

The Mail
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SPECIAL REPORT

By **Nick Craven, Holly Bancroft**
and **Helen Cahill**

The Government seems paralysed. So we've assembled a distinguished team of world-leading experts to help them...

How the MoS's Corona Cabinet say we can get the UK moving

GARDEN centres and DIY stores should be the first businesses to reopen fully as the lockdown is relaxed, according to a panel of distinguished experts.

Home improvement, decorating and gardening could help revive the economy and give families a much-needed boost as they emerge from the restrictions which have had a devastating financial impact, the Mail on Sunday panel said.

The experts – drawn from the fields of public health, medicine, retail, economics and psychology – said the Government should plan a staged sequence of ending the lockdown.

That would see the businesses that posed the least risk to health reopen first, with social distancing remaining and the effects on public health being carefully monitored.

Allowing the public to visit DIY and garden centres freely would be followed by rebooting small-scale manufacturing and most high street shops as long as coronavirus infections were clearly on the wane and sufficient testing was in place.

The experts said the criteria for which sectors of the economy to unlock first should be based on types of activity, rather than relaxing the rules by focusing on particular age groups or geographical areas.

They also called for the public to be allowed to travel without restrictions to parks and green spaces as long as they observe social distancing and stay two metres apart.

In a wide-ranging discussion on video conferencing platform Zoom, the MoS lockdown forum heard:

- The Government should spell out a clear strategy for ending the lockdown to the public as soon as possible, according to economist Gerard Lyons.
- The first phase of releasing the lockdown restrictions could occur

'What we've done so far is to simply scare people'

as early as tomorrow week, if cases in the UK are falling sharply and there has been no second wave of infections seen from lockdowns being relaxed in countries such as Austria, cancer specialist Professor Karol Sikora said.

● Psychologist Dr Kimberly Dienes spoke of the profound effect the lockdown has had on many people by removing their control, and warned that people will be anxious on health and social grounds as they emerge from it.

● Business psychologist Dr Dimitrios Tzivrikos stressed the importance of kick-starting the economy – 'or we might not have enough funds to support the medics'.

● Retail consultant Richard Hyman said supermarkets should be the model for other businesses to follow in ensuring social distancing.

● Public health expert Dr Bharat Pankhania said he saw nothing wrong in people driving to parks or beauty spots for exercise, if they observed strict social distancing.

Economist Mr Lyons wanted to see a 'gradual unlocking of the economy' in three phases.

But he stressed that the Government must give people a clear blueprint of the strategy in advance, 'because once you start to unlock, the natural tendency is for people to experiment'.

The trigger should still be a medical one, based on the infection rate. We also need to take testing into



THE PSYCHOLOGIST

Dr Kimberly Dienes is a lecturer in clinical and health psychology at the University of Manchester with interests in social, biological and psychological stress processes. She has studied the experiences of people in social isolation.



RETAIL CONSULTANT

Richard Hyman is an independent retail consultant with more than 35 years' experience providing insight and analysis. He founded the retail analysis firm Verdict and has worked as a strategic adviser to consultancy Deloitte.



BORIS'S OLD GURU

Gerard Lyons is chief economist at Netwealth and senior fellow at the Policy Exchange. He advised Boris Johnson when he was London Mayor, and was in the running to replace Mark Carney as Bank of England Governor.



PUBLIC HEALTH EXPERT

Dr Bharat Pankhania is Senior Clinical Lecturer at the University of Exeter Medical School. He is a public health expert with more than 20 years' experience in communicable disease control and infectious disease management.



CANCER SPECIALIST

Professor Karol Sikora is one of the world's leading cancer specialists and a former director of the WHO Cancer Programme. He is chief medical officer of Rutherford Health and Professor of Medicine at the University of Buckingham.



CONSUMER KING

Dr Dimitrios Tzivrikos is one of the UK's leading consumer and business psychologist and works at University College London. Dr Tzivrikos advises businesses and governments on consumer behaviour.

manufacturing etc on May 11, and a much fuller resumption of economic activity by May 25.'

Dr Dienes, who has conducted psychological studies of people experiencing lockdown, left her colleagues in no doubt about the effects of isolation. 'Their reaction has really been one of a loss of motivation, a loss of self-worth in a lot of ways. Many people reported depression and anxiety as a result of the lockdown.'

And she warned that while some people might want to 'run to the beaches' when the measures ended, two things will happen: 'People will want to engage more but they will also have health anxiety and social anxiety about engaging with the outside world again.'

Dr Tzivrikos said the Government's strategy on public communication 'has been a disaster'.

'I think what we have done so far is to simply scare people and that can only work up to a point. What is a saving grace is that we are actually globally experiencing this – people have been obedient because they have seen other people do it.'

Mr Hyman said the way supermarkets had dealt with social distancing should be the model for others. 'What most of the big food stores are doing is limiting the number of people going in at any one time, and they are ensuring it's one person at a time, so group shopping is outlawed. It has become a functional activity.'

'Common sense suggests areas like DIY and garden centres are probably the way to start.'

Dr Pankhania said: 'You either get infected from human beings or from a place where other humans congregate – so from some kind of contaminated surface. If you can mitigate [the risk of infection] by social distancing, masks and gloves, then a lot of things become possible, provided also that cases and deaths are falling sharply, there is enough testing being carried out and adequate PPE is available.'

But he also warned of the dangers of a second wave of infections if the relaxation was carried out too fast. 'We do not know that you become immune after you have been infected and recover, so people should assume they are still at risk.'

account, along with changes in behaviour and social distancing, and we also need to enforce behavioural changes such as wearing masks. If behaviours go back to what they were before the crisis, that risks the virus re-emerging.

'Garden centres are interesting because in terms of health and

wellbeing, and in terms of spending time at home, one would think DIY activities and garden centres should be more accessible.'

Professor Sikora, who has warned of up to 60,000 unnecessary deaths among cancer patients if the NHS isn't able to resume normal, non-coronavirus treatments, was the

keenest panel member to get Britain moving.

He said: 'I would move to the first phase by April 27, provided there was no second wave in Austria, control measures were in place and the number of cases and deaths has sharply dropped. I would then move to the second stage with small

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