

*Strictly embargoed until 00:01 Tuesday 9 March 2021  
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## **The Royal Statistical Society calls for a full review of health statistics as it sets out the lessons that must be learnt from Covid-19**

A year on from the publication of the government's Covid-19 action plan, the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) sets out its ten recommendations for how statistics and data could be better used in future crises.

While data and statistics have been a crucial resource and central to the UK Covid response, the pandemic has highlighted the need for government to invest in proper data infrastructure. The RSS calls for a full review of UK health statistics, to address the issues of a fragmented and under-resourced system.

The RSS calls for social care data to be treated as an essential part of this review. The harrowing number of Covid deaths in care homes, which became apparent some months into the pandemic, has shone a light on the need for better social care data. The number of care home residents in England is still not known and while it is claimed that all care home residents have been vaccinated there remains no data to back up this claim.

Transparency has also been a recurring issue. Too often, political communications have relied on cherry-picked data to persuade the public that a particular decision is a right one, rather than prioritising informing the public. This risks undermining public trust at a time when it is vital. The RSS recommends that the public are given the full information behind any policy announcements, as well as the full data-sets so they can be analysed by independent experts.

A lack of an agile infectious diseases surveillance system in the UK hampered its abilities to track the spread of Covid early on. The Test and Trace system has mainly focused on operational goals, while the reporting of data relevant to characterise transmission has largely been neglected. The RSS recommends that a real-time pandemic surveillance system is put in place to tackle future health emergencies.

Testing has been a crucial component of the government's Covid response. However unlike with medicine and vaccines, such tests are not held to a common statistical standard. This issue has been brought to the fore with the 'moonshot' mass testing plans, with the use of lateral flow tests rolled out without robust evaluation. The RSS will be reviewing this and setting out statistical criteria for future tests to ensure their effectiveness. With rapid testing representing a large component of the Covid safety plans for schools, the RSS considers this a matter of urgency.

**Professor Sylvia Richardson, RSS President and co-chair of the RSS Covid-19 Task Force, said:**

“As often is the case in times of crisis, existing issues, both societal and structural have been brought to the fore. It's now important that we learn lessons from the past year. So, we are better prepared for future pandemics, the government must look how to fully harness the power of statistics by improving our data infrastructure and surveillance systems.”

**Stian Westlake, Chief Executive of the RSS, said:**

“Statistics have been crucial both to our understanding of the pandemic and to our efforts to fight it. While we hope we won’t see another pandemic on this scale, we need to see a culture change now – with more transparency around data and evidence, stronger mechanisms to challenge the misuse of statistics, and leaders with statistical skills.”

#### **Notes to editors**

- The Royal Statistical Society (RSS), founded in 1834, is one of the world's most distinguished and renowned statistical societies. It is a learned society for statistics, a professional body for statisticians and a charity which promotes statistics, data and evidence for the public good. Today the RSS has around 10,000 members around the world. [@RoyalStatSoc](#)
- **To see a copy of the embargoed report please email [m.wiley@rss.org.uk](mailto:m.wiley@rss.org.uk)**
- For details of the RSS’s work on Covid-19 and its Covid-19 Task Force go to: <https://rss.org.uk/policy-campaigns/policy/covid-19-task-force/>
- Our Task Force recently released a statement on their concerns about the use of lateral flow testing in schools: <https://rss.org.uk/RSS/media/File-library/News/2021/RSS-statement-on-surveillance-in-schools-5-March-2021.pdf>