

Another UK Cabinet member has COVID-19 symptoms

March 28 2020, by Danica Kirka



In this Friday, Nov. 22, 2019 file photo, Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson, right, and Health Minister Matt Hancock visit Bassetlaw District General Hospital on their General Election campaign in Worksop, England. Matt Hancock has tested positive for the new coronavirus, Friday March 27, 2020, the same day as Prime Minister Boris Johnson was confirmed to have COVID-19. (Christopher Furlong/Pool via AP, File)

Another member of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Cabinet has developed symptoms of COVID-19, as the number of people with the coronavirus to die in the U.K. passed the 1,000 mark Saturday.

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack said he had symptoms of the disease and was self-isolating a day after the [prime minister](#) and Britain's [health secretary](#) revealed they tested positive for the [virus](#) and were experiencing mild symptoms.

Johnson, 55, is the highest-profile political leader to have contracted the virus. Jack sat beside him in the House of Commons on Wednesday before Parliament shut down until at least April 21 to reduce the risk of infections.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma said Johnson continues to show only "mild symptoms" of coronavirus.

"He continues to lead the government's effort in combating Covid-19," Sharma told reporters, "This morning he held a video conference call and he will continue to lead right from the front on this.

"What this has reminded us is that no one is immune and that is precisely why we ask people to follow the Government advice in terms of staying at home where they are able to do that," Sharma said.

Johnson has been accused of failing to follow the British government's distancing measures after he, Health Secretary Matt Hancock, 41, and the chief medical officer of England began self-isolating with symptoms Friday.

The medical officer, Dr. Chris Whitty, has been advising the prime minister during the virus pandemic and not said if he was tested.

The editor of the respected British medical journal The Lancet published a scathing editorial Saturday that criticized the government for doing too little, too late to protect public health and leaving the U.K.'s public health system "wholly unprepared for this pandemic."

Lancet editor Richard Horton wrote that despite numerous warnings, Britain's strategy for containing the virus failed, "in part, because ministers didn't follow WHO's advice to 'test, test, test' every suspected case. They didn't isolate and quarantine. They didn't contact trace.



Journalists keep their distance as they report from Downing Street in London after it was announced that British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has tested positive for the new coronavirus, Friday, March 27, 2020. Johnson's office said Friday that he was tested after showing mild symptoms, Downing Street says Johnson is self-isolating and continuing to lead the country's response to COVID-19. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein)

"These basic principles of [public health](#) and infectious disease control were ignored, for reasons that remain opaque." Horton said.

Keith Willett, the National Health Service's strategic incident director for COVID-19, disputed the editorial's conclusions.

He said the NHS freed up 33,000 beds for virus patients - a third of all hospital capacity -and enabled 18,000 nurses and doctors to return to practice. Three new makeshift hospitals are being built.

"In respect of our NHS responsibilities and response, the facts clearly speak for themselves," Willett said.

NHS employees have begun getting tested for the virus, a move seen as helping get self-isolating staff members back on the job.

The issue of health workers going into self-isolation has proved to be a big problem for the NHS because workers are sometimes in that position because they have an ill family member, not because they themselves are infected.

Meanwhile, authorities released photos of the inside of the ExCel center, an exhibition space which is being converted into a makeshift hospital. It will have two wards, and ultimately have a capacity of 4,000.

Initially, however, it will house some 500 beds with ventilators and oxygen.

The U.K. had 17,300 confirmed virus cases as of Saturday, according to a Johns Hopkins University tally. British officials reported that the number of deaths increased by 260 from a day earlier, bringing the country's total for virus-related deaths to 1,019.

The new [coronavirus](#) causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing [health](#) problems, it can cause more severe illness or death.

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Citation: Another UK Cabinet member has COVID-19 symptoms (2020, March 28) retrieved 23 June 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-03-uk-cabinet-member-covid-symptoms.html>

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