



A guide to COVID-19 resources on the Friends of Millbank website

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This is an updated version (10 Feb 2021) of a Letter published in BMJ Military Health.¹

Friends of Millbank is a society that celebrates the heritage, achievements and ongoing relevance of military medicine, normally holding talks at the former Royal Army Medical College (now Chelsea College of Arts) in Millbank, London. Those meetings ceased when the UK instituted a national lockdown in March 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. They have been replaced for now by monthly online talks, open to all, advertised through our website.

The Royal Army Medical College, Millbank was the British Army's centre of excellence for postgraduate military medicine and tropical health (including briefly vaccines development), and the home of the Journal of the RAMC (now BMJ Military Health), between 1907 and 1999. As our contribution to tackling the pandemic and misinformation on the subject, we have collated the best official online resources into a one-stop COVID-19 portal on our website which we recommend to your readers.² This site is regularly updated. In this description, names in *italics* refer to links, prime ones being '*World Health Organisation*' [WHO], '*GOV-UK*', and '*NHS – latest advice*'.

Once online, start with the personal perspective '*LSHTM Viral Podcast - Peter Piot's battle with COVID-19*'. Piot is director of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (see '*LSHTM – COVID-19 Resources*') – and he fell seriously ill with COVID-19 in March 2020. His insights are thought-provoking. The '*RSM Live – COVID-19 Series webinars*' are excellent value. Frontline health professionals will benefit from '*Coronavirus - e-Learning for Healthcare (e-LfH)*' and '*St George's online course*'. There are excellent international courses: '*WHO – Online courses for COVID-19, Ebola, Cholera, Polio*'. Keep abreast of the latest clinical information (including on virus variants, vaccine effectiveness and long-COVID) with '*COVID Reference – The COVID Textbook (current online edition)*'.

Continue to be inspired by '*Captain Tom Moore's 100th Birthday walk for the NHS*' (his legacy carries on through the '*Captain Tom Foundation*'). Be proud of '*Coronavirus: What the Military's doing to fight COVID-19*' through its weekly updates, and appreciate the behind-the-scenes effort that went into '*NHS Nightingale and COVID-19 Hospitals in the UK*'.

'*Coronavirus timeline up to lockdown*' provides salutary reminders of the rapidity with which a virulent new pathogen can threaten society. '*IHME COVID-19 Projections: the next few months*' shows how national responses may affect the future course of the pandemic.

Daily COVID-19 deaths in UK hospitals in the first wave peaked at 866, on 10 April 2020.³ This single day's toll was more than twice that of British personnel killed by hostile action (405) in Afghanistan over 14 years. The UK's official toll surpassed 40,000 on 5 June, less than three months after the first death on 8 March. In the US, whose first death was on 6 February, fatalities surpassed 100,000 on 28 May – more than the total from the Korean, Vietnam and Iraq wars combined. And now, one year after its first death, the US has sustained over 464,000 deaths and 27 million cases ('*Johns Hopkins University Dashboard*').

The pandemic's first wave soon passed in many countries due to national responses. However, premature easing of restrictions led to the UK and much of the world suffering a much worse second wave in late 2020 – early 2021 ('*WHO - COVID-19 weekly situation reports*' and '*European Center for Disease Prevention and Control*'). In





the UK, the number of new people testing positive with COVID-19 escalated to over 60,000 daily soon after Christmas (*'GOV.UK – The COVID-19 dashboard (UK only)'*). Inevitably, soon afterwards, the UK's death rate surged to well over 1,000 cases daily, remaining so for several weeks, and peaking at 1,820 deaths on 20 January 2021 (more than twice as high as the peak of the first wave).⁴ The cumulative UK death toll reached 100,000 on 26 January and is predicted to exceed 120,000 by Easter. The country's hospitals and critical care units came under unprecedented extreme and sustained pressure for weeks, before this wave began slowly receding due to a second national lockdown and new vaccine rollout. The rate of decrease remains agonisingly slow due to the arrival of a new and more infectious UK variant of the virus.

COVID-19 cases continue rising sharply worldwide (as of 10 February 2021, over 107 million cases have been confirmed, with over 2.3 million deaths recorded in the 13 months since the first death on 11 January 2020 (*'WHO'*). Catastrophe threatens low-income and war-torn countries (*'COVID-19 Resource Centre – The Lancet'*), but also countries with divergent government policy responses: Brazil has suffered over 9.5 million cases and 233,000 deaths (*'Johns Hopkins University Dashboard'*).

Resurgent malaria, measles and other illnesses, due to disrupted prevention campaigns or healthcare systems, are seriously compounding the global effect. This is best shown through excess mortality rates (*'Office for National Statistics', 'Our World in Data'*).

The economic effects on society are huge, hence the drive to ease lockdown, see *'COVID-19 Policy Tracker – The Health Foundation'* for England, and *'Lockdowns around the world'*. Easing lockdown risks further waves should measures prove premature or ineffective, as was shown with the second wave – almost all countries still have community transmission (*'WHO - COVID-19 weekly situation reports'*). New outbreaks can escalate exponentially if unchecked, especially if new variants of the virus prove to be more infective or resistant to vaccines. See *'GOV-UK Science – latest R number'* for the virus's reproduction number (R) in UK: 07-1.0 on 5 February 2021; and *'COVID Messenger'* to see the situation reported by councils in England. The guiding principles are Test, Trace and Isolate (*'WHO'*).

The most effective prevention measures are 'Hands, Face, Space and Air': hand hygiene, masks and physical distancing, with adequate fresh air ventilation, and personal protective equipment in healthcare settings (*'WHO', 'CDC'*). Face masks or coverings have a definite role: WHO has been encouraging the use of medical and non-medical masks by the general public since 5 June.⁵ See also *'A history of the medical mask'* and *'CDC – Cloth face coverings - DIY guide'*. Other control measures are quarantine (of asymptomatic travellers) and isolation (of symptomatic persons and their contacts), see *'NHS – Latest advice'* and *'NHS COVID-19 App'*. Mental health can be adversely affected by quarantine, be kind to yourself and others, *'Corona - Self-isolating Help Offer'*.

Fortunately, effective vaccines are becoming available and being distributed worldwide, though the logistical challenges are immense (*'COVID-19 Vaccine tracker'*). More than 12 million people in the UK have been vaccinated since early December, but many countries lag far behind. There is still no specific treatment though clinical outcomes have improved through better management, see *'NHS – approved COVID-19 research projects'* and *'COVID Reference – The COVID Textbook (current online edition)'*. There is still little immunity in the community (the *'SeroTracker Dashboard'* shows seroprevalence rates). This highlights the importance of collaborative research, exemplified by powerhouses that shape government strategy: *'Imperial College', 'Johns Hopkins University', 'Oxford University'* and the *'Royal Society'*. Do use the *'COVID Symptom Study app'*.

This is not a time for complacency, or to let down our guard (Stay Alert!). Lives may be lost by undue haste. Stay informed, stay safe and stay well.





¹ Vassallo D. COVID-19 resources through Friends of Millbank website *BMJ Mil Health*; accepted 18 June 2020, published online 4 August 2020, and in print 31 December 2020: *BMJ Mil Health* 2020; 166(6):440
<https://militaryhealth.bmj.com/content/jramc/166/6/440.full.pdf>

² Friends of Millbank website www.friendsofmillbank.org and COVID-19 portal www.friendsofmillbank.org/covid-19

³ <https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/newsevents/news/2020/peak-covid-19-deaths-occurring-english-hospitals-passed-8-april>
(last accessed 8 February 2021)

⁴ Cumulative number of coronavirus (COVID-19) deaths in the United Kingdom (UK)
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1109595/coronavirus-mortality-in-the-uk/> (accessed 8 February 2021)

⁵ WHO - Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) advice for the public: When and how to use masks
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>
(last accessed 8 February 2021)

