



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From the Chief Medical Officer & Chief Scientific Adviser
Professor Chris Whitty CB FMedSci*

Rt Hon Greg Clark MP
Chair of the Science and Technology
Houses of Parliament,
London
SW1A 0AA

39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

4 November 2020

Dear Mr Clark

Thank you for inviting me to speak to the Science and Technology Committee yesterday at short notice. One of the answers I gave has been interpreted by commentators in a way I neither said nor meant, and I wanted to give you a clarification to avoid any misinterpretation. Normally I would wait until the Hansard draft record to do a footnote, but since this is to inform a Debate this afternoon, I wanted to clarify now because it was challenged by serious commentators. I have therefore gone through the data in detail with the JBC this morning.

You asked a question illustrating it with data from Liverpool, and I gave what was (I thought at the time reasonably clearly) a general answer rather than a Liverpool specific answer since I interpreted you to be making a general point illustrated by Liverpool. This was based on my memory of the data from country as a whole and the Northwest, and going back over data available on Monday night (which I used for this hearing) that was also correct for the Northwest and the north of the country more widely, with significant local variation.

I did not say that there was no reduction in Liverpool specifically (nor does my relistening imply that- I said 'looking at the data, particularly in the north of England'), but since that has been the interpretation put on my comments can I say on the record that in Liverpool specifically rates have been dropping both in younger people and older people. Across the country as a whole however the picture is much more mixed, and whilst the rate of decrease in younger people is a wide trend, the rates are continuing to rise in other older groups, including in areas in all three tiers with wide variation between specific cities and regions. There are some complexities in interpreting the data in part because of a half term effect which seems to have led to a reduction in testing rates, but I think this is a fair overall interpretation.

The drop in Liverpool specifically is likely to reflect the fact they went into strong measures, widely brought into, at an early stage, and is good news in every way.

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR CHRIS WHITTY
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER AND DHSC CHIEF SCIENTIFIC ADVISER.