Briefing for ARM representatives on emergency motion calling for a near elimination strategy

> *"In the past week, we have seen the rates of new COVID-19 infections rise to a higher level than when we went into lockdown, albeit in a younger population with a lower risk of admission to ITU and subsequent death.*
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> *"In order to prevent the need for further national lockdowns, with all of the adverse impact that may have on the education of our younger generation, the economy, older adults in care, mental health and social isolation, and to return to "normal" life as soon as possible …*
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> *"This meeting calls on governments to pursue a policy of near-elimination of SARS-CoV-2."*

What is a 'near elimination' policy?
'Near elimination' describes an approach intended to drive the incidence of new cases of COVID-19 down to such low levels that:

- any cases that do occur will largely be reintroductions,
- any cases can be well-controlled through testing and contact tracing to prevent onward spread.

The approach has been advocated by the Independent SAGE group of scientists, and explicitly committed to in a number of countries including Australia, New Zealand and Scotland. Where it has been pursued, it has been possible to dramatically reduce positive cases to a point of 'near elimination' for a period of time. However, reintroductions and low levels of transmission in the community have flared into significant local outbreaks in recent weeks, necessitating a return to more restrictive lockdown measures.

What does a near elimination strategy involve?
A near elimination strategy favours tougher measures in the short term to reduce transmission of cases. An example of the type of restrictions that may be involved in a near elimination strategy include:

- much more widespread and visible public messaging including clear and consistent public health advice on the strategy including regular updates on progress in the form of government and expert updates
- setting and communicating clear targets for daily and weekly incidence (new cases) and trigger points for the implementation of specific additional measures both locally and nationally, with greater restrictions on social mixing that are in line with disease incidence;
- implementing a focused strategy to reduce transmission in potential 'hot-spots' (for example, comprising a combination of regular testing of asymptomatic staff in health and social care settings and enhanced PPE, even in 'lower risk' settings);
- strengthening border arrangements and in some cases closing border points of entry, as well as a more enforceable or managed approach to quarantining individuals arriving from overseas; Criteria for non-essential travel may also be set;
- greater monitoring of COVID-secure arrangements in public settings and workplaces while taking necessary steps to enforce measures where they are not being complied with.

What are the alternatives to a near elimination policy?
The [Independent SAGE group of scientists](#) define two alternative approaches to managing a global pandemic:

1. **Control** – reducing the number of people currently infected with the disease to a low level and capacity to maintain control indefinitely (eg. Germany, China). This approach is contingent on being able to effectively test and trace for the virus at mass scale and then enforce public health measures that the public agree to follow.
2. **Eradication** – permanent reduction to zero worldwide incidence of infections through a mass vaccination programme. This is a long-term approach that can only be implemented once an effective vaccine has been developed and public uptake is high.

What factors must be considered when choosing an approach?
- Strategies for managing the pandemic will have a health, economic and societal impact. Decisions on which interventions to employ will require an assessment of the relative benefits and costs of the different options available to governments in the epidemiological context at the time. The weight of any potential ethical or societal costs will vary, depending on how restrictive or disruptive an intervention is to society or the economy and requires a careful, proportionate balancing of the different interests at stake against the benefits that might accrue.
- The time in which restrictions to enforce a strategy are in place and which of these factors is prioritised will also be relevant considerations. It is also important to note that the three are not independent of each other and are all linked to some extent.
- For each approach, there is no widely agreed criteria for implementation or success and the level of surveillance that would be necessary to monitor this.
- To some extent all approaches advocate similar restrictions, but to varying degrees. It can therefore be difficult to distinguish between approaches other than to say restrictions need to be tighter and enforced more strongly. A near elimination strategy will need to consider how it differs from the current approach being taken by the government in England.