

COVID-19 is a wake-up call for the UK to make systematic change

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Professor Sir Ian Boyd. Credit: University of St Andrews

Government must learn from the current pandemic and make systematic change, according to a former scientific advisor.

Professor Sir Ian Boyd, former Chief Scientific Advisor to DEFRA, warned that despite practice runs for an influenza [pandemic](#) being carried out by the UK Government prior to COVID-19, the necessary actions to cope with such a reality were not implemented.

Writing in *Nature* he says: "We learnt what would help, but did not necessarily implement those lessons. The assessment, in many sectors of government, was that the resulting medicine was so strong that it would be spat out. Nobody likes living under a fortress mentality."

He added that unless we change our approach, and [government](#) are more prepared take preventative action earlier, which could be seen as punitive on the public, such events could happen again, with even worse outcomes.

He said now is the time to enact change while the public understand why such measures are necessary.

Sir Ian, who is now heading up a new environmental strategy for the University of St Andrews, said: "The middle of a pandemic, when we are all struggling to cope, may not be the best [time](#) to get people's attention. But we need to wake up to our vulnerabilities. There are a lot of rare events which could happen and bring similar problems to those we are experiencing now.

"Trends including the rise of global population and [climate change](#) are making us more vulnerable and this means that these types of events are likely to become more frequent in future. In normal times, it is difficult for politicians to act to bolster our resilience because events like COVID-19 seem too distant to most people to be a concern.

"However, building resilience when times are good to enable us to be stronger when times are bad is going to have to be an important part of

future planning from the [international community](#), to national governments and even down to individual households."

Brexit planning to keep food, drugs and fuel etc available, Sir Ian suggested, may actually help the United Kingdom tackle the fall-out of COVID-19 and help the country rebuild.

He added: "COVID-19 might be just a wake-up call: Let's use it to rebuild our systems into something more resilient."

Professor Sir Ian Boyd's article, "We practiced for a pandemic but didn't brace," is published in *Nature*.

More information: Ian Boyd. We practised for a pandemic, but didn't brace, *Nature* (2020). [DOI: 10.1038/d41586-020-00919-3](https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-020-00919-3)

Provided by University of St Andrews

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