immunisation

NHS Covid vaccine booking website crashes as Moderna rollout begins

Initial glitch as over-45s rush to book jab, while third vaccine offers alternative to AstraZeneca for under-30s

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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The Vaccines Taskforce has secured 17m doses of the Moderna vaccine for the UK. Photograph: Luca Zennaro/EPA

The Vaccines Taskforce has secured 17m doses of the Moderna vaccine for the UK. Photograph: Luca Zennaro/EPA

[Sarah Marsh](#) and [Frances Ryan](#)

Tue 13 Apr 2021 06.30 EDT

The NHS's booking website allowing people aged 45 and over to schedule their coronavirus vaccination initially crashed, moments after it was opened.

The website appeared to go down just after slots were made available. Users were met with the message: "The NHS website is currently experiencing technical difficulties. We are working to resolve these issues. Thank you for your patience."

Shortly after the vaccine booking site was hit by the technical issues, the vaccines minister, Nadhim Zahawi, tweeted that the problem had been "fixed". It is understood NHS Digital was able to get the website back up and running on Tuesday morning, with all issues being resolved and people able to book appointments.

Meanwhile, England was gearing up to offer its first doses of the Moderna jab, the third Covid-19 vaccine introduced in the national deployment.

On Tuesday, the vaccination will be available at 21 sites, including the Madejski Stadium in Reading and the Sheffield Arena. It will offer an alternative to the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine for under-30s, after concerns about a possible link to very rare blood clots. The Pfizer jab has already also been available.

England follows Wales and Scotland, which began using the Moderna vaccine last week. The Vaccines Taskforce has secured 17m doses of the Moderna vaccine for the UK.

Prof Stephen Powis, the medical director of NHS England, said having the Moderna vaccine marked another milestone in the national programme.

He said more sites would offer the Moderna vaccine as supplies arrived, urging people to get vaccinated when they were invited, as it is "our hope at the end of a year like no other".

Quick Guide

Covid vaccine side-effects: what are they, who gets them and why?

Show

What are the most common side-effects from the Covid vaccines?

[According to Public Health England](#), most side-effects from the Covid vaccines – Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford/AstraZeneca – are mild and short-lived. These include soreness where the jab was given, feeling tired or achy and headaches. Uncommon side-effects include having swollen lymph nodes.

Why do the common side-effects occur?

“The sore arm can be either due to the trauma of the needle in the muscle, or local inflammation in the muscle probably because of the chemicals in the injection,” said Prof Robert Read, head of clinical and experimental sciences within medicine at the University of Southampton and director of the NIHR Southampton Biomedical Research Centre.

“The other common side-effects – the muscle aches, flu-like illness and fatigue – are probably due to generalised activation of the immune system caused by the vaccine. What this means is that the white blood cells that are stimulated by the vaccine to make antibodies themselves have to secrete chemicals called cytokines, interferons and chemokines, which function to send messages from cell to cell to become activated.”

Are blood clots a side-effect of the vaccines?

The Oxford/AstraZeneca jab has been linked to a small but concerning number of reports of blood clots combined with low platelet counts (platelets are cell fragments in our blood that help it to clot).

These include a rare clot in the brain called cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST). In an unvaccinated population, upper estimates suggest there may be 15 to 16 cases per million people per year.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) said recipients of the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab should look out for new headaches, blurred vision, confusion or seizures that occur four days or more after vaccination. The MHRA also flagged shortness of breath, chest pain,

abdominal pain, leg swelling and unusual skin bruising as reasons to seek medical advice.

Up to and including 31 March, the MHRA said it received 79 reports of cases of blood clots combined with low platelets, including 19 deaths, following more than 20m doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab. That equates to about four cases for every million vaccinated individuals.

Two cases of blood clots with a low platelet count have also been reported among recipients of the Pfizer/BioNTech jab. The European Medicines Agency is also examining three cases of venous thromboembolism blood clots involving the Johnson & Johnson jab.

The MHRA says blood clots combined with low platelets can occur naturally in unvaccinated people as well as in those who have caught Covid, and that while evidence of a link with the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine has become stronger, more research is needed.

Nicola Davis *Science correspondent*

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

All people aged 50 and over and those in high-risk groups in the UK have been offered a coronavirus vaccine before the mid-April deadline set by the government, allowing the second phase of the deployment to younger cohorts to begin.

Boris Johnson hailed the passing of “another hugely significant milestone”.

However, there are fears of a slowdown in supply of vaccines and possible fall in confidence after a change in advice on who could get the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab.

With more than 32 million people having had a first dose and 7.6 million of those having received their second, the prime minister said “many thousands of lives” had been saved.

But there were concerns not everyone had been offered a jab they could access. Last month, the Guardian reported that a number of [high-risk people had still not had their first vaccine.](#)

People unable to leave their homes were meant to be visited by a mobile vaccination team, similar to the service offered to care home residents. But the Guardian understands that months on, a number of older and disabled people who are too unwell to leave their homes are still waiting, with some told to travel miles to a vaccine centre.

Public [Health](#) England released operational details about the Moderna jab on Monday, including information on the dose, the interval between first and second jab, the storage temperature and whether people who receive the jab would need to be monitored afterwards.

[Covid-19: what's going on with the AstraZeneca vaccine? – podcast](#)

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The vaccine needs to be stored at a temperature of -25C to -15C and once thawed can be stored at 2C to 8C for up to 30 days. The minimum interval between first and second dose of the Moderna vaccine is 28 days. Patients who receive the Moderna jab will need to wait at the vaccination centre and be observed for a period of 15 minutes after they receive the vaccine.

On Monday evening, and earlier than expected, Johnson announced the target had been reached. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) – the body advising on which groups should be prioritised for a jab – is to publish its final advice later this week on who should be next in line.

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Johnson suggested the current plan would continue, meaning people in their late 40s would be offered a vaccine next. The JCVI's interim plan published earlier in the year said the rollout should continue down the adult age groups.

Sir Simon Stevens, the chief executive of the [NHS](#) in England, said: "Vaccinating 19 out of 20 people aged 50 and over is an incredible milestone. Thanks to our [NHS](#) nurses, doctors, pharmacists, operational

managers and thousands of other staff and volunteers, the [NHS](#) Covid vaccination programme is without a doubt the most successful in our history.”

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UK Covid: health department insists Johnson & Johnson's decision will not derail vaccine rollout – as it happened

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NHS

Covid: 4.6m people missed out on hospital treatment in England in 2020

Exclusive: millions of ‘missing patients’ could send overall NHS waiting list soaring to nearly 10m

- [‘It was one big whirlwind’: artist on being denied access to cancer treatment](#)
- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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A sign directing people with symptoms of Covid-19 to an isolation unit at St Mary’s hospital in London in March 2020. Photograph: NurPhoto/Getty Images

A sign directing people with symptoms of Covid-19 to an isolation unit at St Mary’s hospital in London in March 2020. Photograph: NurPhoto/Getty Images

[Denis Campbell](#) and [Sarah Marsh](#)

Tue 13 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

More than 4.5 million people missed out on hospital treatment in [England](#) last year due to the disruption to the NHS caused by Covid, with growing numbers turning to crowdfunding to pay for cancer drugs and operations.

The number of patients having planned surgery such as a joint replacement plummeted from 16.62 million in 2019 to just under 12 million last year – a drop of 4.64 million people – an analysis of NHS hospital activity by the [Health Foundation](#) reveals.

[‘It was one big whirlwind’: artist on being denied access cancer treatment](#)
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The fall was mainly caused by hospitals suspending many of their normal services as they focused on the influx of people severely ill with coronavirus, which resulted in operating theatres being turned into [makeshift intensive care units](#) and surgical staff being repurposed to fight the pandemic.

At the same time GPs referred 6 million fewer people to have diagnostic tests and treatment in hospital as a result of the disruption to care, patients' reluctance go to hospital in case they caught Covid and a desire not to add to the pressure on the overstretched [NHS](#). They referred 14 million patients in 2020, compared with 20 million in 2019.

It has created millions of “missing patients” who could send the overall NHS waiting list soaring from its already record high 4.6 million people to 9.7 million by 2024 if three-quarters of those people belatedly seek treatment now that the pandemic is easing, the Health Foundation estimates.

Data collected by the website GoFundMe shows that more and more people are turning to crowdfunding to finance urgent medical care as they battle delays, clinical trial cancellations and long waiting lists for NHS care.

[Graphic](#)

The number of people seeking donations from the public citing “waiting lists” as a reason has gone up 87% between last year and this year and the number who mention “clinical trials” – medical research studies that aim to find better treatments, many of which were suspended during the pandemic – rose by 60%.

['A truly frightening backlog': ex-NHS chief warns of delays in vital care](#)
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There was also a 55% surge in people seeking public support mentioning cancer drugs between March 2020 and February 2021, GoFundMe said.

Tim Gardner, a senior policy fellow at the Health Foundation, said a combination of long delays for care and the sheer number of people awaiting care could coalesce into a major political problem. The number of people forced to wait more than a year for their operation has rocketed from 1,613 before the pandemic to 304,044 in January this year, and more than 1 million people have been waiting at least six months, even though 92% of patients are supposed to be treated within 18 weeks under the referral to treatment scheme.

“The waiting list is already at the highest level it’s been since comparable records began in 2007, and if it did rise from 4.6 million now to 9.7 million by March 2024 as we estimate, that’s more than double the waiting list now,” said Gardner. “These ‘missing millions’ have the potential to become problematic for the government. So this – addressing the backlog of care and getting waiting times back on track – has got to be seen as the defining challenge between now and the next general election.

“However, doing that will take years. I think we are looking at well beyond the next election before patients needing care can access the care that they need within the 18-week commitment in the NHS constitution. NHS staff are exhausted, so I think progress towards tackling the backlog and getting things back on track will be slow.”

[UK cases](#)

Rachel Power, the chief executive of the Patients Association, said: “The disruption to NHS services brought by the pandemic appears to have accelerated a trend that was already emerging for patients to use crowdfunding to seek the treatment they could not access on the NHS.”

She said the association was “particularly concerned by reports of treatments being cancelled that could be life-saving”, adding that it was “understandable the patients are exploring other avenues”.

The Health Foundation analysed the number of people who had hospital treatment in each month in 2019 and 2020. It found the NHS performed 712,620 fewer trauma and orthopaedic treatments, 396,107 fewer ear, nose and throat procedures and 205,918 fewer oral surgeries last year than the year before.

The analysis also discloses that the biggest fall in the number of people who received planned care in hospital occurred in the north-west, where the number of patients treated fell from 222,741 to 154,487 – a 31% drop. The south-west recorded the smallest fall, but still treated 24% fewer patients.

It also found that disruption to hospital treatment was much more severe in England’s poorest areas compared with its richest. The number of “completed treatment pathways” fell by 9,162 per 100,000 population in the former but by 6,765 in the latter.

The former chief executive of the NHS in England Sir David Nicholson said [in a Guardian interview](#) last week that the scale of the backlog of care the NHS was facing was already “truly frightening” and that delays could damage patients’ health.

The Health Foundation’s findings come days after new [polling by Ipsos Mori](#) showed that people think “improving waiting times for routine operations” is the most important task facing the NHS, even ahead of the Covid vaccination programme.

Half of respondents cited shortening the wait times for surgery as the service’s key priority, followed by increasing the number of NHS staff

(43%), Covid vaccination (41%), NHS workers' mental wellbeing (38%) and mental health (36%), Health Service Journal (HSJ) reported.

The “gratitude bounce” among the public towards the NHS during the pandemic would not last long now that Covid was in retreat, with people wanting the service to reduce waiting times for surgery as soon as possible, the pollster’s chief executive, Ben Page, told HSJ.

An NHS spokesperson said: “Alongside treating around 400,000 seriously unwell patients with Covid since the pandemic began and rolling out the biggest vaccine programme in health service history, NHS staff also cared for more than 1.3 million patients without Covid during the peak of infections this winter and cut down waiting times by more than a third since last July.

“The NHS has recently published a plan to accelerate the delivery of operations and other services with a £1bn elective recovery fund, with every area of the country being asked to maximise their capacity to provide care for as many urgent and non-urgent patients as possible.”

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Coronavirus

‘It was one big whirlwind’: artist on being denied access to cancer treatment

Kerry, a curator, set up a crowdfunding page and has raised thousands to afford the help she needs

- [4.6m people missed out on hospital treatment in England in 2020](#)
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Kerry was diagnosed with rare eye cancer, a clinical trial offered an experimental treatment that had proven effective in some patients but because of Covid it was halted. Photograph: kerry

Kerry was diagnosed with rare eye cancer, a clinical trial offered an experimental treatment that had proven effective in some patients but because of Covid it was halted. Photograph: kerry



[Sarah Marsh](#)

[@sloumarsh](#)

Tue 13 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

When Kerry visited her oncologist about her cancer treatment, the words that came out of his mouth still echo in her mind.

Unable to bring anyone to her appointment due to Covid restrictions, she scrambled to take notes as the doctor told her there was nothing more he could offer. The clinical trial that provided the treatment she needed had been cancelled due to the pandemic.

He said her best option was to crowdfund to get money to go privately, and without this, she would only have a year to live.

“I was pretty stunned to be told I only had a year to live and there was no treatment available. It was one big whirlwind: your head starts spinning and you cannot think,” she said.

“I was trying to take notes as the oncologist was talking but it is difficult to take on board that sort of devastating information when you are on your own,” she added.



Photograph: kerry

Since then, the artist and curator [in her 50s set up a crowdfunding page](#) and has raised tens of thousands to afford the help she needs. She was diagnosed with rare eye cancer five years ago, which spread to her liver at the end of August 2020.

“I had a laparoscopy and they found several small tumours in my liver that could not be removed by surgery,” she said.

Originally, a clinical trial offered an experimental treatment that had proven effective in some patients but because of Covid it was halted. The treatment is available privately for £40,000.

[Covid: 4.6m people missed out on hospital treatment in England in 2020](#)

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“I turned around and said to my oncologist, there is no way I could even afford one treatment and he said, ‘All I can suggest is that you crowdfund’... that was the end of the conversation,” Kerry said.

She said the news was “devastating” and came with the added stress of trying to raise money, which she eventually did. “I have had three treatments so far and it is working,” she said.

Her last visit for care was over a week ago and she has been told the tumours are dying but she needs further treatment to make sure every cell is dead. “I have to keep crowdfunding,” she said.

Kerry said she was surprised by the level of support she got through crowdfunding, “especially due to the pandemic and people losing their jobs”. She has been “amazed by people’s generosity”.

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Johnson & Johnson to ‘proactively delay’ vaccine rollout in Europe over blood clot reports – as it happened

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Global development

‘We will lose more doctors’: Sudan’s health workers plead for Covid jabs

Country has struggled to get vaccines to frontline medical staff, while Covid toll remains under-reported

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A Sudanese health worker receives a dose of Covid vaccine at Jabra hospital in Khartoum. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

A Sudanese health worker receives a dose of Covid vaccine at Jabra hospital in Khartoum. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

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[Zeinab Mohammed Salih](#) in Khartoum

Tue 13 Apr 2021 04.00 EDT

More than 200 Sudanese doctors, nurses and medical workers have died from Covid-19, according to sources close to the health ministry – more than three times the official figure.

[Like other countries across sub-Saharan Africa](#), Sudan has struggled to obtain vaccines and distribute them to frontline medical staff. Many of the doctors who have died were senior consultants in their 50s and 60s or older, and so were in high-risk categories.

“Doctors are exhausted and they have to work and go to their clinics despite being elderly in order to pay for their living expenses,” said Manal El-Degair, a Sudanese doctor and member of Jisir, an NGO campaigning in providing vaccines and other medical supplies to Sudan. “If no one acts now to protect them with vaccines, we will lose more doctors in the third wave.”

Other health workers are also suffering. “People tend to focus on doctors but the number of nurses who died is unknown, and that’s a huge loss. With Covid19, the role of nurses is really central,” El-Degair said.

Sudan has registered 32,000 cases and 2,000 deaths, but this is widely believed to reflect only a fraction of the true number of victims. A [study](#) published late last year by scientists from Imperial College London's Covid-19 response team in Sudan found that only about 2% of Covid deaths in the capital, Khartoum, had been reported.

Last month Sudan became the first country in the Middle East and north Africa region to receive vaccine doses through the UN-backed Covax facility, taking delivery of [828,000 doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca shot](#).

Though the country has also received a shipment of 250,000 doses of the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine, its health minister said recently that the stocks were not enough.

The families of doctors who have died from Covid-19 in Sudan blame local authorities for diverting scarce funds elsewhere, and the international community for hoarding vaccines.

Dr El-Taib El-Naiem, 63 a senior orthopaedic surgeon, is believed to have been exposed to the virus during his contacts with students doctors or possibly at his home when treating poor patients who could not afford to go to hospital.

“My father was always like that ... that probably made him vulnerable to the virus as well ” said his son Mahmoud El-Naiem, an NHS doctor who works with Covid-19 patients in London.

Sudan has only three doctors who specialise in intensive care and fewer than 80 ICU beds for 43m inhabitants. There are only 150 dedicated Covid beds in Khartoum, a city of 6 million. The government has banned big gatherings but few people practise social distancing or wear masks.

“Many of our facilities and public hospitals are closed because of a lack of basic supplies, not just PPE or trained staff. That is one reason so many doctors have died,” said a health ministry official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Hussain Gasim Abu-Eikar, an emergency doctor at a dedicated clinic treating Covid-19 victims in Khartoum who lost his 63-year-old cousin to the pandemic last week, said many healthworkers in Sudan had no choice but to continue working despite the risks because they had no other way of earning a living.

Thousands of Sudanese doctors are on strike, protesting against work conditions and a failure to pay their salaries for almost a year. Some doctors complained that their families paid for their food and transportation and living expenses. Many hospitals failed to provide them with face masks, they said.

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Coronavirus

Covid pandemic still growing exponentially, WHO says

World Health Organization says ‘confusion and complacency’ prolonging global situation

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People wait to receive their vaccinations in Kolkata. India is struggling to contain its second wave of the pandemic. Photograph: Piyal Adhikary/EPA

People wait to receive their vaccinations in Kolkata. India is struggling to contain its second wave of the pandemic. Photograph: Piyal Adhikary/EPA

[Peter Beaumont](#)

Mon 12 Apr 2021 12.29 EDT

The global coronavirus pandemic is still growing exponentially, the [World Health Organization](#) said on Monday, as it reported 4.4m cases in the last week, the seventh straight week of rising numbers.

The latest global figures represent a 9% increase in infections on last week and a 5% rise in deaths.

As lockdown restrictions were eased in England, the WHO's director general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said "confusion, complacency and inconsistency in public health measures" were prolonging the pandemic.

He said it might be months before the global situation was brought under control, and only then with concerted measures.

"We too want to see societies and economies reopening and travel and trade resuming," he told a news briefing, noting that there had been seven consecutive weeks of rises in infections despite 700m doses of vaccine being administered around the world.

"But right now, intensive care units in many countries are overflowing and people are dying and it's totally avoidable," he said. "The Covid-19 pandemic is a long way from over. But we have many reasons for optimism. The decline in cases and deaths during the first two months of the year shows that this virus and its variants can be stopped."

Tedros said that restaurants and nightclubs were full and markets open and crowded in some countries, with few people taking precautions, despite continuing transmission.

"Some people appear to be taking the approach that if they're relatively young, it doesn't matter if they get Covid-19," he said.

His comments came as other officials said they were looking at ways to expand the production of Covid vaccines.

[Ganges crowds highlight distancing challenges as Covid cases soar in India](#)
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India has overtaken Brazil as the nation with the second-highest number of infections worldwide after the US, [as it struggles to contain its second wave of the pandemic](#). The country, which has a population of 1.4 billion, has administered about 105m vaccine doses.

The WHO's team leader on Covid-19, Maria van Kerkhove, told the news briefing the pandemic was still growing exponentially.

“This is not the situation we want to be in 16 months into a pandemic, when we have proven control measures,” she said. “We are in a critical point of the pandemic right now.”

Covid-19 has killed at least 2,937,355 people since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP at 1000 GMT on Monday. At least 135,952,650 cases have been registered.

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Coronavirus

African health workers left without Covid jabs as paltry supplies dwindle

Fear of third wave and new variants as sub-Saharan vaccine distribution is dogged by supply disruption

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South Africa is using the single-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine after putting distribution of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine on hold in February.
Photograph: Themba Hadebe/AP

South Africa is using the single-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine after putting distribution of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine on hold in February.
Photograph: Themba Hadebe/AP

[Jason Burke](#) in Johannesburg

Tue 13 Apr 2021 00.00 EDT

Millions of healthcare workers in sub-Saharan [Africa](#) continue to risk their lives to fight Covid-19 as authorities across the continent struggle to obtain and distribute vaccines to frontline medical staff.

Though hundreds of millions of people in western nations are now protected from the virus, [doctors, nurses and others on the frontline](#) of the fight against Covid in Africa will have to wait months, or even years, for a vaccine.

Last Thursday the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) said less than 2% of the 690m Covid-19 vaccine doses administered globally to date were given in Africa, where most countries received vaccines only five weeks ago and in small quantities.

Supplies were dwindling on the continent with almost half of the 31.6m doses delivered to Africa already administered, the WHO said. Fewer than 13m doses have been given to the continent's 1.3 billion people so far.

“Africa is already playing Covid-19 vaccination catch-up, and the gap is widening,” said Dr Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO Africa regional director. “While we acknowledge the immense burden placed by the global demand for vaccines, inequity can only worsen scarcity,” she added.

Cyril Ramaphosa, the South African president, [said on Monday](#) that Africa must expand its medical manufacturing capacity to combat the pandemic and be better equipped to face future health emergencies.

African health facilities struggled to cope with a second wave of infections that spread across much of the continent earlier this year, fuelled by new variants of the virus. Of 21 countries surveyed by the WHO, two-thirds reported inadequate critical care capacity and more reported a shortage of oxygen in recent months.

Only a handful of African countries believe they will be able to immunise their frontline healthcare workers over coming months, and the vaccination of general populations may not be completed for several years, leaving hundreds of millions of people vulnerable. There are now fears of a third wave.

The slow pace of the rollout also means there is a greater risk of new, more transmissible or severe variants emerging.

A major blow has been the decision of India, [hit by surging infections in recent weeks](#), to suspend the export of large shipments of Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid-19 shots made in its territory by the Serum Institute of India, the biggest global producer.

The [AstraZeneca](#) vaccine is the cheapest and easiest to store and transport, making it well suited to the needs of African countries. Last week Dr John Nkengasong, the director of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, said the ban could have a “catastrophic” impact if extended.

The AstraZeneca vaccine accounts for the vast majority of doses that African nations expect to receive through the WHO-backed Covax programme, which aims to deliver 600m shots to 40 African countries this year, enough to vaccinate 20% of their populations.

In Rwanda, about 350,000 [people](#), mainly healthcare workers, were vaccinated before supplies ran out. Half a million AstraZeneca shots [have since arrived](#), allowing the campaign to restart.

[Sub-Saharan meningitis epidemics could be signalled by weather forecasts](#)
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Nigeria recently told local authorities [to stop administering first doses](#) of the AstraZeneca vaccine once they had used up half of their stock in order to safeguard supply for the second dose.

Officials in Kenya, which received a million doses of AstraZeneca vaccine in March, wanted to vaccinate every healthcare worker by June, but have so far reached only 99,000, among 300,000 people in total [who have received the jab](#).

In South Africa, [fewer than 300,000 healthcare workers](#) have been vaccinated with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, out of a total of more than 1 million. In February, South Africa put use of the AstraZeneca vaccine on

hold after data showed that it gave minimal protection against mild-to-moderate infection caused by the country's dominant and more-infectious variant.

Even before a second wave more than doubled the official Covid-19 death toll, the disease [killed nearly 350 workers](#) in South Africa's stretched public healthcare system. The ruling ANC party has been criticised for a lack of planning, transparency and consultation as well as a failure to crack down on corruption. Only 19,000 vaccine jabs were distributed last week. No reason has been given for the slowdown.

Nkengasong said the [African Union](#) had also shifted its efforts to secure doses from Johnson & Johnson, with a deal announced last month to supply the continent with up to 400m doses. They will be manufactured in South Africa, which could simplify delivery, but are unlikely to be available before June. But Nkengasong said the continent would struggle “to bridge that gap” in the meantime.

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The main reason for the switch was to avoid duplicating efforts by agencies in Africa working to obtain vaccines, he added.

Moeti confirmed that the WHO and the African Union wanted to ensure that they were “not competing and stepping over each other looking for the same vaccines” for African nations.

According to the latest figures from Johns Hopkins University, there have been 4.3 million confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Africa and [more than 115,000 deaths](#). This could be a significant underestimation, however. For example, the official death toll in South Africa is 53,000, but excess mortality data suggests that the true total is at least twice that figure. South Africa, the worst-hit country on the continent and one of the wealthiest, has some of Africa’s most reliable statistics.

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2021.04.13 - Spotlight

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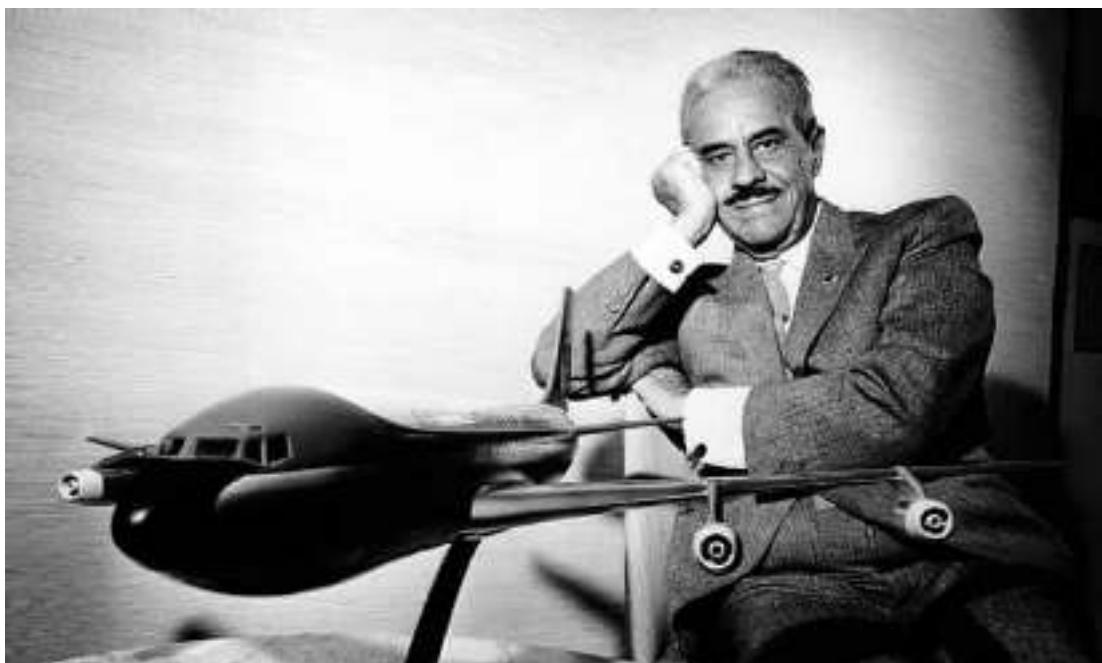
The knackerman: the toughest job in British farming

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Design

From pencil sharpeners to a \$539m lawsuit: how big tech weaponised design patents

In 1842, the US patent office registered 14 designs, including a bathtub and a ‘corpse preserver’. It now handles 35,000 a year. Why did this once sedate world became a corporate arms race?



The master ... Raymond Loewy poses in his office with a model of the presidential plane. Photograph: RG/AP

The master ... Raymond Loewy poses in his office with a model of the presidential plane. Photograph: RG/AP



[Oliver Wainwright](#)

[@ollywainwright](#)

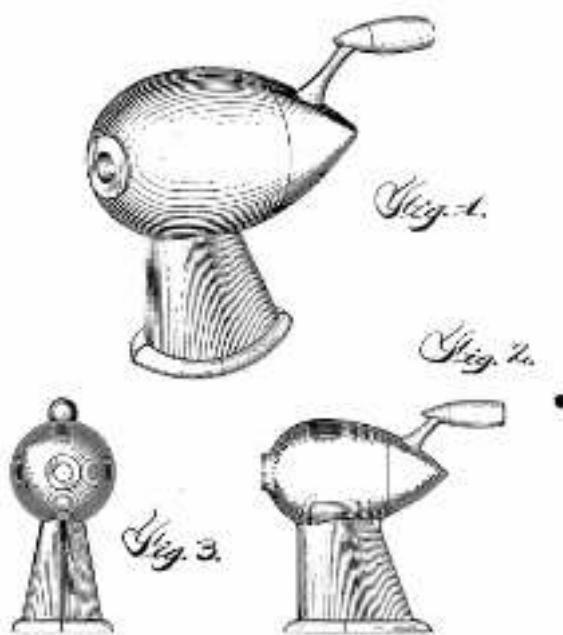
Tue 13 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

It was designed to make sharpening a pencil feel as thrilling as flying a jet. A gleaming chrome teardrop, tapered to a point and adorned with a bullet-like handle, Raymond Loewy's aerodynamic tail-fin pencil sharpener brought the glamour of the machine age to the humble office desk.

As the godfather of American industrial design, Loewy gave his streamlined signature to trains, planes and Coca-Cola vending machines, [defining the sleek art deco look of the 1930s](#). But his go-faster pencil sharpener never made it into production, deemed one chrome-plated, deco-styled step too far. The design does survive in the form of its patent, filed in 1933 and now republished as one of 1,000 such protected inventions, brought together in a new book.

“Design critics trashed Loewy’s sharpener,” says Thomas Rinaldi, author of the Patented: 1,000 Design Patents. “A pencil sharpener doesn’t have to fly through the air, they said, so why make it aerodynamic?” But the design went on to become an icon of the streamlined era. The prototype sold for \$85,000 at auction in 2001 and, despite the innumerable designs that Loewy

realised throughout his career, it was the phantom pencil sharpener that was chosen to honour him on a [celebratory postage stamp](#) in 2011.



Not cleared for take-off ... the aerodynamic pencil sharpener by Loewy.
Photograph: Raymond Loewy/Phaidon

Featured among everyday classics like the ring-pull can and the cassette tape, the sharpener is one of a number of designs in the book that never made it off the drawing board. From a flying automobile-cum-helicopter designed in 1959 to the [ill-fated Google Glass wearable display](#) of 2011, it seems designers' ambitions have often been ahead of what is technologically feasible – or practically desirable.

“Sifting through the archives,” says Rinaldi, “it became clear that design patents have often been used as a publicity tool. Someone would design a crazy thing, without having a manufacturer on board, so they could shop it around and get it published in magazines to raise their profile. For a lot of designers, patenting was a vanity exercise.”

Arranged chronologically from 1900 to the present day, one patent per page, the book presents a fascinating cross-section through more than a century of material culture, the simple black and white line drawings reflecting the changing tastes and technologies of the decades. Drawn from around

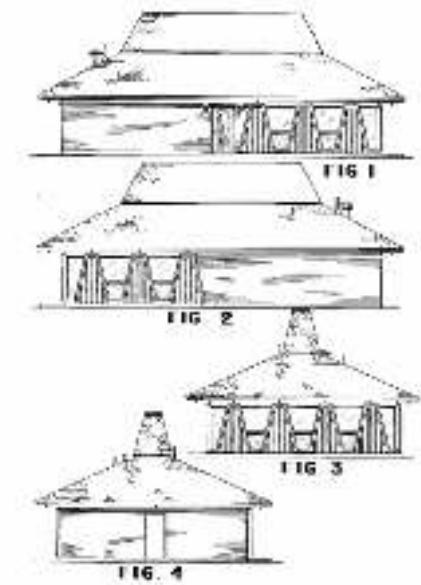
800,000 designs registered at the US Patent and Trademark Office, the catalogue of objects reflects not only the onset of mass manufacture, the rise of electrical appliances and the later ubiquity of personal electronics, but it also reveals a story of international trade and shifting global power.



Causing a stir ... the development of the food mixer. Photograph: Phaidon

We see how US-created designs for cars and appliances were overtaken by innovations from Japan in the 1970s and 80s and, more recently, an influx from China – with a sixfold increase in filings from Chinese companies and inventors over the last decade. On a stylistic level, we see how the rich ornamentation of the 1900s gives way to the streamlining of the 30s, and how the angular forms of the 70s melt into chubby postmodern products of the 80s.

One surprise inclusion, among the scores of gadgets and appliances, is patented building designs – a phenomenon that coincided with the birth of roadside fast-food joints and gas stations, designed like 3D billboards to be easily recognisable from a moving car. Who could resist pulling in to refuel beneath one of Eliot Noyes' 1966 [UFO-like canopies for Mobil](#) (one of which remains on the A6 at Birstall, Leicestershire, safely listed in 2012)?



Upper crust ... 1965 patents for a Pizza Hut building. Photograph: Phaidon

A section at the front of the book shows the evolution of particular products, which reads like Darwinian natural selection. The mobile phone arrives as an enormous brick in the 70s, before gradually shrinking towards the tiny palm-sized flip-phone of the early 00s, then swelling into vast touch-screen slabs too big for most pockets, before coming full circle and ending with a basic, compact model, with analogue buttons and a small LCD screen – part of a backlash against the always-connected smartphone lifestyle. The food mixer goes through similar convulsions, travelling from industrial-looking machine, through futuristic streamlined forms, and back again, concluding with a retro model patented in 2019 that doesn't look too far from the first 1927 version.

One thing that remains eerily consistent is the visual style of the patent drawings. When design patents were introduced in the late 19th century, the illustrations had to withstand reproduction at reduced scale in periodically issued gazettes, and the standard has remained the same ever since. Whether depicting the design for a Victorian billiard table or [a Pizza Hut restaurant](#) building, a Rolodex card file or a Chinese drone, each item is drawn with the same objective black lines, floating against a white background. Stripped of all context, their very essence distilled, the objects take on an almost totemic

quality. Even a novelty pig-shaped clock, with hands emerging from its rear, starts to look like a design classic.

The book also shines a useful spotlight on unsung heroes behind the items we use every day. “I’d never heard of [Jean Reinecke](#) before I started this research,” says Rinaldi. “But it turns out he probably designed three quarters of all the tape dispensers you’ve ever touched. Or there’s [Ray Patten](#), an in-house designer at General Electric who designed everything from kitchen timers to locomotives. Or Charles McLeod, who designed dozens of electric clocks.” It was Rinaldi’s own considerable collection of clocks, radios, lamps and other flea-market finds that first prompted him to find out more about the anonymous designers behind these products, beginning the years-long process of whittling down the selection for the book.

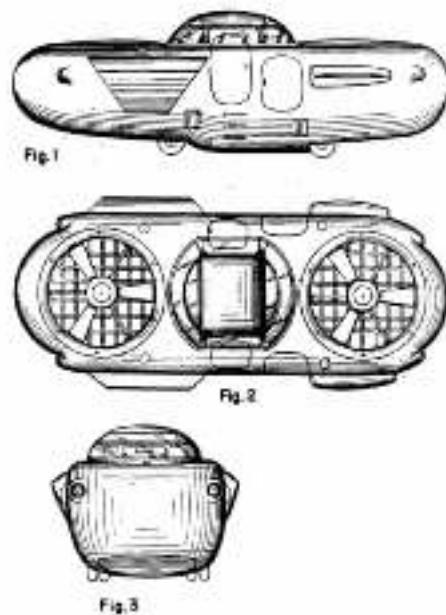


UFO influenced ... Grade II-listed Esso garage in Birstall. Photograph: Rui Vieira/PA

He traces the origins of design patents back to the birth of mass production, when industrialised processes of casting, stamping, weaving and cutting enabled objects to be produced at scale for the first time – as well as more easily copied. “Utility patents” had been around since the 1790s, but they regulated how an invention functioned, not how it looked, and proved ill-suited to protecting a new age of designed products.

Introduced in 1842, the US design patent law saw just 14 designs registered in its first year, including a typeface, a bathtub and a “corpse preserver”. By 1930, the patent office was issuing 3,000 design patents a year, and 6,500 by 1941, a figure that wasn’t exceeded until 1989. That number has now mushroomed to around 35,000 – good news for lawyers, but maybe less so for innovators.

The recent boom in design patents has mostly come from the electronics sphere, spurred on by a landmark supreme court case between Apple and Samsung, which began in 2011 and was finally settled in 2018, when [Apple was awarded \\$539m](#) in damages. The case revolved around Apple claiming Samsung had copied numerous elements of the iPhone, from its “bounce-back scrolling” interface to the “rectangular product shape with all four corners uniformly rounded”.



Patently absurd ... designs for a combined automobile and helicopter registered in 1959. Photograph: Phaidon

Design patent lawsuits had never seen such vast sums awarded, so the shock ruling sparked an explosion in tech companies racing to patent every last detail of their devices, from the internal components of hardware to the user interface designs displayed on screen. As [Florian Müller](#), intellectual

property activist and author of a patents blog, puts it: “The number of patents in a phone is so huge that nobody has ever been able to count.”

The unprecedented ruling [unleashed an arms race](#), with big tech companies amassing vast arsenals of pre-emptive patents, conceived as assets to be sold or traded, as well as providing an insurance policy against any potential litigation. If someone sues you for infringement, you are more likely to be able to countersue for one of the thousands of other patents in your possession.

While providing protection on one hand, this thicket of patents also serves to stifle innovation. As patent law professor Michael A Carrier remarked in response to the Apple ruling: “There’s always the trade-off between litigation and innovation, and in the time these companies spent in the courtroom, they weren’t innovating.”

Still, in centuries to come, at least the inexorable archive of patent drawings will provide a useful insight into the lengths our species went to protect the monetisable details of smartphone packaging and poop emojis.

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Devon holidays

Our Devon holiday park is full of smiling faces: the beginning of the end of lockdown

As holiday lets reopen in England, our writer reports from one north Devon resort where there's an air of celebration among tourists and staff



Free at last! Children on Croyde beach near Ruda Holiday Park. Photograph: Simon Burt

Free at last! Children on Croyde beach near Ruda Holiday Park. Photograph: Simon Burt

[Sam Haddad](#)

Mon 12 Apr 2021 13.36 EDT

One night in January, I was at a low ebb in a period of particularly low ebbs, when a friend messaged to say she'd booked a caravan in Croyde for the last

week of the Easter school holidays. She and her husband had crunched the data on vaccine distribution and the likely effects of lockdown on hospital admissions, and felt it was worth taking a chance.

I was less optimistic, but Parkdean Resorts, which operates Ruda Holiday Park in north Devon, has a Covid policy that meant we could shift the trip to another time of year if things hadn't opened up by then – though you do have to pay the difference in price for your stay. I transferred the deposit for our family of four, thinking October half-term seemed more realistic.

Amazingly, my friends got it spot on. So, here we are sitting in camping chairs above one of the most picturesque beaches in the country on the first day that self-contained holidays are permitted in [England](#), bathing in beautiful Devonian light, despite having driven through grey skies and snow to get here, while our kids are charging about in a field. Feeling fortunate doesn't cover it. We owe these friends, who are also here, in a separate caravan, an outdoor socially-distanced drink.

The holiday park is full of smiling faces, the sense of a collective breath having been long drawn and now released.

Liz Bolger, a teacher from Dorset has just arrived with her family, including her nine- and 12-year-old children.



The writer and her kids on the caravan park

“We all found this third lockdown much harder,” she says, while both kids nod vigorously. “The fact we weren’t expecting it, and then the weather in January and February being so bad. We felt a lot more trapped within our same four walls.”

“To be here now with all this space and the sun glinting off the water feels liberating, especially on the date that things are opening up. It’s serendipitous but it makes it special, as if we’re celebrating things getting better.”

The elation isn’t contained to guests.

“Holiday parks can be quite eerie places when they’re closed,” Rob Warner, operations director of Parkdean Resorts South told me last week. “About 90% of our staff are locals, they’re attracted to the job as they like working in a vibrant environment with guests bobbing about everywhere. I’ve visited 42 holiday parks in the last three weeks and there’s excitement for opening.”

By the nature of their design, holiday parks are thought to be relatively safe when it comes to airborne Covid transmission: self-catered accommodation five metres apart, with no shared facilities except the pool, which is open for pre-booked limited numbers only. Instead of checking in at reception, we drove straight to our van, which had a green light taped to the window letting us know we could enter. The outdoor beer garden is open, but restaurant facilities offer takeaway only.



Ruda Holiday Park

“Across the holiday park sector we had 4.1 million visitors in 2020, even in that short window of opening and there were only 16 cases through test-and-trace,” says Warner.

At the local surf school, [Surfing Croyde Bay](#), owner Nathan Hill-Haimes is also happy to have holidaymakers back.

“Like a lot of local businesses, lockdown has been tough for us,” he says. “We’re a remote area of the country and it’s a fantastic boost for the local tourist economy to be opening up again.”

Surf school bookings have been rising throughout March, as the government’s roadmap out of lockdown has been laid out, and Hill-Haimes concedes this week could well be hectic. But he’s keen to play a part in the nation’s healing process and thinks having fun outdoors as a family at the beach can help with that. It’s certainly what I plan to do with my kids this week.

He says: “People seem to be looking forward to coming down, for that physical and mental wellbeing, the ‘blue health’ you can get from surfing and being by the sea. It’s easy to safely socially distance and a fantastic way to bring some normality back into our lives. We just encourage people to

respect the coastline and not drop litter as it's such a wonderful part of the world."

The prohibitive cost of UK breaks has been much discussed, but we've paid £431 for a four-night stay at Ruda. Does Warner from Parkdean Resorts hope it will lead to more of us regularly choosing UK holiday parks over trips abroad?

"The normality of today is not the normality of yesterday," he says. "People who would have normally gone on holiday abroad will be experiencing places they've never been in the UK and going home feeling refreshed and reinvigorated."

"We've been through such a low point as a country, to make these happy memories now, they'll take on an extra significance. Will we become more attached to our UK breaks? Hopefully!"

Four nights at [Ruda Holiday Park](#) in Devon for a family of four from £431

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Cornwall holidays

Why I long for the wilds of west Cornwall



Men-an-Tol at sunrise, Cornwall. Photograph: David Forster/Alamy

Men-an-Tol at sunrise, Cornwall. Photograph: David Forster/Alamy

Immersed in a Cornish fishing community for her first book, the writer plans a post-lockdown trip to the coast near St Just on the Penwith peninsula

Lamorna Ash

Tue 13 Apr 2021 01.30 EDT

On 30 December 2019, I was on my hands and knees crawling through a narrow granite ring on the stark stretch of moorland between the north and south coasts of westernmost Cornwall. My travelling companion, Amy, was waiting for me on the other side, both of us unable to contain our laughter as we chanted, “Rebirth, rebirth!” to the empty winter skies.

The granite ring was the [Men-an-Tol](#), a bronze age monument between two upright fingers of grey rock. It takes an hour and a half to walk there from the village of Madron, a couple of miles inland from Penzance on the south coast. The route is wild and desolate, the undulating land covered in dark grey and red gorse.

For a while, Amy and I kept to the single-track road, along which the only sign of life was a single tractor grinding along slowly, its driver blowing cigarette smoke out of the window. But, city kids through and through, we wanted something other than concrete beneath our feet, and so veered off the road to clamber instead over high, thick brambles and trip in the mud at the edges of faded fields. The land seems endless in all directions here, so it came as a surprise when, nearing the Men-an-Tol, we suddenly saw the grey waves of the north coast's Celtic Sea in the distance.



Lamorna Ash at Men-an-Tol



That new year trip to Cornwall's final peninsula, West Penwith, not far from the village where my mother grew up – and from my namesake, Lamorna Cove – has remained at the forefront of my mind because it was the last adventure I took before the pandemic. As such, it has grown into something much larger and more freighted with meaning than it might have been.

Most nights, when I'm lying in bed, staring out through the same thin blinds at the same London main road beyond, I imagine what it would be like, instead, to be back with Amy, marching across this abundance of earth between two seas. (In theory we could be there this week now that self-catering properties in England are open again, but we stayed in a hostel and they don't open, beyond an exclusive hire, until 17 May.)



Lamorna Cove. Photograph: Ian Woolcock/Alamy

There are two prevailing theories about the original purpose of the Men-an-Tol's ringed stone: either it was part of an ancient stone circle constructed to frame specific parts of the horizon, the other stones since removed or lost to time; or it once formed part of a tomb. In Cornish folklore, the site was thought to hold miraculous healing powers, including increasing the fertility of those who clambered through the ring a number of times, preferably while naked. On that occasion, Amy and I decided against the naked part, and chose to reinterpret fertility as creative fertility, hoping our chanting would help produce a year that was less tumultuous and uncertain than the previous one had been for the both of us. (It did not.)

Twenty minutes' drive from Madron towards Land's End, there is a second stone ring. This one isn't very old: it's a replica of the original, sitting in the town centre of St Just in Penwith, one of my favourite places in Cornwall. St Just, once famed for its mining and now strung prettily with bunting, is too far off the beaten track to become as popular as St Ives or Newquay. But it has a lot going on for a small town. There are several excellent pubs – particularly the [Kings Arms](#) – a medieval granite church, galleries, hotels and several cafes. [When I was living in Newlyn](#), a fishing town near Penzance, my elderly neighbour would drive over to St Just to get pasties from [McFaddens butchers](#) every Friday, arriving at noon as they came fresh

out of the oven. One morning, he took me with him: the pasties were the best I'd ever eaten – hot and peppery, the pastry golden.



St Just market square. Photograph: Sebastian Wasek/Alamy

Amy and I were staying a short walk from St Just at [YHA Land's End](#). Accommodating up to 41 guests in 11 bunkbed rooms, it's a friendly, cheerful place, decorated in pastel blues and yellows, with a large front lawn where people can camp for £14 a night.

The youth hostel overlooks Cot valley, or Porth Nanven, a secluded, rocky beach shielded from the winds by black-wet cliffs like curtains framing a stage. From there, a high cliff path leads to Cape Cornwall, part of an area known as the Tin Coast. This seven-mile-long Unesco-listed site was mined for tin and copper for more than 2,000 years – though all that is left of the mines now is a series of stone ruins suspended over the sea. The Cape Cornwall headland itself is dramatic and forbidding: the monument at its edge was the chimney of Cape Cornwall Mine.



YHA Land's End

On that last trip to St Just, I sat at a picnic table in the hostel garden on the first morning of 2020 among many other bleary-eyed people, each of us staring out at where the land began sloping towards the sea. I remember discussing our hopes for the coming year, our ambitious travel and life plans – none of which have come to fruition.

At the start of the pandemic, I was frustrated I would not be able to visit Cornwall for a long time. But, being required to stay in one place has its merits. It makes you more conscious of the places you miss, rather than constantly wanting to try out new, far-flung locations. This summer, if it is safe, we hope to return to St Just, where it will be less busy than other parts of Cornwall, to camp in the grounds of the youth hostel, retrace those walks we did a year and a half ago and crawl through the Men-an-Tol again, wishing this time for smaller things – not creative rebirth but some return to an approximation of normality.

Lamorna Ash's book Dark, Salt, Clear: Life in a Cornish Fishing Town (Bloomsbury, £9.99) is now available in paperback

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[**Opinion**](#)[**Prince Philip**](#)

This is a moment to mark the Elizabethan era, and ask what Britain has become

[**Polly Toynbee**](#)



The start of her reign was marked by optimism and progress. But the monarchy has now been weaponised by the right



Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip in the House of Lords, June 2014.
Photograph: Carl Court/AFP/Getty Images

Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip in the House of Lords, June 2014.
Photograph: Carl Court/AFP/Getty Images

Tue 13 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

The Elizabethan age is slowly drawing to a close. The end of [Prince Philip](#)'s long life is a dress rehearsal for its final curtain, when the country will find itself reviewing what it has become, the choices it has made.

Celebrate her era's social freedoms in gay rights, divorce and abortion, and at least an alertness to race and sex discrimination. But take note too of the decline in social mobility. The crown is emblematic of growing class rigidity: her subjects are more unequal and less likely to rise above their birth status than when the Queen ascended the throne.

Her longevity, through 14 passing prime ministers, lends a misleading veneer of continuity to a time of near-revolutionary turmoil. During her reign, the Tories have governed for around twice as many years as Labour. But they are now the Conservative party in name only. It was seized in two coups: once by Margaret Thatcher's Hayekians in 1979; a second wave when the Brexit party took over.

The ageing Harold Macmillan saw his party was no longer recognisable when he denounced Thatcher's great sweep of privatisations as [selling off the family silver](#). Her Tory revolutionaries shrunk the Queen's state in scope, capacity and taxation, with British companies recklessly sold abroad: even today, the business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, is [watering down rules on foreign takeovers](#).

An army reduced to [76,500](#) might herald a new realism about Britain's global standing, but our current prime minister still spouts world-class bombast. The Queen may live to see her realm disintegrate beneath her throne, with Scotland and perhaps Northern Ireland departing from the unpleasant little England that ignored their remain votes. The country is already fractious with the European Union and irrelevant to the United States, but the serious risk to UK influence will be the widespread disrespect for what we've become.

The Queen has seen Britain decline from wartime victory and the 1945 rise of the welfare state, to this prancing Ruritanian minnow, thanks to a succession of these radical wreckers. A rich ex-prime minister is caught [lobbying for a failing financier](#), and stood to make tens of millions. Worse, his head of a civil service once proud of its bowler-hatted probity, lost all sense of public ethos by throwing open government procurement to this sharp operator.

Squidily bewitched by hot finance, there goes the respectable old establishment. But Boris Johnson never pretended to honesty, rewarding donors with ermine despite official objections, gifting lucrative protective-equipment contracts to pals, wafting public money to his lover, diverting bungs from the towns fund [to Tory seats](#), shutting down parliament, and brazenly [breaking international law](#) with his internal markets bill. Now he curbs the judiciary's power to challenge his law-breaking. What feels so sinister is a new impunity: never mind 130,000 Covid deaths, it's pub opening time.

We know nothing of the Windsors' politics, but the miasma of monarchy sets a stamp of respectability on whatever rottenness hides beneath. Subtly, with its claque of a press, the crown helps make a Conservative vote seem

the British patriotic norm. That mystical word “sovereignty” worked its magic in the Brexit referendum, as if it embodied the monarch herself.

There were choices every step of the way down this ruinous post-1979 path. There was a more Scandinavian option: imagine if we had put North Sea oil revenues into a sovereign fund like Norway did, to secure a strong state in perpetuity, investing in education. The authentically patriotic choice now is to invest, with inspiration from Joe Biden, in jobs and British talents. Instead of planned cuts, plough funds into our sciences, the arts, sport and invention.

[‘Prince Philip’s death is the end of an era. What is the future for the royals?’](#)
[Read more](#)

Of course the monarchy never stopped the country electing a progressive government. But the pomp of the crown acted as useful cover for the wild insurgents subverting the Tory party. This week is a reminder of how their culture war weaponises the monarchy. Despite overwhelming sympathy for the 94-year-old queen’s loss of her husband, their bulldogs hunt down imaginary slights among any who reject their narrow Brexity Britishness.

Fear-stricken broadcasters bowed to these bullies with a Soviet-style 24-hour shutdown of the major TV channels. Even then the Brexiteer-founded Defund the BBC [went on the attack](#): “Disgraceful! The anti-British BBC has set up a form to encourage complaints about the volume of coverage of Prince Philip’s death.” The BBC, our best global influencer, needs to stiffen its spine against these barbarian enemies.

In the avalanche of Philip coverage, the culture warriors were disappointed by a dearth of disrespectful material. They tried absurd outrage at Keir Starmer sending his condolences 11 minutes early; at [Jeremy Corbyn](#), not told of the royal news, tweeting about Bolivia instead. They claimed a non-existent “[backlash](#)” at Ursula von der Leyen slightly mistaking the prince’s title. No joy even from the anti-monarchy group Republic, which politely [sent its condolences](#).

The country was not always so cowed. Unchecked, these bullies will terrorise all unorthodoxy as unpatriotic: by making poppy-wearing virtually compulsory, they perversely destroyed its emotional impact. By enforcing

Rule, Britannia! at the Proms, they ruined its warm self-mockery. They claim “tolerance” as a British virtue, even as they browbeat resisters.

Thugs disguised as conservatives feel the Brexit vote gave a strutting ascendancy to their ersatz patriotism. Their “war on woke” tries to crush any acknowledgment of institutional racism and sexism as un-British. But it’s now for progressives to lay claim to authentic patriotism: a love of country that sees social injustice with its eyes wide open and aims for something better. There is just time to see off the rotten party that brought the country low, and end the Elizabethan era with some of the optimism with which it began.

Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

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OpinionMilk

Can you drink milk and stay ethical? I'm desperate to work out how

[Emma Beddington](#)



Should we go for oat milk? Seaweed-fed cows? But then there's the packaging to worry about ... Every choice seems bad



‘Cow’s milk is, of course, bad news for the planet.’ Photograph: Catherine Falls Commercial/Getty Images

‘Cow’s milk is, of course, bad news for the planet.’ Photograph: Catherine Falls Commercial/Getty Images

Tue 13 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

I have a problem with milk. Well, multiple problems. Let me elaborate. (Are you excited?) Cow’s milk is, of course, bad news for the planet: three times worse in [greenhouse emission terms than any plant milk](#). I have known for ages, but pretended not to, because tea is horrible with oat milk.

I do, however, seek out the least bad dairy. I get my milk from cows fed on seaweed, which reduces bovine belching: research has recently found this can [cut methane emissions by up to 82%](#). So, great? Well. First, it comes in a plastic bottle, not a glass one. Worse, as a household we finish our two pints of seaweed milk precisely six days after our weekly delivery. If I ordered another two-pint bottle, most of it would end up down the sink. I have tried holding out, but I feel bad imposing my eco-guilt on my younger son, who has the smallest carbon footprint of any of us, and just wants milk on his cereal, so I end up buying a pint of Bad Milk from the corner shop. The household vegan is disgusted by dairy, but drinks a litre of oat milk a day delivered in packaging the council does not recycle.

If you aren't insensible with tedium at this point, congratulations, but my point is: living ethically is hard. In the second half of my life, I feel morally compelled to do better; I am ever more aware and appreciative of the heart-stopping beauty of the world, and anxious to minimise my part in transforming it into a flaming wasteland. But, goodness, it is complicated – and milk is just the tiniest example. I bought a secondhand bed last week, to avoid contributing to flat-pack landfill waste, but it came without slats, and I ended up buying them from Ikea. I recycle like a demon, sorting, flattening, rinsing and parsing the council's opaque and inadequate recycling policy, but no one will take plastic takeaway boxes, a stacked record of my laziness and greed. "Won't it all end up in some Indonesian plastic island anyway?" says my best friend, depressingly (but probably correctly).

Every choice is bad; I am constantly balancing one harm against another. As in so much of life, I just want someone authoritative to tell me what to do. Friends lose patience with my eco-anxiety: the responsibility, they say, lies with states and corporations, not us; 100 companies are responsible [for 71% of greenhouse emissions](#). It's also true that when governments make proper financial and structural commitments, it becomes easier for individuals to do the right thing. When I lived in Belgium, everyone knew what to recycle and how (there were ad campaigns everywhere). The state commitment to comprehensive and affordable public transport, cycling and pedestrian infrastructure is chipping away at Belgians' love affair with their cars. Our government could make this far simpler for us; it chooses not to.

But you can't just give up, can you? Hence my shambolic attempts to tread more lightly, stuck between a rock – my conscience (admittedly more wobbly blancmange than rock) – and a hard place: my younger son, who says I'm "on the point of becoming one of those toothless hermits on Ben Fogle's New Lives in the Wild who lives underground". He's right: life would be so simple in my burrow with my composting toilet, I often think, wistfully.

But what about my husband? That brings us back to milk. I'm going to have to quit: the journalist Henry Mance's new book, How to Love Animals, has forced me to confront welfare concerns over dairy cows and their calves that I have tried to swerve for years. But my husband is from Normandy; no culture in the world worships the produce of the cow more fervently than

his. Will our relationship survive? Surely this is the definition of “irreconcilable differences”? Because guess what: even divorce is bad for the planet. [Research found divorced US households used between 42% and 61% more resources per person than before the split](#). Maybe I won’t print off that recipe for cashew camembert just yet.

Emma Beddington is a Guardian columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/food/commentisfree/2021/apr/13/can-you-drink-milk-and-stay-ethical-im-desperate-to-work-out-how>

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Movies

Belarus culture workers need our support after detention of Tatsiana Hatsura-Yavorskaya

[Mark Cousins](#)

The arrest of Watch Docs festival director Hatsura-Yavorskaya is a reminder of how much culture matters in authoritarian states



Humanitarian ... Tatsiana Hatsura-Yavorskaya. Photograph: zvyano.by

Humanitarian ... Tatsiana Hatsura-Yavorskaya. Photograph: zvyano.by

Tue 13 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

The arrest in [Belarus](#) of the director of Minsk's Watch Docs festival of nonfiction cinema is a reminder of how much culture workers matter in authoritarian states and at times of information deficit.

On 5 April Tatsiana Hatsura-Yavorskaya's home was searched by security forces, phones and computers were confiscated, and she was arrested. The ostensible reason was that she had co-organised (with Natalia Trenina and Yulya Semenchenko, who were also arrested but since released) [an exhibition called The Machine Is Breathing, I Am Not](#) about Belarus health professionals at the time of Covid-19.

Following the arrests [the online exhibition closed](#). On 8 April, a court fined Hatsura-Yavorskaya 700 Belarusian rubles for "protesting against police". Another criminal case is now being prepared, accusing her of "raising money for protests".

In 2019, Hatsura-Yavorskaya visited the Belfast film festival at the invitation of Irish writer Laurence McKeown. The result was an exchange of films between Belarus, Britain and Ireland. As chair of the Belfast film festival and its sister organisation Docs Ireland, I went to Hatsura-Yavorskaya's Watch Docs festival, and [wrote about it for the Guardian](#).

I was deeply impressed by how Tatsiana, a humanitarian activist and mother of four, steered her festival through the storm of KGB intervention, censorship and outright banning of films. Audiences were large and hungry for stories and perspectives outwith those of the state media.

We at the Belfast film festival and Docs Ireland call on the authorities in Belarus to release Hatsura-Yavorskaya. And we ask other documentary film festivals, film workers and humanitarians to do the same. Tag [@BelfastFilmFes1](#) on Twitter and we will retweet to the relevant authorities.

Nonfiction cinema is our lingua franca. Those who speak it to governments should be defended.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/apr/13/tatsiana-tanya-hatsura-yavorskaya-belarus-minsk-watch-docs-film-festival>

2021.04.13 - Around the world

- [Turkey First Bitcoin teahouse opens amid economic turmoil](#)
- ['Stand tall' Jimmy Lai writes letter to Hong Kong journalists before sentencing](#)
- [Derek Chauvin trial George Floyd's death 'absolutely preventable', doctor testifies](#)
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[**Turkey**](#)

Turkey's economic turmoil drives Bitcoin frenzy

Investors turn to cryptocurrency after Erdoğan's sacking of central bank governor caused further fall in lira



A man holds a physical imitation of a Bitcoin at a cryptocurrency exchange near the Grand Bazaar, Istanbul. Photograph: Ozan Köse/AFP/Getty Images

A man holds a physical imitation of a Bitcoin at a cryptocurrency exchange near the Grand Bazaar, Istanbul. Photograph: Ozan Köse/AFP/Getty Images

[Bethan McKernan](#) in Istanbul

Tue 13 Apr 2021 00.00 EDT

The neighbourhood teahouse is a focus of daily life across [**Turkey**](#), an Ottoman tradition that has endured through the centuries. At the Red Lightning teahouse in Çorum, the enterprising owners have one foot in the

past and one in the future: it's the first in the country where customers can pay in [bitcoin](#).

"Everyone we know in Çorum is starting to invest in cryptocurrency. We think that in five years or so regular currency will be in decline, it will be replaced by digital ones. So we wanted to be in a good position now," said co-owners Hüseyin Nalcı, 38, and Kerem Kutay Yıldırım, 28.

"The older customers think it's a bit absurd. They made fun of us. But now the dürum [wrap] shop next door is asking us to teach them."

The Turkish lira slumped dramatically last month after President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's shock decision to [fire the central bank governor, Naci Ağbal](#). The reserve is now on its fourth governor in less than two years, and the lira has lost half its value since a 2018 currency crisis.

Inflation reached a six-month high in March of 16.19%, well above a 5% target, and unemployment remains high, at 12.2%.

The latest economic turmoil has led to a surge in cryptocurrency trading in the country, with investors hoping to gain from bitcoin's recent rally and shelter against inflation.

Data from the US researcher Chainalysis [analysed by Reuters](#) showed that trading volumes between the start of February and 24 March hit 218bn lira (£19bn) with a spike on the weekend Ağbal was sacked, up from just over 7bn lira in the same period a year earlier. Cryptocurrency worth 23bn lira was traded in the first few days after the shock announcement, the data showed, versus 1bn lira in the same timespan in 2020.



Hüseyin Nalcı, 38, co-owner of the Kırmızı Şimşekler (Red Lightning) teahouse in Çorum. Photograph: The Guardian

Turkish Google searches for cryptocurrency also hit a record high in the week before Ağbal was removed. The governor, who took over the post in November, was reportedly at loggerheads with Erdoğan over interest rate hikes: contrary to mainstream economic thinking, the president has repeatedly said that he believes high interest rates cause inflation.

Bitcoin's climb to a new record of just under \$62,000 (or more than £44,000) has seen interest in the digital currency soar worldwide: investors and companies have embraced the emerging asset despite warnings about its volatility.

“Turkish people like stable assets due to our history of high inflation,” Özgür Güneri, CEO of cryptocurrency exchange BtcTurk, told Reuters. “That is why generation after generation of Turks invested in gold, real estate and dollars.”

Turkish interest in cryptocurrencies has been growing steadily for several years, in large part because they are finite resources with a reputation for being immune to inflation.

So far, Ankara has not made any moves to regulate or tax the digital currency space, which adds to the appeal for Turkey's youthful, tech-savvy population.

Erdoğan recently reiterated calls for Turks to invest gold and foreign currencies kept under the mattress in order to shore up domestic financial markets. The country's recent economic troubles have had significant implications for his ruling Justice and Development party: its [support has fallen away](#) with the abrupt end of years of strong economic growth.

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At Sirius Coin, a cryptocurrency cashpoint near the gold dealers of Istanbul's Grand Bazaar, Mehmet, 35, said business was booming. The shop's owners are getting ready to launch their own trading exchange by the end of the year.

“Everyone wants to get rich quick. Turks are no exception to that,” he said.

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[Hong Kong](#)

‘Stand tall’: Jimmy Lai writes letter to Hong Kong journalists before sentencing

Media mogul writes from prison that ‘freedom of speech is a dangerous job’ but journalists must uphold justice



Jimmy Lai, founder of Hong Kong’s Apple Daily, has written to staff from prison ahead of his sentencing Photograph: Tyrone Siu/Reuters

Jimmy Lai, founder of Hong Kong’s Apple Daily, has written to staff from prison ahead of his sentencing Photograph: Tyrone Siu/Reuters

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Tue 13 Apr 2021 04.56 EDT

The [Hong Kong](#) media mogul and pro-democracy activist Jimmy Lai has told his staff to “stand tall” in a letter from prison, days before being sentenced in two of several cases against him.

Separately on Tuesday, his fellow activist [Joshua Wong](#) was sentenced to a further four months in jail, concluding another of the growing number of trials in a sweeping crackdown.

Lai, the 72-year-old founder of Hong Kong tabloid Apple Daily, is in jail on remand after prosecutors [successfully appealed against a court decision](#) to grant him bail on national security charges.

On Tuesday, Apple Daily published a handwritten letter Lai sent to staff, urging them to take care of themselves.

“Freedom of speech is a dangerous job,” he wrote. “Please be careful not to take risks. Your own safety is very important.”

On the day of Lai’s arrest in August, hundreds of police [raided the Apple Daily newsroom](#). It marked the start of an escalation in authorities’ moves against journalism in Hong Kong, which have since included the replacement of the head of public broadcaster RTHK, the cancellation of politically sensitive programmes, and the [prosecution of a journalist](#) who accessed a public database to investigate police brutality.

In his letter, Lai said it was “a journalist’s responsibility to uphold justice” but the situation in Hong Kong had deteriorated.

[Hong Kong activists plead guilty but say ‘history will absolve us’](#)
[Read more](#)

“It is precisely this that we need to love and cherish ourselves. The era is falling apart before us, and it is time for us to stand tall.”

Lai, who is charged with foreign collusion offences, has not spoken publicly in months. Days after his arrest on national security charges, [he said](#) authorities “just want to show the teeth of the national security law, but they haven’t bitten yet. So let’s see what happens”.

On Tuesday, another high profile activist, 24-year-old Joshua Wong, was sentenced to an additional four months in jail for his involvement in an October 2019 unauthorised assembly and for violating an anti-mask law, Hong Kong Free Press [reported](#).

Wong is already [serving a 13-month sentence](#) on other protest-related crimes, and is yet to face trial on charges under the national security law. Wong had pleaded guilty in January, and his co-accused, the veteran activist Koo Sze-jiu, was sentenced to five months in jail after pleading not guilty. Koo is being [treated for late-stage cancer](#), and had just completed a jail term on [a separate conviction](#).

Lai's national security trial is pending, but earlier this month [he was convicted](#) over his involvement in one unauthorised protest, and last week he [pledged guilty over another](#). Sentencing for both is scheduled for Friday. The offences carrying maximum penalties of five years in prison.

The conviction relates to a rally on 18 August 2019, when an estimated 1.7 million people [marched](#) peacefully, but against police orders. The guilty plea was over a rally on 31 August, which had originally been called off by the organisers after police arrested pro-democracy lawmakers and activists, but crowds protested regardless. It later descended into violent clashes.

Lai's co-accused include veteran activist Lee Cheuk Yan and five other leading pro-democracy figures. Martin Lee, an 82-year-old renowned barrister and former legislator considered the father of democracy in Hong Kong, is also facing sentencing for the first time on Friday.

Critics have argued the imposition of jail terms over the unauthorised protest offences would be disproportionate. In pleading guilty, Lee Cheuk Yan told the court: "History will absolve us."

According to a transcript provided by Lee, he urged the judge to "understand my deep felt pain and sufferings to see how the state power had been using brute force against the people, and the sacrifices of so many Hongkongers who were injured, jailed or exiled, also to witness the deprivation of the basic rights of the people and the regression in democracy."

“I saw my ideal crumbling but I will continue the struggle even though darkness is surrounding us. It is an ideal for which I am prepared for any sanction.”

More than 10,200 people have been arrested or charged over the 2019 mass protest movements, but just a fraction have reached the judicial system.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/13/jimmy-lai-letter-hong-kong-journalists-before-sentencing>

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George Floyd

Derek Chauvin trial: George Floyd was ‘a person everybody loved’, brother says

Philonise Floyd tells jury how his brother was ‘a leader’ while cardiologist says George Floyd’s death was ‘absolutely preventable’



Makeshift memorial of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota.
Photograph: Chandan Khanna/AFP/Getty Images

Makeshift memorial of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota.
Photograph: Chandan Khanna/AFP/Getty Images

[Joanna Walters](#), [Victoria Bekiempis](#) and [Chris McGreal](#)

Mon 12 Apr 2021 18.12 EDT

George Floyd’s younger brother, Philonise Floyd, took the stand on Monday in the trial of the former police officer accused of murdering him and told

the jury how [George Floyd](#) was “a person that everybody loved around the community”.

Philonise Floyd broke down in tears when shown a picture of his late mother and a young George Floyd, saying: “I miss both of them.”

He testified as part of an effort by prosecutors to humanize his brother in front of the jury and make him more than a crime statistic. [Minnesota](#) is a rarity as a state in allowing what is known as “spark of life” testimony during the trial stage.

Earlier, a heart specialist said that George Floyd’s death was “absolutely preventable” and he would have lived if now-ex police officer Derek Chauvin had not pinned him to the street.

02:04

George Floyd's brother, Philonise, testifies at Derek Chauvin trial – video

Chauvin, who is white, denies murdering George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, last May, when he knelt on his neck for more than nine minutes during an arrest.

Jonathan Rich, a cardiologist at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago, took the stand as the last medical expert called by the prosecution. He told the jury he was certain Floyd did not die of a heart attack, heart disease or a drug overdose.

The heart specialist said Floyd died of cardiopulmonary arrest – when adequate heart function and breathing stop – caused by low oxygen levels.

When prosecutor Jerry Blackwell asked what caused the oxygen deficiency, Rich said it was “induced by the prone restraint and positional asphyxiation that he was subjected to”.

It was the 11th day of testimony in the historic trial. The prosecution is close to resting its case before the defense calls its witnesses. It is expected that relatives of Floyd will be allowed to address the court, to talk about his life and character.

Floyd's death was caught on video and sparked the largest civil rights uprising in the US since the 1960s.

Chauvin led three other officers last 25 May in forcing Floyd to the ground, face down and handcuffed behind his back, as they arrested him on suspicion of using a fake \$20 bill to buy cigarettes in a corner store.

Chauvin kneeled on Floyd's neck for nine minutes and 29 seconds, the court has heard, as Floyd repeatedly said he couldn't breathe and cried for help before passing out.

On Monday afternoon, Philonise Floyd was called to the stand.

Philonise Floyd and other relatives of George Floyd have been a constant presence inside and outside court, turning up every day to support their family member's cause.

He only spoke for a very short time and was not cross-examined by Chauvin's defense. But it was a powerful appearance that caught the attention of the jury, amid a lot of important but much drier expert testimony.

Growing up, Philonise Floyd told the jury, George Floyd "was so much of a leader to us in the household".

"He would always make sure that we had our clothes for school," Philonise Floyd recalled. "He made sure that we all were going to be to school on time. He just was like a person that everybody loved around the community. He just knew how to make people feel better."

"He was a big momma's boy," he said of Floyd's relationship with their mother.

When she died in May 2018, Philonise recalled, "He would just say 'Mama, Mama', over and over again.

"I didn't know what to tell him because I was in pain too," he said. "He was just holding her, just holding her. He didn't want to leave the casket."

The aim of the prosecution and the family was to give a more rounded view of Floyd prior to the defense starting to call its witnesses, which is expected soon, and focusing on all the down sides of his life and health.

Illicit drugs were found in Floyd's system and he had underlying health conditions which the defense intends to argue killed him, while Chauvin's actions were reasonable in dealing with a large, struggling suspect who was high on a mix of the opioid fentanyl and methamphetamine.

But Rich, the cardiologist, said that in his opinion Floyd had been restrained by Chauvin "in a life-threatening manner" and was alert, awake, conversant and walking when the officers encountered him, the opposite signs and symptoms of someone who was overdosing.

"I believe that Mr George Floyd's death was absolutely preventable," he said.

The prosecutor asked if Floyd would have lived had it not been for Chauvin pressing down on his neck for more than nine minutes.

"Yes I believe he would have lived," Rich said.

Earlier, the judge, Peter Cahill, denied a request by the defense to sequester the jury owing to the potential influence of the [fatal shooting of a 20-year-old Black man](#) by police in a suburb of Minneapolis on Sunday, which sparked protests.

The last testimony on Monday afternoon involved a former police officer, law professor and expert on the use of force telling the trial that "no reasonable officer" would have used the level of force Chauvin applied on Floyd because Floyd was neither aggressive nor a threat. Seth Stoughton said that was particularly true during his last minutes under Chauvin's knee.

"Somebody who does not have a pulse does not present a threat in any way," Stoughton said. "No reasonable officer would have believed that was an acceptable, appropriate and reasonable use of force."

The prosecution is close to resting its case and defense witness testimony is expected to begin on Tuesday. Cahill indicated that he expects closing

arguments could take place next Monday, following which the jury will be sequestered for its deliberations prior to delivering its verdict.

The trial continues.

The Associated Press contributed reporting

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George Floyd

Chauvin's defence faces uphill battle after prosecution undercuts case

Police and medical experts have eroded key defence arguments over George Floyd's death



Defence attorney Eric Nelson questions a witness during Derek Chauvin's trial last week. Photograph: AP

Defence attorney Eric Nelson questions a witness during Derek Chauvin's trial last week. Photograph: AP

Chris McGreal

Tue 13 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

Derek Chauvin's trial opened last month with his lawyer telling the jury there was much more to George Floyd's death than the now notorious video that prompted global protests for racial justice and landed the former police officer with a murder charge.

Eric Nelson laid out the pillars of his defence of Chauvin, the former [Minneapolis](#) officer filmed kneeling on Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes, in his opening statement. He said there was an untold story of drug intoxication, a failing heart, a hostile mob, and a police officer doing the best he was trained to do.

Nelson also had a card up his sleeve: an official autopsy that made no mention of Floyd having the breath squeezed out of him, as the prosecution claimed, but which did talk about a heart condition and illegal drug use.

[Derek Chauvin trial: George Floyd was ‘a person everybody loved’, brother says](#)

[Read more](#)

The defence lawyer promised the jurors that by the time they heard all the evidence, “common sense” would require them to acquit the former policeman who has denied charges of second- and third-degree murder, and manslaughter, over Floyd’s death last May.

But as Nelson begins to present his case on Tuesday, he will be confronted with persuading a jury that has listened to a parade of prosecution witnesses who already appear to have done considerable damage to his case.

Nelson is presenting two key arguments. He says that whatever actions Chauvin took were reasonable and followed his training as a police officer, and that in any case those actions are not what killed Floyd.

“You will learn that Derek Chauvin did exactly what he had been trained to do over the course of his 19-year career. The use of force is not attractive, but it is a necessary component of policing,” he told the jury.

But that will be a harder line for Nelson to push after no less than eight of Chauvin’s [former colleagues](#) in the Minneapolis police department, including the head of the murder squad, told the jury that digging a knee into a suspect’s neck as a means of detaining them was never authorised. Remarkably, those testifying against Chauvin also included [the city’s police chief, Medaria Arradondo](#), who fired him the day after Floyd’s death and called it “murder”.

“It’s not part of our training, and it is certainly not part of our ethics and our values,” [he said](#) of Chauvin’s conduct.

Defence lawyers frequently tell juries trying police officers not to second-guess those who have to make split-second life-and-death decisions. But that is going to be a difficult argument to present in the face of video that shows Chauvin pressing his knee down on a passive Floyd with plenty of time to decide on his actions.

Likewise, a jury might decide that Nelson’s claim that Chauvin and the three officers with him faced a hostile mob, which distracted them from focussing on Floyd’s growing struggle for life, is not what they see on a video showing bystanders mostly pleading with Chauvin to lift his knee.

But perhaps the biggest obstacle the defence now faces is the wealth of testimony from [medical experts](#) about how Floyd died.



Protesters prepare to release balloons in front of the Hennepin county government center, site of the trial, in a protest calling for justice for George Floyd. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Nelson went into the trial armed with an official autopsy that is ambiguous enough on the cause of Floyd’s death to provide fertile ground for sowing reasonable doubt.

The Hennepin county medical examiner, Dr Andrew Baker, concluded that the detained man died of “cardiopulmonary arrest complicating law enforcement subdual, restraint, and neck compression”. Baker listed heart disease and illicit drug use as “other significant conditions”.

Nelson boiled that down to Floyd dying from a coronary condition combined with the use of powerful illegal drugs found in his system, the opioid fentanyl and methamphetamine.

Crucially for the defence, the medical examiner said nothing about lack of oxygen or asphyxia.

This was clearly a problem for the prosecution. In different circumstances, it might have been expected to lead the medical evidence with the findings of the official autopsy and then put experts on the stand to back them up.

Confronted with [Baker's conclusions](#), the prosecution did the reverse. It had a succession of medical experts state unequivocally that Floyd died because he couldn't breathe under the grip of the police officers.

One medical witness in particular, an Irish-born pulmonologist, Dr Martin Tobin, [held the jury's attention for hours](#) as he gave clear explanations of complex medical issues. He said that Floyd died because he was caught in a “vice” between Chauvin and the street that all but stopped him breathing

“It was almost to the effect that if a surgeon had gone in and removed the lung,” he said.

[‘Excited delirium’: the controversial defense that could be used in the Chauvin trial](#)

[Read more](#)

Everything else – brain damage and then heart failure – had followed from that.

Tobin's conclusions were backed by another witness, Dr Lindsey Thomas, a medical examiner who trained Baker. She said the autopsy could not be considered in isolation from the video evidence of the police pressing Floyd into the street.

By the time Baker took the stand, all the prosecution had to do was to get him to agree that the autopsy offered a conclusion on the moment of Floyd's death – that his heart gave way – but not what caused that to happen. Baker obliged by telling the jury that whatever the condition of Floyd's heart or the impact of the drugs in his system, he would not have died on that May evening if the police officers had not set in train the collapse of his system.

While the autopsy is still a potential chink in the prosecution's armour, Baker's findings look less like a winning card in raising reasonable doubt than at the beginning of the trial.

Now a Minneapolis jury, and millions of Americans, wait to see whom Nelson will produce as witnesses to say differently.

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Headlines monday 12 april 2021

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- [Live UK Covid live: England faces cold weather as lockdown restrictions start to ease](#)
- [UK Union in peril as PM ‘speaks for England alone’, former civil servant warns](#)
- [Environment France to ban some domestic flights where train available](#)

UK weather

Spring cold snap hits as England relaxes Covid lockdown restrictions

Snowfall in some areas dampens hopes of businesses reopening their doors for first time in months

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Commuters make their way to work through a spring snow blizzard in Wimbledon, south-west London, on the first day the coronavirus restrictions are lifted in England. Photograph: Jeff Gilbert/Alamy Live News/Alamy Live News.

Commuters make their way to work through a spring snow blizzard in Wimbledon, south-west London, on the first day the coronavirus restrictions are lifted in England. Photograph: Jeff Gilbert/Alamy Live News/Alamy Live News.

[Kevin Rawlinson](#)

Mon 12 Apr 2021 06.58 EDT

The lifting of lockdown restrictions to allow people in [England](#) to use pub beer gardens and dine in the outdoor areas of restaurants is being met by snowfall, as a spring cold snap hits.

The inclement weather will come as a blow to thousands of businesses that were hoping to welcome back customers on Monday after months of restrictions.

Met Office forecasters said southern England and much of [Wales](#) could expect outbreaks of rain, sleet and some snow, although this was predicted to clear through the morning, leaving sunny intervals and scattered showers.

Elsewhere in the UK, people were told to expect sunny periods and isolated wintry showers. The Met Office said temperatures were not expected to rise beyond single figures celsius.

The new week's starting rather wintry across southern England and parts of Wales with some snow, which is giving a temporary covering in places. Meanwhile the dry, clear weather further north is giving a locally severe frost pic.twitter.com/50J82CIEGc

— Met Office (@metoffice) [April 12, 2021](#)

Non-essential shops, hairdressers, indoor gyms, swimming pools, nail salons and zoos in England are also opening for the first time this year.

A number of pubs with 24-hour licences opened as soon as they were allowed. The Kentish Belle in south-east London opened at one minute past midnight on Monday until 3am. In Newcastle, the Switch bar and the Bank did the same, despite temperatures dropping below freezing.



Barrels of beer from Brixton Brewery are delivered to a bar in Brixton.
Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

Hundreds of people dressed in hats and winter coats queued outside the world's biggest Primark store in Birmingham, which reopened its doors at approximately 6.30am.

Customers at the Royal Victoria Pavilion in Kent, thought to be the largest pub in the UK, cheered as the first pints were served.

Nicky Maxey, a spokesperson for the Met Office, said of the temperature: "We're going to struggle to get into double figures anywhere really ... quite widely across the country there will be single figures. We're going to start seeing temperatures recover during the week but they are still going to be below average."

She added that a chilly night was expected again on Tuesday, with freezing temperatures forecast widely, especially in more isolated areas.

Timeline

How England's Covid lockdown is being lifted

Show

8 March 2021

Step 1, part 1

In effect from 8 March, all pupils and college students returned fully. Care home residents can receive one regular, named visitor.

29 March 2021

Step 1, part 2

In effect from 29 March, outdoor gatherings allowed of up to six people, or two households if this is larger, not just in parks but also gardens. Outdoor sport for children and adults allowed. The official stay at home order ends, but people will be encouraged to stay local. People will still be asked to work from home where possible, with no overseas travel allowed beyond the current small number of exceptions.

12 April 2021

Step 2

In effect from 12 April, non-essential retail, hair and nail salons, and some public buildings such as libraries and commercial art galleries can reopen. Most outdoor venues can open, including pubs and restaurants, but only for outdoor tables and beer gardens. Customers will have to be seated but there will be no need to have a meal with alcohol.

Also reopening are settings such as zoos and theme parks. However, social contact rules will still apply here, so no indoor mixing between households and limits on outdoor mixing. Indoor leisure facilities such as gyms and pools can also open, but again people can only go alone or with their own household. Reopening of holiday lets with no shared facilities is also allowed, but only for one household. Funerals can have up to 30 attendees, while weddings, receptions and wakes can have 15.

17 May 2021

Step 3

Again with the caveat "no earlier than 17 May", depending on data, vaccination levels and current transmission rates.

Step 3 entails that most mixing rules are lifted outdoors, with a limit of 30 people meeting in parks or gardens. Indoor mixing will be allowed, up to six people or, if it is more people, two households. Indoor venues such as the inside of pubs and restaurants, hotels and B&Bs, play centres, cinemas and group exercise classes will reopen. The new indoor and outdoor mixing limits will remain for pubs and other hospitality venues.

For sport, indoor venues can have up to 1,000 spectators or half capacity, whichever is lower; outdoors the limit will be 4,000 people or half capacity, whichever is lower. Very large outdoor seated venues, such as big football stadiums, where crowds can be spread out, will have a limit of 10,000 people, or a quarter full, whichever is fewer. Weddings will be allowed a limit of 30 people, with other events such as christenings and barmitzvahs also permitted.

This will be the earliest date at which international holidays could resume, subject to a separate review.

21 June 2021

Step 4

No earlier than 21 June, all legal limits will be removed on mixing, and the last sectors to remain closed, such as nightclubs, will reopen. Large events can take place.

Peter Walker *Political correspondent*

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Boris Johnson said people should enjoy the new freedoms but remain wary of the risks. In a message hailing the latest stage of lockdown lifting, the prime minister said: “Today is a major step forward in our roadmap to freedom as venues such as shops, hairdressers, nail salons, outdoor attractions, and pubs and restaurants open once again,” he said.

“I’m sure it will be a huge relief for those business owners who have been closed for so long, and for everyone else it’s a chance to get back to doing

some of the things we love and have missed.”

Johnson also stressed the need for “fresh air” as a key Covid-19 prevention measure, alongside the familiar messages of handwashing, social distancing and mask-wearing.

“I urge everyone to continue to behave responsibly and remember ‘hands, face, space and fresh air’ to suppress Covid as we push on with our vaccination programme,” he said.

After a cold April weekend, during which many areas experienced a light dusting of snow, temperatures of between 0C (32F) and -2C were expected in the early hours of the morning across the UK. Heavy rain and hill snow was also forecast for [Northern Ireland](#) and west Wales on Monday morning.

The Met Office said rain showers would move south-eastwards throughout the day, hitting the Midlands by mid-morning and reaching the south coast by the afternoon and into the evening.

No flood warnings were in place on Sunday night, but the Environment Agency issued six lower-level alerts for scattered locations in south-west England where flooding was possible.

Meanwhile, people in northern England and [Scotland](#) can expect to see a cold but sunny and dry start to the week.

Average midday temperatures range from 6C in the Scottish isles to 12C in Cornwall, with 10C forecast for London and 7C in Manchester.

A chilly night was expected to follow on Tuesday, with freezing temperatures forecast across the UK. The rest of the week was likely to be cold but dry, the Met Office said.

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Politics live with Andrew Sparrow

Coronavirus

UK vaccinations to be rolled out to over-40s this week, says NHS chief – as it happened

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Boris Johnson

Union in peril as PM ‘speaks for England alone’, former civil servant warns

Philip Rycroft says PM’s ‘muscular brand of unionism’ has deepened divisions between four nations



Boris Johnson’s ‘union unit’ has been plagued by infighting. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Boris Johnson’s ‘union unit’ has been plagued by infighting. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

[Jessica Elgot](#) Deputy political editor

[@jessicaelgot](#)

Mon 12 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

The pandemic has seeded the idea of a prime minister “who speaks for England alone” as relations between the four nations of the UK deteriorate amid “deep-rooted complacency”, a senior former civil servant has warned.

There is widespread ignorance towards the union, meaning ministers can be kept in the dark about major reforms with little consideration for the four nations, Philip Rycroft, the permanent secretary to the Brexit department until 2019, says in a report.

His damning conclusion says the 300-year-old union is in deep peril and even major political ructions such as the close-run 2014 Scottish referendum and the following year’s SNP landslide prompted little soul-searching in Westminster.

Rycroft said the pandemic had deepened the crisis with a breakdown of [communications with central government](#) and the demonstration to citizens that devolved leaders could chart their own course.

[The union unit: the No 10 team tasked with keeping UK together](#) [Read more](#)

Boris Johnson’s “[union unit](#)” in the cabinet has been plagued by infighting over strategy amid growing momentum for a second referendum on Scottish independence and the deterioration of relations in Northern Ireland following the Brexit deal. In recent days clashes described as the worst street violence in years [have taken place](#).

Though public messaging was coordinated at the start of the coronavirus crisis, cracks appeared as Johnson announced the reopening of schools in late spring 2020 before agreeing it with devolved nations, and ceased Cobra meetings until the autumn, replacing them with new committees with no devolved representation.

With little consultation and as Johnson’s decisions on reopening society began to appear unpopular, devolved leaders charted a different course. “As other UK nations pursue different lockdown rules and messaging, the public may be adapting to the strange idea of a prime minister who speaks for England alone,” Rycroft said.

Rycroft's co-author, Prof Michael Kenny, said it was political decision-making, not devolution itself, that caused widening divisions. "It was dismantled by political decisions primarily made by No 10."

Rycroft said Johnson had a "muscular brand of unionism" that asserted the value of the union rather than demonstrating it, appearing reluctant to share platforms with first ministers.

The report's conclusion highlights that Conservative scepticism of devolution is also flourishing anew, as evidenced in Johnson's unguarded comments to MPs about [devolution in Scotland being "a disaster"](#).

Rycroft said the instinct to preserve the union was "not in the bloodstream of the UK state" in the same way concern for the territorial settlement was at the forefront of policymaking in countries such as Canada and Spain.

The study, conducted by researchers from the Bennett Institute for Public Policy at the University of Cambridge, looked at two decades of devolution from inside UK state machinery.

Rycroft suggests there is an ingrained tendency to "muddle through" relations with the union with no defined strategy. Recurring tropes include an over-reliance on informal backchannels while the main intergovernmental committees have at times been "largely tokenistic", with devolution issues often ranked as a low priority by some of Whitehall's main departments.

"The cost of getting things wrong on devolution is seen as somebody else's problem for most Whitehall departments – even in the wake of Scotland's referendum," said Rycroft, a senior visiting fellow at the Bennett Institute. "There is little emotional engagement across government with the trends towards independence, no sense that maintaining the union is part of everyone's job."

Kenny said the approach was "fundamentally unstrategic" and said trying to stem the tide of nationalism in the devolved territories by incrementally devolving new powers was "no longer sustainable". He said the "serious risk" to the union required a fundamental overhaul of approach.

Rycroft said policymaking needed close communication and consultation with devolved administrations at a much earlier stage. “There is no good justification for devolved ministers hearing about policies that will have significant knock-on effects for their own territories at the last minute,” he said. “Yet it is still a regular occurrence.”

A UK government spokesperson said: “The United Kingdom is the most successful political and economic union the world has ever seen ... Strengthening the United Kingdom is at the heart of everything we do and we are working alongside the devolved administrations to establish new ways of regular, meaningful and effective cooperation so that we continue to deliver for people right across the United Kingdom.”

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Climate change

France to ban some domestic flights where train available

MPs vote to suspend internal flights if the trip can be completed by train within two and a half hours instead



Air France-KLM intends to reduce its French domestic routes by 40% by the end of this year. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Air France-KLM intends to reduce its French domestic routes by 40% by the end of this year. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

[Kim Willsher](#) in Paris

Mon 12 Apr 2021 05.34 EDT

French MPs have voted to suspend domestic airline flights on routes that can be travelled by direct train in less than two and a half hours, as part of a series of climate and environmental measures.

After a heated debate in the Assemblée Nationale at the weekend, the ban, a watered-down version of a key recommendation from President Emmanuel Macron's citizens' climate convention was adopted.

It will mean the end of short internal flights from Orly airport, south of Paris, to Nantes and Bordeaux among others, though connecting flights through Charles de Gaulle/Roissy airport, north of the French capital, will continue.

The climate commission set up by Macron had originally recommended the scrapping of all flights between French destinations where an alternative direct train journey of less than four hours existed.

This was reduced to two and a half hours after strong objections from certain regions and from Air France-KLM, which, like other airlines, has been badly hit by local and international Covid-19 restrictions on travel.

Map

A year ago, the French government agreed a €7bn loan for AF-KLM on the condition that certain internal flights were dropped, but the decree will also stop low-cost airlines from operating the banned domestic routes.

The chief executive of Air France-KLM, Benjamin Smith, has said the airline is committed to reducing the number of its French domestic routes by 40% by the end of this year.

The transport minister, Jean-Baptiste Djebbari, told MPs: “We have chosen two and a half hours because four hours risks isolating landlocked territories including the greater Massif Central, which would be iniquitous.”

The measure, part of a climate and resilience bill, was passed despite cross-party opposition. The Socialist MP Joël Aviragnet said the measure would have a “disproportionate human cost” and warned of job losses in the airline sector. Other MPs, including from the Green party, complained that watering down the climate convention’s recommendation had made the measure meaningless.

Mathilde Panot, of the hard left La France Insoumise, said the measure had been “emptied”, while her colleague Danièle Obono said retaining the four-hour threshold would have made it possible to halt routes that “emit the most greenhouse gases”.

The French consumer association [UFC-Que Choisir](#) had called on MPs to retain the four-hour recommendation and give the new law “some substance ... while also putting in place safeguards that [French national rail] SNCF will not seize the opportunity to artificially inflate its prices or degrade the quality of rail service.

“The Covid-19 pandemic is exacerbating pre-existing environmental and social crises. It must lead us to rethink our health policies in order to face the challenge of future health crises of infectious origin.”

It added that banning domestic flights if a direct train alternative of fewer than four hours existed it would have a “real impact” on reducing CO₂ emissions and would not adversely affect travel times or prices.

“On average, the plane emits 77 times more CO₂ per passenger than the train on these routes, even though the train is cheaper and the time lost is limited to 40 minutes,” it said. “Our study shows that ... the government’s choice actually aims to empty the measure of its substance.”

[Court convicts French state for failure to address climate crisis](#)
[Read more](#)

Details of the exact routes that will be halted will be published in the official decree. Flights from Paris to Nice, which takes about six hours by train, and Toulouse, four hours by train, will continue.

France’s new law will be watched closely by other countries. Austria’s coalition conservative-green government introduced a €30 tax on airline tickets for flights of less than 217 miles (350km) last June and a ban on domestic flights that could be travelled in less than three hours by train.

Meanwhile, the Netherlands has been trying since June 2013 to ban short domestic flights. In 2019, Dutch MPs voted to ban flights between Schiphol

airport in Amsterdam and Zaventem airport in Brussels, a distance of 93 miles. However, the ban was seen as breaking European commission free-movement regulations and was not implemented.

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2021.04.12 - Coronavirus

- [UK Covid-status certificates could lead to deliberate infections, scientists warn](#)
- [Long Covid Many will need specialist therapies, says expert](#)
- [Weekly stats uncovered How big are AstraZeneca risks?](#)
- [New Zealand Border staff told to get vaccine or be redeployed](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

Covid-status certificates could lead to deliberate infections, scientists warn

Immunity certification could foster ‘an erroneous sense of no risk’ in people’s behaviour, according to analysts

04:03

Covid vaccine passports: what can we learn from Israel? – video explainer

[Sarah Boseley](#)

Sun 11 Apr 2021 12.18 EDT

Covid-status certificates – to allow those who have been vaccinated, recovered from the virus or have tested negative to attend an event or holiday abroad – could do harm as well as good, UK government science advisers have warned.

While they could encourage some people to get vaccinated, the scientists say others may deliberately go out to get infected, in order to test positive for antibodies and get a certificate enabling them to mix more freely.

They say certificates, like vaccine passports, may also encourage people to behave as though they are no longer at risk, discarding masks and ignoring social distancing.

The [paper, which has not yet been peer reviewed](#), was written by a group of eight psychologists and behavioural scientists, all but one of whom take part in the government advisory body on the pandemic known as [Scientific Pandemic Insights Group on Behaviours](#) (SPI-B).

Their paper reviews the studies so far carried out of people’s attitudes and likely behaviours if immunity certificates are adopted.

“Allowing people to return to work, meet socially, and fulfil care obligations brings many social, emotional and economic benefits,” write John Drury, social psychology professor at the University of Sussex, and his colleagues.

“Indeed, it might be considered unethical to restrict the movements of those who pose minimal risk to others. Depending on how it is applied, health certification could also encourage vaccination uptake. It also has the potential for harm.

[What are Covid-status certificates and how might they work?](#)
[Read more](#)

“One concern from a behavioural perspective is that certification may foster an erroneous sense of no risk – both in those with and those without certificates –resulting in behaviours that increase risk of infection or transmission.

“In addition, immunity certification based on a test-positive result for antibodies could have a paradoxical effect on health protective behaviours whereby people deliberately seek infection in order to acquire a certificate.”

Health status certificates are not a new idea, they point out. In the 15th century, printed health passes were used to allow trade and travel during the plague in Europe. They certified only that the bearer had come from a plague-free city.

In the current pandemic, Israel has already introduced a “green pass” app to allow those who are vaccinated to go to concerts and the theatre, while the EU has announced a scheme to allow those who have had Covid-19 or been vaccinated to travel between member states.

The potential benefits of certificates, such as enabling people to go to events and travel more freely and safely, need to be considered in the context of their potential for harm, say the authors, “but the nature and scale of these remains uncertain. Also uncertain is how any harms might most effectively be mitigated.”

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Long Covid

Long Covid: many will need specialist therapies, says expert

Intensive care consultant says doctors are hoping to create a uniform structure for follow-up clinics

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



A patient undergoes tests as part of UCLH's long Covid clinic. Photograph: The Guardian

A patient undergoes tests as part of UCLH's long Covid clinic. Photograph: The Guardian

*Sarah Marsh
@sloumarsh*

Sun 11 Apr 2021 05.48 EDT

A “significant” number of people will require long-term aftercare such as the physiotherapy and speech therapy being received by [Derek Draper](#) after a year in intensive care following Covid, a leading doctor has said.

On Friday, it was revealed that Draper, the former political adviser and the husband of ITV presenter Kate Garraway, has been taken off support machines and [returned home](#) after a year in intensive care – but will receive 24-hour care at the couple’s newly adapted north London home.

“It does feel a little bit like the hospital has come home with me at the moment,” Garraway said, referring to the team of healthcare professionals in her house.

In a documentary last month, Garraway told of the slow road to recovery since Draper, 53, was admitted to hospital with coronavirus in March 2020 before being put in a coma. “He’s using more words, and there are more things that he can do now,” she said. “He’s got some more movement in his hands, he can show emotion. But it felt as though everything had stalled medically and if anything was going slightly back.”

Dr Carl Waldmann, the former dean of Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine, who is leading a project on coronavirus aftercare, said the number in need of it would be “significant … not just like Kate [Garraway’s] husband Derek but a [lot of people](#) who [cannot get back to work](#)”.

“There is funding to run these long Covid clinics but there is no defined funding for intensive care unit follow-up clinics,” he told the Guardian. “But hospitals are all developing their own models. We are hoping to create a uniform structure. At the moment only some intensive care units provide the service or ensure patient access to service and get follow-up.”

11:06

Inside a long Covid clinic: ‘I look normal, but my body is breaking down’ – video

Waldmann said 200,000 patients were admitted to intensive care each year; 20% die and a further 10,000 to 15,000 die within the first year of discharge. He said that 30-40% require a recovery pathway such as physiotherapy or

other support. Given the surge in critical care admissions during the pandemic, the numbers in this position were likely to run into the tens of thousands.

Waldmann said to have spent such a long time in critical care, as in Draper's experience, was an "extreme case" and "very rare". "The fact is for years patients very ill in intensive care on ventilators often get a prolonged recovery called post-intensive care syndrome. What that means is anything related to the critical illness side, physical or psychological," he said.

"You might have someone in for two to three months and they are coming off a ventilator and are not ready to go home so they would go to a rehab ward ... and be kept on ventilation at night but need long-term care but that happens in a small percentage who come to intensive care unit," he said.

Waldmann added that patients not necessarily in intensive care were also experiencing after-effects from Covid including brain fog, memory loss and physical problems such as muscle weakness, as well as problems associated with having pneumonia.

Thirty-two MPs and 33 peers signed a [letter urging Boris Johnson](#) to give greater priority to the potential harm posed by long Covid following the Office for National Statistics' finding that an estimated 1.1 million people are suffering its effects – far more than previously thought.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/apr/11/long-covid-many-need-specialist-therapies-expert>

The weekly stats uncoveredCoronavirus

How big are the blood-clot risks of the AstraZeneca jab?

David Spiegelhalter and Anthony Masters

For most people, the risks of Covid outweigh the minimal risks from the vaccines



A nursing home worker receives the AstraZeneca vaccine. Photograph: Heo Ran/Reuters

A nursing home worker receives the AstraZeneca vaccine. Photograph: Heo Ran/Reuters

Sun 11 Apr 2021 03.28 EDT

Last Wednesday, the European Medicines Agency [stated](#) there was a plausible link between the Oxford/AstraZeneca (Vaxzevria) vaccine and rare types of blood clotting, which the MHRA [estimates](#) may happen in one in 100,000 young adults who get the vaccine.

It is challenging to think of such low risks: when we have to count the zeros, all intuition goes. So what else has roughly a one in 100,000 chance for a young adult? We could choose from the risk of dying when under general anaesthesia, or in a [skydiving jump](#), or, on the positive side, winning the [Lotto jackpot](#) if you bought 450 tickets, or guessing the last five digits of someone's mobile phone number.

Perhaps more pertinently, it's roughly the risk of a young woman on the [contraceptive pill](#) having some form of blood clot in one week.

But think how you react to these risks: do they seem negligible or important? Risk is as much a matter of feeling as analysis. For the [briefing](#) last week, the [Winton Centre](#) (which DS chairs) constructed a comparison of benefits and risks in different age bands, balancing avoiding intensive care with Covid-19 against getting one of these specific clots. When there is not much virus circulating, these may be finely balanced in [younger people](#), as they do not tend to get severely ill with Covid-19.

But this analysis leaves out important potential benefits of vaccination, such as preventing other risks from Covid, including [blood clotting](#). Then there's long Covid – around 12% of people aged 17 to 24 reported symptoms [12 weeks after infection](#).

Vaccination is also not just for the person who gets jabbed; it looks like it will help prevent symptomless infections and viral spread and so benefit all those they meet.

Life is neither safe nor unsafe: risk is a spectrum. There are acceptable risks, which are so low people do nothing in response. There are risks so high we desist our activities.

The third kind is tolerable risks: where we seek to reap the benefits while mitigating downsides. For most people, when there is virus circulating, the risks of Covid-19 outweigh the minimal risks from the vaccines.

David Spiegelhalter is chair of the Winton Centre for Risk and Evidence Communication at Cambridge. Anthony Masters is statistical ambassador for the Royal Statistical Society

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/commentisfree/2021/apr/11/how-big-are-the-blood-clot-risks-of-the-az-jab>

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New Zealand

Ardern tells New Zealand border staff: get Covid vaccine now or be redeployed

Prime minister's comments come after border worker diagnosed last week said to have missed two vaccine appointments

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



New Zealand's prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, says it's not good enough that only 79% of staff at a border security firm have been vaccinated against coronavirus. Photograph: Hagen Hopkins/Getty Images

New Zealand's prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, says it's not good enough that only 79% of staff at a border security firm have been vaccinated against coronavirus. Photograph: Hagen Hopkins/Getty Images

[Helen Livingstone](#)

Sun 11 Apr 2021 20.56 EDT

Border workers have until the end of April to be vaccinated before being moved to lower risk roles, the prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, has said after a third worker from Auckland's Grand Millenium managed isolation facility [tested positive for Covid-19](#).

"We want everyone to be vaccinated on our frontline," [she told TVNZ's Breakfast](#) on Monday.

"From Monday through until the end of April, that becomes the final window where if people are not vaccinated in that period of time then they are redeployed, they are moved on. And that was always the point we had to get to."

Her comments came hours before it was [confirmed that the worker, known as case C, had not been vaccinated](#), adding to concerns raised last week when it was made public that case B had [missed two vaccine appointments](#).

[New Zealand suspension of travel from India questioned amid fears of racist backlash](#)

[Read more](#)

Case C, a close contact of last week's case, known as case B, was reported to have the virus late on Sunday. The Ministry of Health said that as they had already been isolating at home there was little additional risk to the community and that they and their partner had now been moved to a quarantine facility.

Ardern said 79% of those employed by the security company for which cases B and C worked had so far been immunised, adding that the figure was not good enough.

"We believe we have a health and safety obligation to people who are at the frontline in managed isolation," she said.

New Zealand [began rolling out its vaccine programme in February](#), with border staff and managed isolation and quarantine workers at the front of the queue for the Pfizer jab.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield, the director general of health, told reporters on Monday that case C had been offered the opportunity to get the vaccine but had been unable to attend. However there was no suggestion that either case C or B was “vaccine hesitant”.

Case C wanted to be vaccinated but their situation may have been complicated by being in isolation, Bloomfield said.

The two latest cases are genetically linked to case A, a cleaner who was diagnosed with the virus on 21 March. Their case was genetically linked to a returnee who arrived at the Auckland facility in March.

[How New Zealand's Covid success made it a laboratory for the world](#)
[Read more](#)

Because of the long gap between cases A and B, it was being investigated whether there had been an intermediary between the two, Bloomfield [told RNZ's Morning Report](#).

“That’s all being looked at through CCTV footage and just whether both the cleaner (case A) and the security guard (case B) were in the same place at the same time,” he said.

But at the later press conference he added that cases A and B were genetically identical, suggesting a very direct transmission.

“We don’t have the direct epidemiological connection between cases A and B yet, they both worked at the Grand Millennium we know and we’re just looking at their shift pattern ... to find that connection,” he said.

Earlier he said it was also “an issue” that all three cases were from the same isolation facility and that no further returnees were being hosted at the Auckland facility.

“Last week when we got this case on Thursday we immediately got our MBIE [Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment] teams and health teams together to work out what else is going on potentially in this hotel and

we've convened the technical advisory group to give further advice there,'" he said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/12/ardern-new-zealand-border-staff-covid-vaccine>

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2021.04.12 - Spotlight

- From Naked Attraction to Love Is Blind The couples who found lasting love on wild TV dating shows
- Moby on fame and regret ‘I was an out-of-control, utterly entitled drink and drug addict’
- The healthy child who wouldn’t wake up The strange truth of ‘mystery illnesses’
- A whistleblower’s account How Facebook let fake engagement distort global politics

Dating

From Naked Attraction to Love Is Blind: The couples who found lasting love on wild TV dating shows



Hema and Ajai met on First Dates in 2016. Photograph: JBEVAN/Jessica Bevan

Hema and Ajai met on First Dates in 2016. Photograph: JBEVAN/Jessica Bevan

These series rely on gimmicks - whether contestants are required to take off all their clothes or get married at first sight. But romance can flourish regardless



Sirin Kale

Mon 12 Apr 2021 05.00 EDT

After a half-century of dating shows, the genre has grown increasingly outlandish. Naked dating, marrying complete strangers, secret cameras – it can't be long before singletons are blasted into space in one of Elon Musk's rockets to find love. But behind all the gimmicks, do any of these shows lead to long-lasting love? We spoke to four couples.

First Dates

First Dates invites two single people to have dinner at a restaurant with hidden cameras

Hema Sabina Kalia, 37, a food stylist, and Ajai Kalia, 44, a chartered accountant, both from London, met in 2016

Ajai: On Friday nights it was my ritual: pour a bottle of wine into a pint glass, have dinner, and watch the show. One evening I thought, *why not apply?* I wrote, ‘I’ve proposed three times in my life and I’m still not married,’ and hit send.

The cameras are unobtrusive – like CCTV, you don't really notice them. As I stood there waiting for Hema, my main concern was not wanting to drink too quickly. Before the show the producers explained how carefully they try to match participants. So when Hema walked in and I saw she was Asian, I thought, very sophisticated algorithm! Asian girl, Asian boy. Tick! But when we sat down, we got on so well. There was definitely chemistry. We ended up being the last people in the restaurant. They were talking about us in the back! We were oblivious to the fact that everyone else had left. That's the mark of a good first date.

When the bill came, I offered to pay and Hema said we should split it. I was thinking, what will my family say? Then I thought, I've offered twice – I don't want the evening to end on a sour note.

By the time the episode aired four months later, we were an established couple. I was just relieved they hadn't made me look like an idiot. We invited the producer who had set us up to our wedding in 2019. You don't expect to go on a TV show and meet the person you will spend the rest of your life with.



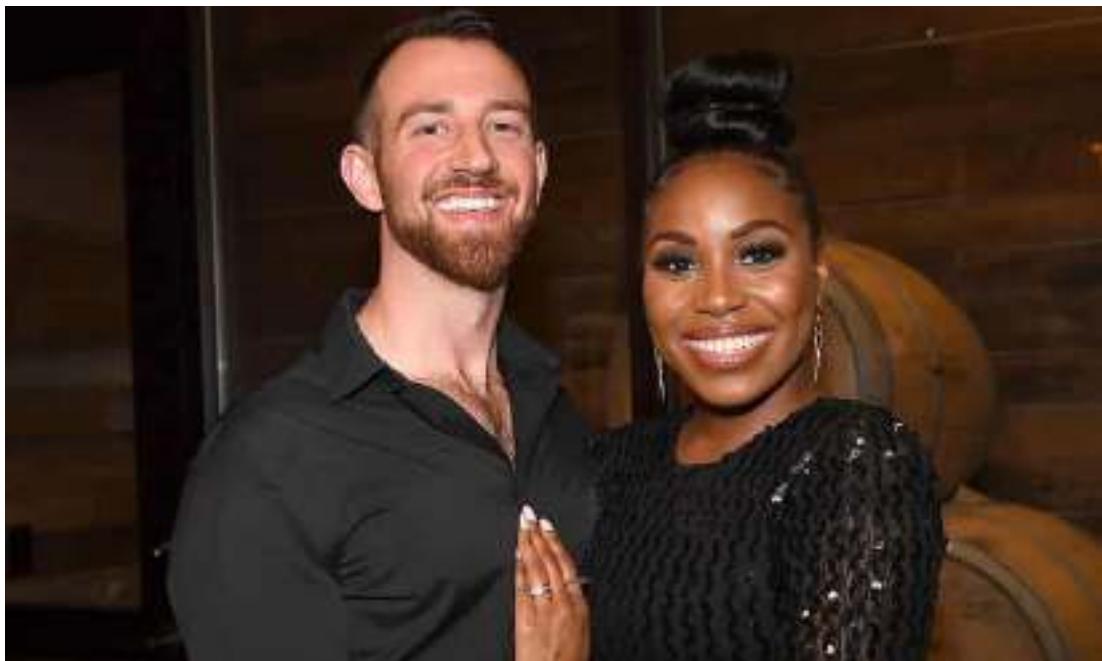
Hema and Ajai on the show, after their first date. Photograph: Channel 4

Hema: I'd been single for about five years, tried all the apps, but nothing had worked out. My friends forced me to apply for First Dates. It all happened so quickly. I got a phone call and they took me through a series of questions, asking me what sort of person I'd like to meet. The key thing for me was that he was funny. The next thing I knew, I was walking up to the restaurant. The walk up is hard. I didn't know he would be in there waiting for me. When I went in and saw him I thought, he has amazing eyes.

It felt like a normal date. There wasn't any silence. It was relaxed. When we left, he gave me his number and told me to text him when I was home safe. I always say to my friends, if the guy doesn't ask you to text him at the end of the date, saying you got home safe, it's a no. So I texted all my friends. I said, he said it! They were like, yes!

We watched it at a big party with all our friends. Got loads of drinks in and just hoped for a good edit. My mum was texting me all the way through, saying, "I'm crying!"

It's so weird, how we met. But we don't talk about it much. It was such a long time ago.



Cameron Hamilton and Lauren Speed met on Love Is Blind in 2018.
Photograph: Handout

Love Is Blind

In Love Is Blind, singles try to match, fall in love and get engaged without ever seeing the person they are dating, then marry a few weeks after meeting

Cameron Hamilton, 30, and Lauren Speed, 33, both digital content creators, from Atlanta, Georgia, met in 2018

Cameron: I didn't apply to be on the show – casting reached out to me. I'm not sure how they found me, as I only had 300 Instagram followers. When they told me the premise of the show, I thought, who would be crazy enough to get married after two weeks? But I was looking for an adventure. My dating life wasn't going well. I was bored in my corporate job.

We bonded over our love for our families. Also, sparks were flying right out of the gate. We wanted to be together fairly early on, but still had to go on dates with other people. On my other dates I'd be trying to get more information about Lauren.

Proposing was nerve-racking. It is a huge moment in anyone's life and I had to do it through a wall. When I asked Lauren to approach the wall it felt like I was watching myself from above. I had an out-of-body-experience.

Flirting in the booths was no different to flirting on the phone. You just say things with a bit of innuendo

On our honeymoon, it was awkward because there were, like, 10 cameras in a hotel room and we're in robes, and they are zooming in, and we knew our parents would be watching. We didn't want it to get too physical. On screen, it looked like we were awkward, but it was just having all those people in the room.

I never had any doubt that I was going to marry Lauren. I felt I really loved this woman and we were deeply compatible. Lauren told me she was going to say yes. But I mean, who knows for sure what will happen at the altar? When she paused [before saying yes], that moment felt like for ever.

Since then it's like any other marriage – a continual process of working things out. You have to show up every day and put in the work.

Lauren: The producers of the show direct messaged me – I had about 6,000 Instagram followers at the time. I thought, what's the worst that can happen? Besides, my mum was putting major pressure on me to get married and have babies.

On a few of my dates with other men on the show, if there was no chemistry, we'd just take a nap. But with Cameron it was easy. Conversation flowed.

I tried not to imagine what Cameron looked like because I didn't want to be disappointed. I homed in on his voice and personality instead. Flirting in the booths was no different to flirting on the phone. You just say things with a bit of innuendo.

When Cameron proposed, I was so nervous I started shaking. I was like, oh my God, is this really happening? I thought I was going to poop my pants. My body was there – I don't know where the rest of me was.

I had doubts, coming up to the wedding. It was so fast. I said to Cameron, "I love you, but this isn't how I pictured my wedding." In the end, I decided I was tired of sabotaging my own happiness. A big part of it was how certain he was about how he felt towards me. I had never been with a man before who had no doubts.

The wedding day was a blur. It felt like riding a rollercoaster. Watching it back on TV, I was like, wow, I didn't even know we had a harpist! It was so strange, watching the show. Like experiencing all the emotions all over again. When we have kids, we'll be able to show them the show and say, this is how Mum and Dad met! It's like Netflix made us our own home video.



Michelle Walder and Owen Jenkins met on Married at First Sight in 2020.
Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Married at First Sight

A show where single people marry partners chosen by a panel of relationship experts, without meeting them

Owen Jenkins, 32, a global account manager, and Michelle Walder, 26, a teacher, both from Sheffield, met in 2020

Owen: I was in a bar with a friend and he went outside for a cigarette. I was flicking through Instagram and saw an advert for Married at First Sight. He came back and I said, “Wouldn’t it be funny if I signed up for this?” Later I got home, had a few more beers and signed up.

The pre-production process is thorough. They interviewed me for hours and spoke to my friends, and my ex-girlfriend. It felt like a way to meet someone in a similar position to me. I’ve never liked modern dating, the way everyone is talking to multiple people. It felt like competing for someone’s attention.

On my wedding day, I didn't know anything, apart from the fact that her name was Michelle. I hadn't even seen her photograph. Our family and friends were waiting with me for Michelle in the chapel for about 25 minutes before she walked in. I was studying the faces of her family, trying to figure out what she might look like.

Our first proper conversation was when we were signing the wedding register. We fancied each other straight away

I told myself before she walked in, it doesn't matter what she looks like. Truly, I've always been more attracted to personality than looks. I knew as long as I liked her personality, attraction would build. But, of course, it's always a worry in the back of your mind, that you won't fancy them. Thankfully, when she walked in, she was a complete worldie – gorgeous!

Our first proper conversation was when we were signing the wedding register. I saw her full name and found out what she did for a living, and we had a chat then. The start of our relationship felt no different to the start of any other relationship, except we were married, obviously. We fancied each other straight away. I'd say we waited a normal amount of time before being intimate.

From day one, we've been very open with each other about what we want. We've just bought a house and are renovating it. In the future, we'll look at having kids. Normal relationship stuff. We rushed the start of our relationship, but now we're like any other married couple.

Michelle Walder: When I told my family I was thinking about going on Married at First Sight, they thought I was joking. My mum found it difficult because she missed all the moments when you plan a wedding with your daughter. But on the wedding day she was over the moon.

It was only as I was standing outside the chapel door that everything hit me. I thought, oh God, this is big. Then the doors opened and I walked in and saw him for the first time.

You have to be open to the fact that the attraction might not be there at the beginning. So it was a pleasant surprise because I thought he was gorgeous.

The kiss at the altar was quite strange. I was so nervous! But there wasn't any awkwardness between us. We were comfortable straight away. When we sat down to sign the register, we were instantly bantering. He felt like my husband.

As the show was being filmed, the Covid-19 pandemic had just hit the UK. We got married on 14 March, and went into lockdown together. Covid gave us time to really get to know each other without external distractions.

Owen and I have said to each other that we probably wouldn't have worked out in real life. I think we'd have had a nice time but it would have fizzled out. On paper, we're not exactly what the other person wants, but we're what the other person needs. When I was dating before, I didn't always pick the right people. The matchmakers did a great job.



Gemma Warren and James North met on Naked Attraction in 2017.
Photograph: PR

Naked Attraction

A show in which single people choose prospective partners based only on their naked bodies

James North, 31, a joiner from Essex, and Gemma Warren, 28, a beauty therapist from West Sussex, met in 2017

Gemma: I'd had a run of crappy relationships. It felt like I was wasting my time. A friend suggested Naked Attraction and I thought, why not? My mum thought it was hilarious. I didn't tell my dad. He didn't need to know. Besides, he goes to bed early, before the show is on.

I didn't prepare physically for the show. I'd vaguely planned to go on a diet but I had one diet shake and it was disgusting. I did have a wax – fully, everything off – got my nails done and a spray tan.

Everyone in the studio is lovely. They do your hair and makeup, which makes you feel like a movie star. You're walking around in a bathrobe, waiting for your cue. I was so nervous that I started sweating. All I could think was, what if I have bits of fluff stuck to my armpits? Also, I was scared of tripping over all the wires and lights. But when it came to it, I whipped off my bathrobe and walked out there with a spring in my step.



Gemma Warren, right, on Naked Attraction just before she chooses James.
Photograph: PR

James had really lovely legs and a nice bum. People ask, did you look at the willy size? Well, of course. There are six penises in your face. But it wasn't like, that's the willy I want to have for ever. I wanted to assess everything. I fancied his bum. His legs were lovely. He had lovely genitals as well. But, primarily, it was James's whole body that attracted me. It wasn't just because he had a nice willy, or his smile. I wanted to get to know him.

On our first date, we didn't stop talking. I unloaded my life story on to him – I have a tendency to ramble. After our date we had a few drinks, then went back to our hotel, changed , went back out again, bought snacks and walked around the streets, just talking. We don't live together, but we see each other as much as possible. We've been doing long distance for four years. I do nag him to move in with me, though.



James North: 'I'm glad I went on. I ended up with Gemma.' Photograph: PR

James: I was watching the first season of Naked Attraction with my mum. An advert came on saying, "Fancy trying your luck?" I said to her, "Shall I give it a go?" Mum said, "If you go on that show, I will kill you." I pulled my phone out and applied. I'm confident around people I know, but on the day, I was nervous. When you're hanging out with all the other lads, it's just a laugh, really. It's bloody weird. We didn't have enough time to size each

other up. You have to get naked and walk into the pods, and wait in there for a while.

I did not forget I was naked at all. I was very cold. They put the fans on us.

I thought Gemma looked really nice. I liked her smile and her eyes. That's always been alluring for me. She pointed at my bum. That's the part of my body I always get compliments on. I've got a woman's bum.

I love everything about her. She's easy to talk to. She doesn't shut up. It's really easy when you just have to be the one who listens.

Whenever the show is repeated, I get texts from my friends. I can't watch because I hate the sound of my voice. It's so cringey. But I'm glad I went on. I showed my mother how far I'm willing to go to spite her and ended up with Gemma. All in all, I crossed a few things off my bucket list.



Challis and Brent Zillwood met on *The Undateables* in 2015. Photograph: Jim Wileman/The Guardian

The Undateables

An observational documentary series that follows the attempts of people living with challenging conditions to find love

Challis Zillwood, 33, a carer, and Brent Zillwood, 29, a film-maker, both from Devon, met on The Undateables in 2015

Challis: A friend of a friend posted on Facebook, “Does anyone want to go on a date? It will be filmed.” I jokingly responded, “I need all the help I can get.” She said, “All jokes aside, you will be perfect for this guy.”

Before I met Brent, a member of the production crew came to meet me, and said, “I promise you will like this guy. You guys are so similar.” I thought they were just saying that. But when I met him, I thought, we really are. We have the same dark sense of humour.

We met at a restaurant by Exeter quay. It was a gorgeous sunny day. We had such a good time that we talked for five hours. The producers were like, we have to stop now. It’s time to go home. We’re done for the day. We exchanged numbers off camera. The producers asked us to re-enact it, but we refused. It was a natural thing that happened.

A year to the day after we met on 22 August, we got married in Las Vegas. It’s the craziest thing. It’s so bizarre how it worked out for us. I was so close to dropping out of the show. Literally, the day before our date, I wasn’t sure if I was going to do it. I was worried about getting crucified on Twitter. But I’m so glad I did.

Brent: I have Tourette syndrome and had been doing a bit of work with the charity Tourettes Action. The production company got in touch with me through the charity, and asked if I’d like to take part. I wanted to raise awareness of TS, so I said yes.

I thought, this girl is too damn gorgeous to be interested in me. When I saw her picture, I thought, am I being punked?

The morning of my date with Challis, I woke up feeling really positive, but nervous. You can see it in my face when you watch the episode. Producers showed me a picture of her, and they couldn’t use any of the footage because

it was like someone pressed my “off” button. I knew they wanted me to say she was gorgeous, but I couldn’t say anything. I went into self-protection mode. I thought, this girl is too damn gorgeous to be interested in me. Genuinely, when I saw the picture of her, I thought: am I being punked? Is [Ashton Kutcher](#) going to turn up?

I liked her sense of humour straight off the bat. There was no small talk. They created some awkward silence in the edit, but I don’t know how they managed that because we literally didn’t shut up.

Watching now, I cringe at the clothes I was wearing. Fingerless gloves! I look like a bandit. If people recognise me in the street and ask where they know me from, I tell them Crimewatch. They don’t say anything else after that.

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Moby on fame and regret: ‘I was an out-of-control, utterly entitled drink and drug addict’

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Books

The healthy child who wouldn't wake up: the strange truth of 'mystery illnesses'

Dizzy diplomats, twitching schoolgirls, children in comas ... psychosomatic illnesses are not always as unexplainable as they seem, writes neurologist Suzanne O'Sullivan



'A disorder that causes an impenetrable comatose state, but where there is no disease to explain it' ... Two sisters who were diagnosed with resignation syndrome, pictured in Horndal, Sweden, 2017. Photograph: Magnus Wennman/AP

'A disorder that causes an impenetrable comatose state, but where there is no disease to explain it' ... Two sisters who were diagnosed with resignation syndrome, pictured in Horndal, Sweden, 2017. Photograph: Magnus Wennman/AP

[Suzanne O'Sullivan](#)

Mon 12 Apr 2021 04.00 EDT

I cannot resist a news headline that refers to a mystery illness and there is no shortage to keep me interested. “Mystery of 18 twitching teenagers in New York”; “[Mysterious sleeping sickness](#) spreads in Kazakhstani village”; “200 Colombian girls fall ill with a mysterious illness”; “The Mystery of the Havana Syndrome”. One medical disorder seems to attract this description more than any other: psychosomatic illness. That the body is the mouthpiece of the mind is evident in our posture, in the smiles on our faces, in the tremor of our nervous hands. But, still, when the body speaks too explicitly, when the power of the mind leads to physical disability, it can be hard to understand why. This perplexity is most apparent when psychosomatic disorders affect groups, spreading from person to person like a social virus, in a phenomenon often referred to as mass hysteria.

We are currently caught in a pandemic. We have been ordered to hide and to search our bodies for symptoms. If there was ever a time for a psychosomatic disorder to spread through anxiety and suggestion, this is it. The threat of a virus can affect health in more ways than one. Since 2018 I have been visiting communities affected by suspected contagions of psychosomatic illness. I have seen what fear can do to our physical health. I have also seen the curative effect of hope.

My journey started with a 10-year-old girl called Nola. She was lying in bed when we met, her eyes closed and her thick black hair spread out on her pillow like a halo. She looked very much as if she was asleep, except that she was unrousable. When her father tried to sit her up she was limp like a rag doll. In fact, Nola had not moved, she had not even opened her eyes, for 18 months. She was being kept alive by her parents who fed her a liquid diet through a tube. They kept her joints mobile with passive exercises and massaged her skin to keep her in physical contact with the world. Belying Nola’s deeply unresponsive state, scans and tests suggested her brain was awake.

Nola is one of hundreds of children who have fallen into a prolonged coma due to a newly coined medical condition called [resignation syndrome](#). This is a disorder that causes an impenetrable comatose state, but where there is

no disease to explain it. Medical test results are always normal. It appears in specific geographical locations: until very recently, people with this syndrome came exclusively from families seeking asylum in Sweden.



'I have seen the curative effect of hope' ... Suzanne O'Sullivan. Photograph: Gary Doak/Alamy

When I visited Nola I was hoping to get some insight into what was prolonging her coma, but I left her bedside feeling frustrated about the opaque way in which resignation syndrome was being discussed. The doctor who facilitated my visit was desperate for me to propose a brain mechanism to explain why children like Nola can't wake up. Swedish scientists had invested considerable time in scans and blood tests to find an answer. The media, meanwhile, marvelled at the seeming impossibility of this "mystery illness".

Resignation syndrome is certainly a highly unusual disorder – comas that are as deep and long-lasting as Nola's, where testing implies the brain is healthy, are very rare. But does this illness really deserve all the headlines? After all, we know what causes it – and how to treat it. In the face of being deported from Sweden, children such as Nola withdraw from society, becoming increasingly apathetic, until they cease to interact with the world. They pull

down their physiological shutters. The cure for resignation syndrome is to offer the child asylum.

When it comes to mass hysteria, allusions to witch-hunts or *The Crucible* are never very far away

It seemed to me that resignation syndrome was a social disorder masquerading as a medical one. When the children display their need through physical symptoms, and others conceptualise it through neurotransmitters and brain connections, their suffering is given some substance. Physical disability attracts more help than psychological or social distress. There are children seeking asylum all over the world but until they wash up on beaches, or become so overwhelmed that they withdraw into a coma, they are easy to neglect.

Having met Nola, it was clear to me that the Swedish children's plight would not be solved by a neurologist or a brain scan. Resignation syndrome is a language of distress. It made me wonder about all the other mystery illness outbreaks and what they might be trying to say.

When, in 2011, a group of American schoolgirls began twitching uncontrollably, their neurologists diagnosed them with a psychosomatic disorder, but a celebrity-driven media frenzy cast doubt over that diagnosis and sent their community on a fruitless hunt for an environmental toxin. In 2016 two dozen American diplomats in Cuba were struck down by a constellation of neurological symptoms, including headaches, dizziness and unsteadiness. A diagnosis of mass hysteria was widely mooted but, likening psychosomatic illness to malingering, the diplomats' doctors insisted their patients were not "pretending" to be ill. Despite the lack of evidence for it, the doctors attributed the outbreak to an attack by a sonic weapon.



Winona Ryder (front centre) in the 1996 film adaptation of *The Crucible*.
Photograph: 20th Century Fox/Allstar

“Mass hysteria” is an ambiguous term. It is used to describe any number of behaviours: excitement; rioting; stampedes; panic buying; mass shootings. As a medical disorder, under the name mass psychogenic illness (MPI), it refers to contagious symptoms that spread through a close-knit group of people, propagated by fear and anxiety.

The medical condition hysteria has had many incarnations. The name comes from the Greek word for womb. It was once thought to be found only in women, linked to childbirth and sexuality. In Freudian theory, hysteria became a psychological disorder caused by repressed trauma converted into physical symptoms. More recently, it has been presented as a biological problem, arising through the interplay between psychological mechanisms and physiological brain processes. With this latest formulation, people are starting to accept the reality of psychosomatic suffering. Although, many are still uncomfortable about talking openly about it.

The group phenomenon of mass hysteria is one of the most misrepresented disorders in medicine. It is inextricably linked to cliches and stereotypes, ogled at by the media and caricatured by art. All too often it is presented as a disorder found in emotionally overwrought girls. Books and films reduce it

to a product of female sexual frustration. Allusion to witch-hunts, and references to [Arthur Miller](#)'s *The Crucible*, are never very far away. News reports liken modern outbreaks to centuries-old laughing and dancing epidemics, as if no time had passed. One newspaper headline referred to the twitching US schoolgirls as "The Witches of Le Roy". I know of no other medical disorder that still carries the burden of 17th-century beliefs.

The way in which the condition is discussed isn't much better among those with medical training. Many doctors still mistake hysteria for malingering, just as the diplomats' doctors did. They assume that it is a condition of the fragile and the female, and as such reject the diagnosis for men. Many still use Freudian theories, often linked to sexual abuse, to explain it. Is it any wonder that groups affected by this disorder will go to great lengths to distance themselves from it?

Sometimes doctors are so busy looking inside people's heads that they forget the social factors creating illness

By presenting MPI as faked illness, the doctors left the diplomats no choice but to look elsewhere for answers. The history of the US embassy in Cuba was fraught enough to make an attack believable. Politicians told embassy staff they were in danger and advised them to hide. In New York, where doctors made a firm diagnosis of a psychosomatic illness, the media took that to mean the girls were troubled and began picking over their social problems. As honours students and cheerleaders, the teenagers simply did not experience their lives as bleak. If mass hysteria was caused by unhappiness and stress, then the diagnosis couldn't be right.

Once the psychosomatic explanation had been belittled and dismissed, both these communities were pushed into endless cycles of medical testing that led to repeated dead ends. The schoolgirls recovered, while five years on in Cuba, some are still looking for a sonic weapon. It makes you wonder, what suffering could have been prevented had the tropes associated with mass hysteria been cast aside.

Mass psychogenic illness is also called mass sociogenic illness. It seems a more fitting name because it suggests it is a social disorder, more than a

psychological or biological one. Sometimes doctors are so busy looking inside people's heads that they forget the social factors creating illness. Or, more likely even, they are afraid to look too closely at their patients' social worlds for fear that they will be accused of blaming the person, their family or their community for the illness. So, they avoid the frank conversation. Which is how resignation syndrome ceased to be the product of a worldwide immigration crisis and became a "mystery".

It is two years since I met Nola and I'm happy to report that she's awake now. Her feeding tube has been removed. She can eat and even goes to school sometimes. But she can't talk yet, so there's progress to be made. Her family has been granted permission to stay in Sweden, at least for the foreseeable future. Her cure did not come from medical doctors or psychologists, it came by offering her hope of a safe future.

The Sleeping Beauties: And Other Stories of Mystery Illness by Suzanne O'Sullivan is published by Picador. To order a copy go to guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

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The Facebook loophole

How Facebook let fake engagement distort global politics: a whistleblower's account

Sophie Zhang detected networks of fake accounts supporting political leaders around the world. Photograph: Jason Henry/The Guardian

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The G7 must push for global vaccination. Here's how it could do it

[**Gordon Brown**](#)



We can't afford inaction. The funds needed are a fraction of the trillions Covid is costing us

- Report: [Gordon Brown calls for G7 to act on Covid vaccine 'apartheid'](#)



Illustration by Matt Kenyon

Illustration by Matt Kenyon

Mon 12 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

This June, President Biden will fly into Britain to attend his first summit of the world's richest nations. The routine meetings of the [G7](#) – made up of the UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United States and the European Union – come and go, and are quickly forgotten, but this time around there is an opportunity not to be wasted. The principal item on the agenda should be health: the mass vaccination of the world.

As things stand, [affluent countries](#) accounting for 18% of the world's population have [bought 4.6bn doses](#) – 60% of confirmed orders. About 780m vaccines have been administered to date, but [less than 1%](#) of the population of sub-Saharan Africa [have been injected](#). Immunising the west but only a fraction of the developing world is already fuelling allegations of “vaccine apartheid”, and will leave Covid-19 spreading, mutating and threatening the lives and livelihoods of us all for years to come.

Vaccine diplomacy, whereby nations selectively donate vaccines to friendly allies, is little more than “pinprick” diplomacy, because only the favoured few will be Covid-free. So to reach the greatest number of people in the

shortest time across the widest geography, the G7 must lead a herculean mobilisation to bring together the proven skills of global pharmaceutical and logistic companies, national militaries, and local health workers.

Home to the major vaccine developers, the G7 countries are in the best position to agree to transfer vaccine technology to low-income countries. The temporary waiver of patents proposed by the [People's Vaccine Alliance](#) will help Africa create its own manufacturing facilities and end months of vaccine nationalism.

[A 'me first' approach to vaccination won't defeat Covid | Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus](#)

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The bigger barrier ahead will not be the shortage of vaccines, however, but the shortage of money to *pay* for them. We need to spend now to save lives, and we need to spend tomorrow to carry on vaccinating each year until the disease no longer claims lives. And this will require at least \$30bn (£22bn) a year, a bill no one so far seems willing to fully underwrite.

The traditional international crisis response – the G7 passing round the begging bowl – will not yield the funds on the scale needed. The global equivalent of a charity fundraiser is no substitute for countries agreeing an equitable sharing of the burden. Lives should not be at the mercy of uncertain and often erratic patterns of giving. And so it is imperative we move on from this history of unpredictable funding and the predictable loss of life.

We cannot afford to not act. The funds needed are a fraction of the trillions Covid is costing us. They are less than 2% of Biden's [\\$1.9tn](#) American Rescue Plan Act. Indeed, it would benefit the US or Europe to underwrite the first \$30bn – not as an act of charity, but as self-insurance to protect national interests. If the G7 came together in June to fund mass vaccination, by 2025 their economies would be at least \$500bn better off, according to the [Eurasia Group](#).

In 2017, anticipating this need for global coordination in any future pandemic, the public-private partnership [ACT-Accelerator](#) was formed to

organise, fund and distribute vital medical supplies, led by Norway and World Health Organization director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. Last year, to its great credit, it set up [Covax](#) to pay for the immediate vaccination of 20% of the developing world. According to current forecasting, it expects as many as 1.7bn doses to be available to 92 countries by the end of 2021, [a 26% coverage](#).

But understandably, [African leaders want 60% coverage](#) now and 70-80% over time, on a par with the minimum most western countries think necessary to achieve herd immunity. Yet at the very moment when international development aid is needed most, Covid and national politics have conspired to cut bilateral aid commitments by 30% last year from [\\$108bn to \\$79bn](#). Donations from charitable and corporate institutions can cover, at best, only 10% of the shortfall.

The World Bank and multilateral development banks can offer an additional \$10bn a year more without undermining their triple-A investment status. But they also need to fund their climate emergency, education, social protection, and infrastructure responsibilities, which have mushroomed as a result of the pandemic.

Special drawing rights – the creation through the International Monetary Fund of [\\$650bn of new international money](#) – is indeed one welcome way forward, even if transferring this money in loans from the richest to the poorest countries will involve complex negotiations on who pays what. But on its own, this one-off intervention cannot guarantee the dedicated and sustained year-to-year financing that the vaccination programme will need.

So it falls to the richest countries to trigger two additional sources of funding required until Covid is eradicated. In the 1960s, the international community approved a special levy on its members to fund smallpox eradication. Currently, UN peacekeeping operations and \$1bn of WHO contributions are covered by similar levies based on a nation's ability to pay as measured by its national income, debts owed and levels of wealth and poverty.

A more equitable burden-sharing would also weigh the differential gains to richer countries from the resumption of trade and the special privileges of G7 and G20 membership. Under such a formula, the US might contribute

about 25% of the vaccination fund, and the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Japan between 4% and 7% each, so the poorest countries are exempt. Here the G7 is critical: its members should declare that they will contribute their full share, totalling 60%. If they did so, China, Russia, Scandinavia and the oil states would feel bound to follow.

But even then, we must make our aid money go further so that we can sustain an annual vaccination programme. The International Finance Facility for Immunisation [has raised \\$8bn](#) to fund vaccinations in low-income countries on the strength of aid agencies covering the interest repayments on their borrowings. They should be asked to raise another \$8bn. And a coalition of richer countries could offer financial guarantees that could then be leveraged up by the multilateral development banks into a special vaccination facility. With \$2bn in guarantees, backed up by a fraction of that in grants, such a fund could generate resources for vaccines at least four times the size of the guarantees.

The costs may still be in billions, but the benefit will be in trillions. If, in advance of the G7 meeting, the western public and developing country leaders can mobilise the same moral force and urgency that inspired Live Aid in the 1980s and Make Poverty History in 2005, we can end our reliance on the begging bowl, establish the global apparatus to deal with this pandemic and other global crises to come, and reunite our fractured world.

- Gordon Brown was UK chancellor from 1997 to 2007, and prime minister from 2007 to 2010; he remained a Labour MP until 2015

OpinionLabour

Behind the scenes, Labour MPs are losing faith in Keir Starmer

[Owen Jones](#)



Ahead of a crucial by-election, discontent with the Labour leader's cautious approach is spreading to all wings of the party



Keir Starmer campaigning for the Hartlepool by-election in Seaton Carew, County Durham, March 2021. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

Keir Starmer campaigning for the Hartlepool by-election in Seaton Carew, County Durham, March 2021. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

Mon 12 Apr 2021 05.00 EDT

During his punt for the top job, Keir Starmer [named Harold Wilson](#) as the Labour leader he most admired, and his predecessor's advice remains apt. "The Labour party is like a stagecoach," Wilson [once observed](#). "If you rattle along at great speed everybody is too exhilarated or seasick to cause any trouble. But if you stop everybody gets out and argues about where to go next."

A [recent poll](#) suggesting Labour could lose next month's Hartlepool by-election sent tremors through the party. Defeat would further cement the Tories' authoritarian populist grip on the country – but [remains unlikely](#): constituency polling is notoriously unreliable, Labour's get out the vote operation gives it a formidable edge, and the government has only taken a seat from its opponents twice in the past half century. But Labour's current malaise is real and keenly felt among its parliamentarians.

Starmer's team believe they deserve credit for reversing a huge polling deficit. [Labour](#), they feel, has won back the right to be heard and has a leader who is an electoral asset rather than a liability. They acknowledge their lack of cut through, but attribute that to a pandemic that consumes all media coverage. Starmer frequently complains that he has never delivered a speech in front of a packed audience, while his team believe that the dearth of talent in the parliamentary [Labour](#) party has left him doing most of the heavy lifting. Their Starmer-or-bust strategy is underlined by the party's phone-banking script, which asks voters what they think of the [Labour](#) leader rather than the [Labour](#) party.

This is a risky move. Although Starmer's team blame the vaccine rollout – which eviscerated their charge of incompetence against the prime minister – for his polling slump, Starmer's ratings began their [steep descent](#) before then. He now [lags behind the prime minister](#) on every measure, is no longer more popular than the party he leads, and his support among those who voted Labour in 2019 has sharply deteriorated. In some polls, Labour has returned to its [2019 vote share](#), and far below what it chalked up in 2017.

This collapse has not been accompanied by the all-out media assault or highly public civil war that defined the Corbyn era. However, across their different factions, Labour MPs believe that the leadership is bereft of vision and direction and have increasingly concluded that Starmer will never be prime minister. Much Westminster politicking normally happens in snatched conversations in parliamentary corridors or bars, and the pandemic has shielded Starmer from plotting by virtue of MPs being siloed, confined to video chats with those they're closest to.

The easing of lockdown is now allowing MPs to better communicate with constituents, who rarely talk of Starmer but do mention the lack of decisiveness and frequent Labour abstentions. Shadow ministers complain of not knowing the party's position on fundamental questions; Labour's recent [indecisiveness over vaccine passports](#) has led party spokespeople to decide to improvise on broadcast slots. Many simply fear Starmer has no coherent political vision and his policy chief, Claire Ainsley, relies exclusively on focus groups of 2019 first-time Conservative voters rather than developing a policy offer of her own, hence the recent emphasis on law and order.

[If Keir Starmer wants to ‘rethink Britain’, he’ll need some bigger ideas |](#)

[Andy Beckett](#)

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While some hope that once the pandemic subsides a vision will emerge that is far more ambitious than that of the New Labour period, there is rarely talk of the “[10 pledges](#)” made during Starmer’s leadership campaign – a commitment to uphold the core domestic policies of the Corbyn era – and Labour’s recent critique of the Tory plan to hike corporation tax violated those promises. Champions of the [Labour Together](#) report fear that the party is wasting its opportunity to implement its findings. The cross-factional postmortem of the 2019 rout committed the party to a transformative economic agenda that proved popular with voters. A much-trumpeted [speech on inequality in February](#) – hailed as laying the foundations for Labour’s 21st-century offer – failed to offer bold policy commitments suited to the scale of the task at hand.

A lack of killer instinct to get the Tories – which Tony Blair and his spinner Alastair Campbell had in the 1990s – haunts the party. “We’re too committed to being supportive of the government,” as one shadow minister puts it. “It leaves people thinking: ‘if you’ve not got anything to say, why should we listen to you?’” Shadow ministers complain almost everyone except Rachel Reeves is kept off the airwaves, including deputy leader Angela Rayner, who they say is shut out of leadership decisions by Starmer’s aides.

This strategic vacuum is filled by the Labour right, which is conducting an aggressive and highly coordinated briefing war. Its ranks include Peter Mandelson, who believes the policies of the Corbyn era must be comprehensively eliminated and the left permanently buried. While cold water is poured on suggestions of a close association with Starmer, the leader’s chief of staff, Morgan McSweeney, is Mandelson’s protege.

[Briefings](#) have particularly targeted the shadow chancellor Anneliese Dodds, who hails from the party’s “soft left”, but whose own allies concede is bedevilled by excessive caution. The Labour right hopes to displace her to enable the ascendancy of Reeves and Blairite Bridget Phillipson (who shares a large part of the blame for preventing the development of a radical

economic agenda). As bereft of ideas as Labour's right flank is, it will predictably respond to poor election results in May by demanding a reshuffle that promotes their own, accompanied by a clear abandonment of Corbyn-era policies. Starmer's own team – who some senior figures believe are as arrogant as they are adept at giving “terrible advice” – will concede to this pressure.

The “soft left” around Labour's Tribune group have settled on a strategy of hugging Dodds tight; how they would respond to the declaration of war which her sacking would represent is unclear. Starmer's purported hero Harold Wilson upheld the principle of a “broad church” – his cabinets spanned Tony Benn, Barbara Castle and Michael Foot on the left to Roy Jenkins, Denis Healey and Shirley Williams on the right – but leadership election promises of party unity have not been upheld. The sacking of Rebecca Long-Bailey and abstentions on pernicious Tory legislations – leading to resignations – have emptied the top team of most leftwingers.

Already, MPs are preparing for life after Starmer. The right is cohering around Yvette Cooper, who alongside Chuka Umunna assembled a leadership campaign in expectation of a rout in 2017. Others raise the question of a leadership election unprompted, but note Labour historically never topples its incumbents.

If Hartlepool falls, the left will be scapegoated, despite Corbyn's leadership holding it twice. Hartlepool (a seat once represented by Mandelson) was a solidly leave seat in which in 2017 Labour won its highest vote share and majority since 2001. While Mandelson claims Labour's 2017 surge was fuelled by remainers angry about Brexit – contradicted by [polling evidence](#) at the time – constituency polling suggests overwhelming support for Corbyn-era policies. The current machinations of the right reveal a refusal to accept any positive lessons from the previous administration.

If Starmer wishes to avoid being trapped in every politician's cycle of doom – falling polling mixed with constant relaunches – salvaging popular transformative policies to construct a coherent vision remains his best shot. Otherwise, political death by attrition beckons.

- Owen Jones is a Guardian columnist
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[**Opinion**](#)[**Coronavirus**](#)

NHS staff are suffering from ‘moral injury’, a distress usually associated with war zones

[**Mariam Alexander**](#)

Adequate support now could head off a post-pandemic exodus of health workers who feel broken by their experiences

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)
- Mariam Alexander is an NHS consultant liaison psychiatrist



‘We have a moral duty to minimise the risk of moral injury to healthcare staff.’ Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

‘We have a moral duty to minimise the risk of moral injury to healthcare staff.’ Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Mon 12 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

I remember the exact moment when the enormity of the Covid-19 crisis dawned on me. In the days before the pandemic was even called a pandemic, I was sitting in a hastily organised meeting of senior hospital colleagues. We were thrashing out how we might respond if the terrifying scenes emerging from northern Italy were to be replicated in our hospital. A critical care consultant stood up and said: “People have to understand that we are entering a war zone – we have to adapt accordingly.” There was a moment of stunned silence in the room. From somebody else these words might have seemed melodramatic, but from this wise, well-respected doctor, they struck a sobering chord.

With the latest UK government figures showing that there have been [nearly 150,000 deaths](#) where Covid-19 was mentioned on the death certificate, it’s understandable why some people compare the pandemic with a war. Indeed, daily life in the NHS is now peppered with military language: the frontline, gold command calls, redeployment, buddy systems. As a psychiatrist, the term that has resonated with me the most is “moral injury”.

Moral injury can be defined as the distress that arises in response to actions or inactions that violate our moral code, our set of individual beliefs about what is right or wrong. In the medical literature, moral injury has historically been associated with the mental health needs of military personnel, arising from their traumatic experiences during active service.

Moral injury is generally thought to arise in high-stakes situations so it’s no surprise that the term has [gained traction in healthcare settings](#) over the course of the pandemic, given that healthcare staff have been faced with extreme and sustained pressure at work. In many ways, working in the NHS over the past year has felt like being some sort of circus acrobat, contorting ourselves to balance various competing realities: the desire to provide high-quality care for all our patients in the context of limited resources, looking after our own health needs alongside those of our patients, trying to make peace with the responsibility we feel towards our loved ones while still upholding our duty of care to patients.

If we fail to deliver, particularly in high-stakes situations where we think things should have been done differently, it can shake us to our core. Our moral code transcends the relatively superficial responsibilities of our professional role: it gets to the heart of who we are as human beings. If we feel like our core values have been attacked, it can leave us feeling devastated and disillusioned.

Many people who have experienced moral injury describe a sense of powerlessness and betrayal. The latter is often cited by healthcare staff in relation to the government's handling of the pandemic, be that over inadequate supplies of PPE, the perceived failure to enter lockdown soon enough or the [real-terms pay cut](#) for many NHS staff.

There is a genuine fear that, once the dust begins to settle on the pandemic, there will be an exodus of [NHS](#) staff who feel too broken by their experiences over the past year to continue in their role.

It's important to recognise that moral injury is not a mental illness. Most people who experience moral injury will recover without the need for formal help. However, research tells us that moral injury can be associated with the development of serious mental health problems such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidal behaviour – this is more likely to occur if people feel unprepared and unsupported.

We know that moral injury can result in various powerful feelings, primarily shame, guilt and anger. We can often tell if someone is feeling angry but it can be much harder to recognise those individuals who have become overwhelmed with shame or guilt. There can be a tendency for such individuals to disconnect from those around them and disengage from the task at hand. The danger of not recognising when people are finding things difficult, is that there can be a delay in getting appropriate help. Like many health issues, the longer that mental distress is left unaddressed, the harder it can then be to tackle. I've lost count of the times that people have told me that they're "fine" when it turns out that they're anything but.

['They were freaking out': meet the people treating NHS workers for trauma](#)
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From what we know so far, it appears a tiered support system that enables people to make sense of their experiences can be beneficial to those who have experienced moral injury – most will be helped by the simple act of a supportive conversation with somebody they trust, while others will require the expertise of specialist mental health services.

It's also worth keeping in mind that, as well as causing injury, trauma can be responsible for growth, too. For some of us, meeting the challenges of the pandemic has helped us to increase our sense of professional competence and confidence. While it remains unclear exactly why some of us will be injured but others will thrive, we do know that we can encourage professional growth by optimising our levels of preparedness and support before, during and after high-stakes situations.

We've now been fighting the war against Covid-19 for more than a year. We are not soldiers, or heroes, or angels. We are healthcare professionals who are trying our best to do the job that we have been trained to do. But we cannot achieve this without adequate support and resources. We have a moral duty to minimise the risk of moral injury to healthcare staff. Not only because we want a sustainable workforce and an effective healthcare system but also because it's simply the right thing to do.

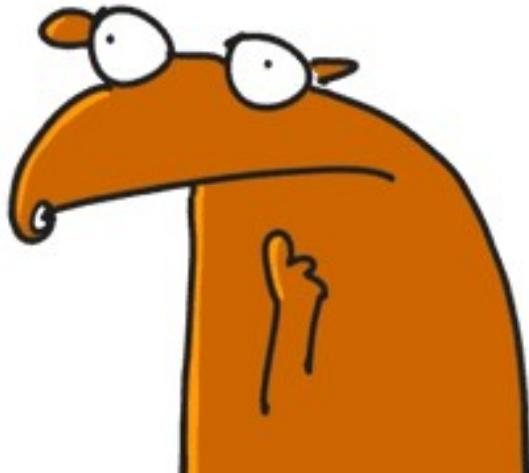
- Mariam Alexander is an NHS consultant liaison psychiatrist
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The ObserverDrugs trade

Colombia's cartels target Europe with cocaine, corruption and torture

Armed Belgian police raids have lifted the lid on a sinister new front in the drugs war



A customs employee during a drug search demonstration; 27 tonnes of cocaine were seized by Operation Sky. Photograph: Olivier Hoslet/EPA

A customs employee during a drug search demonstration; 27 tonnes of cocaine were seized by Operation Sky. Photograph: Olivier Hoslet/EPA

[Daniel Boffey](#) in Brussels

Sun 11 Apr 2021 02.45 EDT

At 5am on a chilly Tuesday morning last month, 1,600 police officers and balaclava-wearing special forces, bristling with arms and battering rams, were ordered into action around the Belgian port city of Antwerp.

More than 200 addresses were raided in what was the largest police operation ever conducted in the country and potentially one of the most significant moves yet against the increasingly powerful narco-gangs of western [Europe](#).

There are hopes that Operation Sky will herald the downfall of a generation of local bosses, although the Belgian and Dutch “godfathers” largely now hide out in Dubai and Turkey, hoping to be out of reach of the authorities.

An incredible 27 tonnes of cocaine have been seized on Antwerp’s quays, in container ships and safe houses, with an estimated value of €1.4bn (£1.2bn), and many arrests have been made. It has been hailed as a mighty blow against what Belgian federal prosecutor Frédéric Van Leeuw calls “a world where morality has totally disappeared”, but Operation Sky has also highlighted a chilling development. Europe has eclipsed the US as the Colombian cartels’ favoured market, because of higher prices and much lower risks posed by European governments in terms of interdiction, extradition and seizure of assets.

Jeremy McDermott, a former British army officer who is now executive director of the thinktank InSight Crime, said a kilogram of cocaine in the US is worth up to \$28,000 wholesale but that rises to \$40,000 on average in Europe, and nearly \$80,000 in some parts of Europe.

“It is more money for less risk. I see a deliberate decision by some of the top-level Colombian traffickers, based on sources who sat in a series of meetings in 2005-6, where the business decisions were made,” McDermott said. “It is a business no-brainer. The reason Antwerp and Rotterdam are so attractive is because they are some of the most efficient ports in the world, handling enormous volumes of containers, which allows traffickers to play the numbers game.”

The methods of operation being brought to Europe’s major ports, where Dutch and Belgian criminals are sub-contracted by Colombians to move the product onwards to Italian, Albanian, British and Irish organised crime networks, are bringing a level of corruption and violence never before seen in this part of the world. “We don’t have robberies any more,” said Joris van

der Aa, the *Gazet van Antwerpen* newspaper's respected crime reporter and columnist. "Everyone is working in the drug business."

Among those dragged from their beds on the first Operation Sky raid on 9 March were serving police officers, an employee of the public prosecutors office, civil servants, tax officials and hospital administrators suspected of feeding desired information to the gangs, as well as those thought to have been responsible for almost daily incidents of gang-related violence in the city in recent months, ranging from drive-by shootings and grenade attacks on homes to punishment beatings. Nearly 50 arrests were made but many more have followed. Only last Thursday, two prisons and 24 homes were searched in Antwerp, Borgerhout, Borsbeek, Essen, Lokeren, Wilrijk and Wijnegem. A further 11 people were read their rights.



Dutch police forcing their way into the building in Wouwse Plantage where a torture chamber constructed in a shipping container was found.
Photograph: Politie Landelijke Eenheid/Reuters

Operation Sky had been two years in the making, triggered, in part, by an escalating sense of fear in the city. The mayor of Antwerp, [Bart De Wever](#), has a 24-hour security brief following threats to his life. But the scale of the savagery that has befallen Antwerp was perhaps most acutely felt last

summer with the discovery of a torture chamber in the village of Wouwse Plantage, 30 miles outside the city.

A makeshift prison had been found constructed out of seven shipping containers, six of which were used as holding cells. The final one, complete with dentist's chair with straps on the armrests and footrests, was fitted out for torture. Shears, saws, scalpels, pliers, tape, balaclavas and black cotton bags to be put over the head provided graphic enough evidence of the scenes that had unfolded.

But for all the calls made by De Wever for a “high-pressure hose” to be put on this stain on the city, Operation Sky was, according to Belgian prosecutors, only possible due to the deciphering of what had been described as an uncrackable encrypted messaging service known as SKY ECC, a Canadian communications company suspected by the prosecutors to be a criminal organisation masquerading as a legitimate business catering for privacy-loving people.

Prosecutors said smartphones fitted with the SKY ECC app, but with microphone and GPS functions removed, had been distributed throughout the city to those within the network of people suspected to be working for the narco-gangs.

Worldwide, there are 171,000 SKY ECC devices registered, mainly in Europe, north America, a number of countries in central and south America – mainly [Colombia](#) – and in the Middle East. But, strikingly, 25% of the active users of these devices are located in Belgium (6,000) and the Netherlands (12,000), and half of those were said to be in use in around Antwerp port.

In “cracking” SKY ECC, the Belgian police claimed they had broken into a communications network used and so wholly trusted by the drug traffickers, and those they blackmailed, threatened and bribed, that images of torture and execution orders were freely sent around, along with insider financial and operational information.



The torture chamber discovered by Dutch police inside the building in Wouwse Plantage. Photograph: Politie Landelijke Eenheid/Reuters

For a period of three weeks, officers were able to view messages live as they were sent, collecting information, acting only where they feared there was a risk to life, and building an unprecedented picture of the increasingly powerful and vicious criminal networks working out of the ports of Antwerp and Rotterdam.

SKY ECC has reportedly denied police had compromised their encrypted messaging platform, saying instead that a malicious phishing app, illegally distributed under the SKY ECC name, was what the police appeared to have hacked.

“The pictures are worse than what I have seen in some TV series,” Van Leeuw told reporters of the images he had seen on the service. “Settling of scores, contract killings, photos of victims, messages that say if we don’t find a target, we attack the family. It’s absolutely incredible violence.”

Belgian prosecutors said investigators intercepted about 1 billion encrypted messages from SKY ECC in total, of which almost half have been decrypted, but which will take months to work through, likely raising many new avenues of inquiry.

Jean-François Eap, SKY ECC's global's chief executive officer, and Thomas Herdman, a former distributor of Sky Global devices, were charged in the US on 12 March with a conspiracy to violate the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (Rico). Both have denied wrongdoing. Eap has said "the unfounded allegations of involvement in criminal activity by me and our company are entirely false".

The prosecutor's office is realistic about the impact on the criminal underworld of Operation Sky. "We are aware the criminals will be flexible and will search and find new ways to communicate," a spokesman said. "We will have to be alert to follow these new technologies". But Van der Aa, who has been following the repercussions at street level, believes Operation Sky will be a watershed moment – whether for good or bad.

"It is a big blow because, in [Belgium](#) and a great part of the criminal underworld in the Netherlands, they really trusted Sky as a system," he said. "They were so full of confidence, and the police now have so much information on how the underworld was structured, bank accounts, all the corrupt contacts are being arrested. It takes years to build these networks.

"I think there will be a change of a whole generation of criminals. Twenty seven tonnes of cocaine is a lot to lose. In south America they will be thinking, 'Let's not do business with these Dutch and Belgian guys any more'.

"So, it is just very quiet at the moment. Everyone is waiting for the storm and asking themselves what the police know. Eventually, they will go after the guys in Dubai.

"But the question then is, who will replace them?"

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Ecuador

Ecuador election: former banker Lasso is surprise winner

Voters in presidential race reject leftist movement, while Peru vote heads for second round



Supporters of Guillermo Lasso await the election results in Quito on Sunday night. Photograph: Luisa González/Reuters

Supporters of Guillermo Lasso await the election results in Quito on Sunday night. Photograph: Luisa González/Reuters

Associated Press and Guardian staff

Mon 12 Apr 2021 12.26 EDT

A conservative businessman has unexpectedly won Ecuador's presidential election as voters rejected the leftist movement started by the former president Rafael Correa more than a decade ago.

Preliminary results showed that Guillermo Lasso took 52% of the vote in the runoff following a campaign that pitted free-market economics against the social welfare plans of Andrés Arauz, an economist.

“We will work together from now on for true change,” Lasso wrote on Twitter. “Today we woke up in peace and with the certainty that better days are coming for everyone.”

Arauz, in contrast to his combative style on the campaign trail, graciously accepted defeat and promptly called Lasso to congratulate him.

In neighbouring Peru, voting on a [crowded field of 18 candidates](#) for the presidency was all but certain to result in a second round of ballots in June.

[Women and young people could determine Ecuador’s election outcome](#)
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Voters in the two countries cast votes under strict public health measures because of the coronavirus pandemic, which has recently worsened in both countries, prompting the return of lockdowns and heightening concerns over their already battered economies. Peruvians also were electing a new Congress.

In Ecuador, Arauz was backed by Correa, a major force in the country despite a corruption conviction that sent him fleeing to Belgium beyond the reach of prosecutors.

“Correa’s negatives outweighed the expectation of a new, unknown candidate who had no career and who did not campaign very well,” said Grace M Jaramillo, an adjunct professor at the University of British Columbia. “He did not speak for all audiences … for the entire population, and he could not respond to human rights accusations of the Correista era.”

Correa governed from 2007 to 2017 and was an ally of Cuba’s Fidel Castro and Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez. He oversaw a period of economic growth driven by an oil boom and loans from China that allowed him to expand social programmes, build roads and schools and pursue other projects.



Guillermo Lasso celebrates at his campaign headquarters in Guayaquil, Ecuador. Photograph: Angel Dejesus/AP

But Correa increasingly cracked down on opponents, the press and businesses during his latter term in office and feuded with Indigenous groups over development projects.

Lasso, 65, who takes office on 24 May, will have to find ways to kickstart the stalled economy, which is in a recession that many fear will worsen as lockdowns return because of a surge in Covid cases.

“I hope he keeps his promise of creating jobs, because seven in 10 Ecuadoreans want formal employment,” said Juan Pablo Hidalgo, 33, a neighbourhood activist in Guayaquil, Ecuador’s largest city. “It’s a moment in which we should all be united.”

Ecuador had recorded more than 344,000 Covid cases and more than 17,200 deaths as of Sunday, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

[Cases](#)

The new president’s main task will be to “depolarise the country”, Jaramillo said. “There will be no signs of governance if the new government does not

reach out and generate a platform where agreements with the [National] Assembly are possible.”

In Peru, to avoid a June runoff a candidate would need more than 50% of the votes, and recent polls pointed to the leading candidate garnering only about 15% support.

The polls have had the centrist Yonhy Lescano as the frontrunner, followed by the centre-right George Forsyth, the conservative Rafael López Aliaga and Keiko Fujimori, the opposition leader and daughter of the polarising former president Alberto Fujimori.

Political chaos in Peru reached a new level in November when three men were president in a single week, as one was impeached by Congress over corruption allegations, and protests forced his successor to resign in favour of the third.

Claudia Navas, an analyst with Control Risks, said the fragmented election was the result of a political system that had 11 parties lacking ideological cohesiveness. She said Peruvians overall did not trust politicians, with corruption being a key driver of disillusionment.

Navas said the congressional elections would probably result in a splintered legislature, with no party holding a clear majority and political alliances remaining short-lived. She said the new Congress was likely to continue to exercise its impeachment authority to reinforce its influence and block any initiative that threatened its power.

“Regardless of who wins, we believe that the president is somewhat unlikely to complete his or her term in office because of the of the populist-type of stance of the Congress and the risk of political instability is likely to persist through the administration,” she said.

Peru has been hard hit by coronavirus, with more than 1.6m cases and more than 54,600 deaths as of Sunday.

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The Pacific projectPapua New Guinea

Police warn of ‘all-out war’ as tribal violence in Papua New Guinea kills 19

High-powered weapons, as well as a hand grenade, were used in fighting near Kainantu Town in Eastern Highlands province



Police arrive near Kainantu in Eastern Highlands province in Papua New Guinea after tribal violence erupted. Photograph: Supplied

Police arrive near Kainantu in Eastern Highlands province in Papua New Guinea after tribal violence erupted. Photograph: Supplied

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Sun 11 Apr 2021 23.38 EDT

Police are warning a “all-out war” could erupt in Eastern Highlands province in Papua New Guinea, after 19 people were [killed in tribal violence late last week](#).

High-powered weapons, as well as a hand grenade, were used in fighting on Thursday and Friday near Kainantu Town in the east of the country, causing 19 deaths, with many more people unaccounted for, and properties destroyed.

The fighting, between the Agarabi and Tapo clans, was over a land ownership dispute and broke out just miles outside from Kainantu Town in Eastern Highlands Province.

Police say they believe fighting stopped on Saturday and Sunday as some fighters observed the Sabbath but fear fighting could escalate today.

[The Karida massacre: fears of a new era of tribal violence in Papua New Guinea](#)

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“A lot of reports coming in that tomorrow will be an all-out war between the two factions as they have by now amassed arms over the weekend,” Provincial Police Commander Michael Welly wrote in his report to Police Commissioner David Manning, as he requested backup be sent to the area. “More lives are expected to lose tomorrow and onwards if we do not get reinforcement in quickly.”



Police say they do not know how many homes have been destroyed in the fighting so far, but fear many people have been left homeless. Photograph: Supplied

A 28-year-old woman, living in the town had her home burnt down in the fighting and does not know where her husband is. She said the fighters came in broad daylight.

“I took my two children and ran away but I don’t know where my husband is. I heard many men were killed and I am very worried as our children are still young,” she told the Guardian.

She said her brother-in-law came and told her to flee with her children. “So I called my brother to come quickly and pick us up.”

“When my brother came and got us, I turned back and I saw our home go up in flames, and I cried bitterly,” she said.

Welly told the Guardian late on Sunday night that the situation was still tense.

“Both sides of the party are fully armed with high powered weapons and we are anticipating the worst-case scenario for tomorrow and are beefing up manpower on the ground.”

“The fight initially began at the end of February and early March over the ownership of the land near the Kundiawa town.”



Homes were destroyed after fighting broke out near Kainantu in Eastern Highlands province in Papua New Guinea. Photograph: Supplied

“Myself and the other local leaders, including local MP Johnson Tuke and Goroka MP Aiye Tambua, intervened at that time and met with both sides to come to a peace settlement.”

“Last week Thursday, both parties from the Agarabi and the Tapo tribe came into town to sign that peace settlement agreement, however, tension was very high at that time and when a fight broke out between two women over a

domestic issue, it just triggered the full battle as one party thought they were being attacked and the other party thought the same.”

“Because there was high tension, the commotion of the two women fighting just triggered a full blown-out battle and all hell broke loose, and 12 people were killed on that Thursday afternoon.”

“The next day, the Agarabi people detonated a hand grenade and the explosion killed seven people from Tapo, who in turn retaliated by burning down the homes of the Agarabi people.”

“So far, there are 19 people killed but I believe there may be more unreported deaths. I also can’t say how many houses were burnt but there was plenty and we will have to do a count.”

“Tensions are still high. Police are doing their best they can right now – we have set up a boundary and told them not bring the fight into the town area, we have police stationed on both sides.”

Police Commissioner David Manning said that a 15-man team from the Northern Mobile Group, was sent in on Friday and are now on the ground to help local police restore peace and a mobile squad (MS 13) from Lae have also been deployed to the area and should arrive today (Sunday).

Local MP Johnson Tuke, who is also on the ground, said that he was aware of the situation and his office, was working with police to address the issue.

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Global development

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Charity warns of 22,000 additional deaths in poorest countries if Wish reproductive health programme ends

- [‘My son could die’: the disabled Syrian refugees on the sharp end of UK aid cuts – photo essay](#)



An MSI outreach clinic in Kenya. The aid cuts could mean 2.7m unsafe abortions and 22,000 maternal deaths in the next year. Photograph: Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty

An MSI outreach clinic in Kenya. The aid cuts could mean 2.7m unsafe abortions and 22,000 maternal deaths in the next year. Photograph: Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty

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The director of a leading sexual and reproductive health charity has accused the government of “abandoning” women and girls it promised to help, as aid cuts derail a leading Tory programme to reduce maternal deaths and prevent unsafe abortions in poor countries.

The threat to the [women’s integrated sexual health](#) (Wish) programme could mean 7.5m additional unintended pregnancies, 2.7m unsafe abortions and 22,000 maternal deaths over the next year, said Dr Alvaro Bermejo, director general of International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF).

“The impact will be brutal,” Bermejo said. “We’re already having to close in half the countries where we are operating and keep the remaining ones operating at 30% of what they were. We will have to close our [Mozambique](#) project with three months’ notice and our Zambia project. We’re losing staff now.”

[‘My son could die’: the disabled Syrian refugees on the sharp end of UK aid cuts – photo essay](#)

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The [Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office](#) (FCDO) said it had not yet made any decisions about where the cuts would be made. However, Bermejo and Simon Cooke, chief executive officer of MSI Reproductive Choices, who implement the FCDO’s reproductive health programme, said they had been told by government officials to “stretch” existing funding beyond June 2021, which meant closing programmes now.

“Women going to get their IUD [intrauterine contraceptive device] or implant inserted will find the clinic is not there,” said Bermejo. “You don’t rebuild that trust, ever.”

“The expected cuts could be the same order of magnitude as when President Trump introduced the ‘[global gag rule](#)’,” he said. “We lost \$100m. This time we stand to lose £72m.”

MPs said cuts to reproductive health programmes are “out of Trump’s playbook” and would lead to deaths of women in the world’s poorest countries. [The former US president’s 2017 “global gag” blocked US aid funding](#) to groups providing information on abortion.

“What is unbelievable is a flagship programme designed by a Conservative government for sexual and reproductive health is going to be destroyed,” said Bermejo.

[IPPF’s Mozambique Wish programme](#) reached half a million women in the last three months, a quarter of them under 25, and increased the take-up of long-term contraceptives, as well as ensuring rural health facilities were stocked with drugs.

Arune Estavela, the project’s director, said the country’s 102 government-run health facilities providing sexual and reproductive services will remain open, but the Wish programme’s closure will mean the quality of the service is reduced. Estavela said women will die as a result.



Schoolgirls pass a mobile reproductive health clinic in Soshanguve township, near Pretoria, South Africa. Such outreach projects will be irretrievably harmed by the aid cuts, experts say. Photograph: Denis Farrell/AP

“We will have more HIV, sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancies,” said Estavela. “Many teenagers will seek unsafe abortions, and we can expect more complications and maternal deaths. The health facilities are a focal point for cases of gender-based violence, with HIV and pregnancy prophylaxis and that will no longer happen.”

The UK is one of the world’s leading donors to family planning. [A review by the then Department for International Development](#), covering April to December 2019, ranked Wish as “excellent” value for money.

Bermejo said: “We signed a three-year contract, with an agreement that if three years were successful we could have another two. We were asked in June 2020 to continue this project for 18 months.”

Six weeks ago, he was told by FCDO officials that: “Given the cuts, we are not going to be able to fund those two years as planned. They said: ‘Try to stretch the money that has been approved from now to June 2021.’”

He will have to close Wish projects in eight countries, including [Afghanistan](#) and Bangladesh. IPPF is trying to keep projects open in Ethiopia and Pakistan, while the remaining programmes in six countries, will operate at 30% of the previous capacity.

Last November, the [government said it would reduce its commitment on foreign aid](#) from a legally protected level of 0.7% of gross national income to 0.5%, [creating a £4bn shortfall](#) and drawing predictions that women and girls would suffer most. In the four months since, the FCDO has provided no details about where the cuts will fall, leading to concerns from the aid sector over transparency.

Cooke said: “We were both expecting a cost extension, which would extend FCDO funding to 2022 and beyond. We had that agreed in principle and planned for it. But we have been told we cannot expect funding before 2022.”

“The reality is a lot of what we are doing has to be shut down,” he said. “In some cases, we will have to stop immediately. In many cases, there are no alternatives, nowhere else for women to go.”

Worst affected would be African countries in the Sahel, he said, with adolescent girls affected most. He described the drop in aid as “an act of self-harm”.

Stella Creasy, the senior Labour backbencher, said: “A government that on the one hand promotes the idea of investing in the education of women and girls around the world and on the other hand takes away the funding for the healthcare that can keep them in school is following the Trump playbook.

“We know that not funding healthcare doesn’t stop abortions, it just leads to unsafe abortions. It is a cut that will lead to a loss of life.”

Gareth Thomas, Labour MP and former international development minister, said it was a “hammer blow to Britain’s reputation and a disaster for women in the poorest countries”.

Liz Sugg, a former Conservative FCDO minister [who resigned in protest at the aid cuts](#), said that while she did not know where they would fall, she was “particularly concerned around family planning and contraception”, adding: “For us to stop funding this work right now seems to me to be a bad decision.”

A UK government spokesperson described the aid cuts as “tough but necessary”. They did not comment on the cuts facing reproductive health services but added: “We are still working through what this means for individual programmes and decisions have not yet been made.”

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Meningitis

Sub-Saharan meningitis epidemics could be signalled by weather forecasts

Pilot scheme is under way to harness forecasts to predict where conditions that fuel cases are likely to develop



A doctor vaccinates a child against meningitis in Nigeria. Photograph: Deji Yake/EPA

A doctor vaccinates a child against meningitis in Nigeria. Photograph: Deji Yake/EPA

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Mon 12 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

A weather-based surveillance system that could offer advanced warning of outbreaks of meningitis is being piloted across sub-Saharan [Africa](#) in a bid to save lives, researchers have revealed.

According to the Meningitis Research Foundation, meningitis affects [about 5 million people around the world](#) each year, one in 10 of whom die, while two in 10 are left with lasting impacts, such as brain damage.

One area that has had major outbreaks of bacterial meningitis – a [contagious and particularly serious form of the condition](#) – is the so-called “[meningitis belt](#)” that cuts across a host of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, with outbreaks most common between November and June.

That, experts say, is in part because hot and dusty conditions raise the risk of bacterial meningitis: among various mechanisms, [previous studies](#) have suggested dust can irritate the lining of the nose and throat, making it easier for microbes to get into the bloodstream and cause infection.

And the situation could become worse: charities have [previously warned](#) that the climate crisis could lead to a rise in meningitis cases.

Now researchers have announced a pilot is under way that could offer advanced warning of when and where meningitis outbreaks or even epidemics may occur by harnessing state-of-the-art weather forecasts to predict where conditions that fuel meningitis cases are likely to develop.

“Previously it was only really possible to use the current weather conditions to see what was going on, and use that to project how outbreaks would come. Now we are able to use forecasts for up to two weeks ahead, which obviously gives much more warning for deployment of resources,” said Prof Doug Parker of the University of Leeds, the lead scientist at the [African SWIFT](#) collaboration, one of the bodies involved in the pilot project.

While experts say the project cannot prevent infections, it could save lives by ensuring the limited resources of the countries are in place – for example around testing, diagnosis and treatment.

“By making sure the appropriate medical services are on offer to those most likely to be affected by a meningitis outbreak, the number of fatalities and the severity of symptoms is being reduced,” said Dr Joshua Talib, research associate at the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, who has been involved in the work.

The two-year project, which is being run across 26 countries in the “meningitis belt”, began in late 2019 with the development of new ways of using the latest weather forecasts. These are now being piloted for their effectiveness and usefulness when it comes to predicting and managing meningitis cases.

“We are getting positive feedback from the medics,” said Parker, adding that detailed evaluation of the impact of the project is under way.

But there is more to do. “Due to the resolution of sub-seasonal forecast data, this prediction can only be provided on a county [or] country-level,” said Talib. “Scientists are working hard to improve the predictability and resolution of sub-seasonal forecasts.”

The pilot, which is backed by the UK government’s Global Challenges Research Fund, is a joint effort by the National Centre for Atmospheric Science, African SWIFT and the African Centre of Meteorological Applications for Development.

[I lost my baby girl to meningitis – that's why I'm passionate about vaccination | Bobby Joseph](#)

[Read more](#)

However, Parker said the future of the project was under threat as a result of recent cuts to the Global Challenges Research Fund.

Linda Glennie, research director at the charity [Meningitis](#) Research Foundation, which is not involved with the project but funded early research into the use of weather data to predict outbreaks, welcomed the pilot.

“Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest burden of meningitis in the world. For at least a century, meningitis epidemics have swept across the region during the dry season. Despite the success of immunisation, even in the last decade, hundreds of thousands of people living in the region have faced the devastating consequences of the disease,” she said.

“Although epidemics occur frequently, they are difficult to predict. Any tools which can forecast where meningitis is likely to strike will help to

ensure vaccinations and antibiotics are readily available to save lives”.

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