

Britain

1st pandemic report

Slow virus lockdown cost 1000s of deaths

LONDON, Oct 12, (AP): Britain's failure to impose a lockdown in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic cost thousands of unnecessary deaths and ranks among the country's worst public health blunders, lawmakers concluded Tuesday in the nation's first comprehensive report on the pandemic.

The deadly delay derived from the failure of British government ministers to question the recommendations of scientific advisers, resulting in a dangerous level of "groupthink" that caused them to dismiss the more aggressive strategies adopted in East and Southeast Asia to limit infections, the report said.



Johnson

It was only when Britain's National Health Service risked being overwhelmed by rapidly rising infections that Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative government finally ordered a lockdown, in late March 2020.

"Decisions on lockdowns and social distancing during the early weeks of the pandemic - and the advice that led to them - rank as one of the most important public health failures the United Kingdom has ever experienced," states the joint report from the House of Commons' science and health committees. "Painful though it is, the UK must learn what lessons it can of why this happened if we are to ensure it is not repeated."

Lawmakers said their inquiry was designed to uncover why the U.K. performed "significantly worse" than many other countries during the initial period of the pandemic. The UK has recorded more than 137,000 coronavirus deaths, the highest toll in Europe after Russia.

But government officials said they did what they could with the information they had in a time of crisis.

Unprecedented

"It was an unprecedented pandemic, Cabinet minister Stephen Barclay told Sky News. "We were learning about it as we went through, and of course with hindsight, there's things we know about it now that we didn't know at the time."

Bereaved families reacted to the parliamentary report with outrage, furious that the people who died of COVID-19 received scant mention in the 150-page document. They said the joint committee only was interested in "speaking to their colleagues and friends."

"The report it's produced is laughable and more interested in political arguments about whether you can bring laptops to...meetings than it is in the experiences of those who tragically lost parents, partners or children to COVID-19," said Hannah Brady, spokesperson for COVID-19 Bereaved Families for Justice. "This is an attempt to ignore and gaslight bereaved families, who will see it as a slap in the face."

Lawmakers released their findings amid frustration with the timetable for a formal public inquiry into the government's response to COVID-19. Johnson says the inquiry will start next spring.

The report was based on testimony from 50 witnesses, including former Health Secretary Matt Hancock and former government insider Dominic Cummings. It was unanimously approved by 22 lawmakers from the three largest parties in Parliament: the governing Conservatives and the opposition Labour Party and the Scottish National Party.

The committees praised the government's early focus on vaccines as the ultimate way out of the pandemic and its decision to invest in vaccine development. These decisions led to Britain's successful inoculation program, which has seen almost 80% of people 12 and over now fully vaccinated.

"Millions of lives will ultimately be saved as a result of the global vaccine effort in which the UK has played a leading part," the committees said.

But they also criticized the government's test-and-trace program, saying its slow, uncertain and often chaotic performance hampered Britain's response to the pandemic.

Strategy

The government's strategy during the first three months of the crisis reflected official scientific advice that widespread infection was inevitable given that testing capacity was limited; that there was no immediate prospect for a vaccine; and the belief that the public wouldn't accept a lengthy lockdown, the report said. As a result, the government sought merely to manage the spread of the virus, instead of trying to stop it altogether.

The report described this as a "serious early error" that the U.K. shared with many countries in Europe and North America.

"There was a groupthink that the way you tackle a pandemic should be similar to a flu pandemic," Jeremy Hunt, a former British health minister who now heads Parliament's health committee, said. "I was part of that groupthink, too, when I was health secretary."

Hunt said that before the coronavirus hit, "an American university said we were the second-best prepared country in the world" for a pandemic.

"We know that clearly wasn't the case," he said.

Trish Greenhalgh, a professor of primary care health services at the University of Oxford, said the report "hints at a less-than-healthy" relationship between government and scientific bodies. With COVID-19 still killing hundreds of people every week in Britain, advisory committees continue to debate exactly what evidence is "sufficiently definitive" to be considered certain, she said.

"Uncertainty is a defining feature of crises," Greenhalgh said. "Dare we replace 'following the science' with 'deliberating on what best to do when the problem is urgent but certainty eludes us'?" This report suggests that unless we wish to continue to repeat the mistakes of the recent past, we must."

Even senior officials like Cummings and Hancock told the committees they were reluctant to push back against scientific consensus.

Hancock said as early as Jan. 28, 2020, he found it difficult to push for widespread testing of people who didn't show symptoms of COVID-19 because scientific advisers said it wouldn't be useful.

"I was in a situation of not having hard evidence that a global scientific consensus of decades was wrong but having an instinct that it was," he testified. "I bitterly regret that I did not overrule that scientific advice."

Vulnerable to unforeseen difficulties

Fewer in US turn to food banks, but need remains

House returns to stave off default with debt limit vote

WASHINGTON, Oct 12, (AP): Members of the House are scrambling back to Washington on Tuesday to approve a short-term lift of the nation's debt limit and ensure the federal government can continue fully paying its bills into December.

The \$480 billion increase in the country's borrowing ceiling cleared the Senate last week on a party-line vote. The House is expected to approve it swiftly so President Joe Biden can sign it into law this week. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen had warned that steps to stave off a default on the country's debts would be exhausted by Monday, and from that point, the department would soon be unable to fully meet the government's financial obligations.

A default would have immense fallout on global financial markets built upon the bedrock of U.S. government debt. Routine government payments to Social Security

beneficiaries, disabled veterans and active-duty military personnel would also be called into question.

"It is egregious that our nation has been put in this spot, but we must take immediate action to address the debt limit and ensure the full faith and credit of the United States remains intact," said House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md.

But the relief provided by the bill's passage will only be temporary, forcing Congress to revisit the issue in December - a time when lawmakers will also be laboring to complete federal spending bills and avoid a damaging government shutdown. The year-end backlog raises risks for both parties and threatens a tumultuous close to Biden's first year in office.

The present standoff over the debt ceiling eased when Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., agreed to help pass the

short-term increase. But he insists he won't do so again.

In a letter sent Friday to Biden, McConnell said Democrats will have to handle the next debt-limit increase on their own using the same process they have tried to use to pass Biden's massive social spending and environment plan. Reconciliation allows legislation to pass the Senate with 51 votes rather than the 60 that's typically required. In the 50-50 split Senate, Vice President Kamala Harris gives Democrats the majority with her tiebreaking vote.

In his focus on the debt limit, McConnell has tried to link Biden's big federal government spending boost with the nation's rising debt load, even though they are separate and the debt ceiling will have to be increased or suspended regardless of whether Biden's \$3.5 trillion plan makes it into law.

gests that the decline has leveled off.

The national data is mirrored in the experiences of individual food banks across the country. At the Alameda County Community Food Bank in Oakland, California, the level of community need spiked in winter and early spring of this year. In February 2021, the organization set a record with 5 million pounds of food distributed. That record stood for one month as March 2021 saw 6 million pounds distributed.

After the March peak, the numbers started dropping steadily - down to 4.6 million pounds in August 2021. But that's still compared with 2.7 million pounds in June 2019.

Recovery

"The recovery is going to be very, very long and steep for families who are typically reliant on food banks," said Michael Altfest, the food bank's director of community engagement. Altfest said the coronavirus pandemic was an additional trauma for families already suffering from food insecurity, and it introduced a whole new category of client who had never used food banks before but had been pushed over the financial edge by the pandemic. Both categories are projected to remain in need of assistance well into next year.

"Things are not getting any easier here for low- and moderate-income households, and we don't expect it to for a while," Altfest said.

Among those newcomers to the food bank system is Ranada James. The 47-year-old child care professional had received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, benefits in the past but never dealt

with a food bank before the pandemic. On a recent overcast Wednesday, James was one of a few dozen people lining up in their cars for a weekly drive-through food pantry operated by a local charity called The Arc in southeast Washington, D.C., the poorest and most virus-ravaged part of the city. Volunteers loaded her backseat with pre-prepared hot meals, lunch sacks, fresh vegetables from The Arc's garden and sealed boxes of durable goods.

"I never thought I would need it," she said. "It helped tremendously, and it still really helps."

Even as the situation slowly improves, James finds herself in need. She has two grandchildren and two nieces living with her, and she's keeping them from attending in-person school out of fear of the pandemic - which means she can't go back to work.

"They really do eat," she said with a laugh, adding that broccoli and fresh string beans were household favorites. "They're growing, and they're picky."

Other food banks across the country are reporting similar trends: a gradual decrease this year, starting in about April, but still far higher than any pre-pandemic numbers. At the Central California Food Bank in Fresno, the numbers have "leveled off" in recent months but remain 25% higher than in 2019, said the food bank's co-CEO, Kym Dildine.

"Many people are still out of work, particularly women, who are the primary caregivers in the home," she said.

At the Capital Area Food Bank in Washington, D.C., the amount of food distributed in July 2021 was 64% higher than in the same month in 2019.

"COVID isn't over by any means," said the food bank's president, Radha Muthiah. "We're still seeing existing need."

Just how long the elevated level of need will last is a matter of debate, with the most conservative estimates projecting it will last well into next summer. Some are predicting that the country's food banks may never return to normal.

Spike

Parallel government food assistance programs like SNAP benefits, commonly known as food stamps, also saw a pandemic-fueled spike in usage. The Department of Agriculture, which administers SNAP, reports that the number of SNAP users increased by 7 million between 2019 and 2021. In August, President Joe Biden instituted a permanent 25% boost in SNAP benefits, starting this month.

But the SNAP program doesn't come close to covering every family in need. Muthiah said many of the clients who depend on food banks for their nutrition are either ineligible for SNAP benefits, intimidated by the bureaucratic paperwork or fearful of applying due to their immigration status. That leaves food banks as the primary source of aid for millions of hungry people.

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack told the AP that at the peak of the pandemic, 14% of American adults were receiving SNAP benefits. That number is now down around 8%, but the need remains highly elevated, and nonprofit charitable options like food banks serve a vital role in papering over the remaining holes in millions of family budgets, he said.

"Legion Foods" is the new subsidiary company of "Aleid Foods" set to develop its business into the HORECA sector

Gad: Legion Foods offer exceptional choices and services bringing excellence to the highly competitive HORECA sector

"Legion Foods" the newest company of "Aleid Foods", specialized in providing food products and services to the HORECA Sector, aspire to the acquisition of an impressive share in the highly competitive market, with a growing client network of brands, suppliers, and food producers from around the globe.

General Manager at Legion Foods, Mohamed Gad, explained the company's adoption of a dynamic and

flexible business model, led by a team with competencies and clear-vision management and based on continuous studies of the ever-changing and evolving market trends, which allow it to swiftly and seamlessly answer to the specific and seasonal demands of HORECA, restaurants and specialty cuisines by providing the best and finest products. Jad empathized the company's commitment to quality, diverse options,



Mohamed Gad

and food safety as the main priorities for sourcing and

selecting the best products and food solutions suitable to keep pace with market trends in order to become a leader in the local food sector.

He ensured that quality, safety, and taste are the solid standards in the company's work mechanism, to provide the gourmet consumer with an exceptional world-class food experience, in addition that "Legion Foods" is proud of being the trusted food supplier of various franchise

chains and local restaurants, due to its commitment to on-time in-full delivery of the best high-quality products while adhering to strict health standards and requirements.

"Legion Foods" offers wide options of meat, poultry, and seafood of exceptional quality complying with international and local standards while maintaining the highest and up-to-date food safety and international regulations in import, storage, and supply.

Kuwait Insurance Company Organizes its Annual Breast Cancer Awareness Campaign in Cooperation With Hadi Hospital



On the occasion of the International Month for Breast Cancer Control and Prevention, Kuwait Insurance Company, in cooperation with Hadi Hospital, organized an awareness campaign on early detection of breast cancer, which it launched under the slogan "Early detection saves a life" in its keenness to spread awareness about periodic detection in order to combat and prevent it.

Mrs. Fajr Al-Sayegh, Corporate Communication Manager at KIC, said, "This campaign comes within the global initiative and based on the company's social responsibility aimed

at raising awareness about the risks of breast cancer, which is considered the most widespread malignant tumor to afflict women, and poses a real threat to women's health. Al-Sayegh explained: "As every year, the breast cancer awareness campaign includes awareness messages to encourage early screening through the company's accounts on social media throughout the month of October."

On that occasion, Kuwait Insurance Company, in cooperation with a consultant oncological disease, Dr Asmaa Mahmoud Abdel Majid, Specialist Radiology from Hadi Hospital, organized a



Fajr Al-Sayegh

seminar for its employees about the nature of this disease and the importance of periodic detection of breast cancer through periodic examinations

that necessitate its work and methods of combating and preventing it.

Dr. Asmaa Mahmoud Abdel Majid at Hadi Hospital, said, "That it is time for women to realize the importance of periodic breast examinations, pointing out the importance of responding to these calls, even if the woman does not have any symptoms, because early detection of the disease increases the chance of a full recovery".

Al-Sayegh also coordinated with the hospital administration, "mammography" and "echography" examinations for the employees of the Kuwait

Insurance Company, under the guidance of a specialized panel of doctors from the hospital, to encourage the conduct of tests that help in the early detection of the disease.

Al-Sayegh concluded: "Kuwait Insurance Company is always keen to provide support and assistance to women. She also thanked the hospital's management and the Marketing Department for their efforts to make this campaign such a successful, and to their logistical cooperation and for providing reduced prices for attendees to perform the necessary examinations, and congratulated staff members for their effective contributions.