CORONAVIRUS NEWS



SOUTH KOREA: "YOU CAN'T CATCH IT TWICE"


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SOUTH Korean scientists say that they do not believe that you can catch the new coronavirus more than once.

In the first few weeks of the outbreak, several countries, including China, Japan and South Korea, reportedly saw COVID-19 patients who tested positive for the illness again after they had recovered.

Now, new research from South Korean scientists says that they think this is unlikely, and that cases where people had caught the disease more than once were most likely due to "testing failures".

Apparently, tests had detected "dead virus traces", rather than the actual virus. If it's confirmed that you really can't catch COVID-19 more than once, you might begin to hear more about 'immunity passports'.

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There are two types of tests: one that can tell whether you have COVID-19 now, and another that can tell whether you have the antibodies that fought off the virus

These will be government-issued documents that would mean you were less restricted by the lockdown if you have antibodies that can fight off the virus.

However, the World Health Organization (WHO) says that "the use of [immunity passports] may increase the risks of transmission," but that "guidance is constantly kept under review and could be updated."

UK LOCKDOWN LATEST

AS *First News* went to press, the Government hadn't said too much about the end of lockdown.


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According to reports earlier this week, the prime minister Boris Johnson will reveal on Sunday 10 May how we'll be leaving lockdown.

The news came after the PM announced that we had "passed the peak," and that cases had begun to fall.

Until now, Government officials have decided not to explain their 'exit strategy', as they say that doing so would make the message to stay at home less effective.

Labour leader Keir Starmer said that his party agreed the lockdown "needs to remain in place, but to maintain morale and hope, people need a sense of what comes next".

THE TWO Rs


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The coronavirus can spread rapidly if its R value is not kept very low

YOU might have heard a lot in the past week about the 'R' number and a drug called remdesivir. So what's all the fuss about?

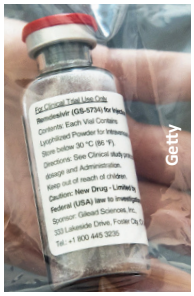
The R number has been talked about a lot lately in relation to relaxing the lockdown. Also known simply as R or the "effective reproduction number", it's a way for scientists to monitor a disease's ability to spread.

R is the average number of people who one infected person will pass the virus on to. It's vital that R stays below one, because if it rises above that, the virus will spread faster and faster. The closer to zero it is, the slower the virus is spreading. As *First News* went to press, the Government's scientific advisers say that R is between 0.6 and 0.9.

If R stays below one, the epidemic should eventually die down – though it takes time, and without social distancing and other measures, R can quickly rise again.

When the COVID-19 epidemic started, scientists think R was between 2 and 3. To give you an idea how that compares with other diseases, measles' R number is thought to be 12-18. That's why it's so important that people are vaccinated against measles – it spreads really quickly and easily.

Another 'r' has been in the news a lot lately, and that's the drug remdesivir (below, right). It was originally developed to treat Ebola, and works by stopping a virus from multiplying inside the body. In the US, the agency that controls the medicines doctors are allowed to use has issued an emergency approval so that it can be used to treat people with COVID-19. President Trump has been hyping it up, but is it all it's cracked up to be?


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Perhaps not. A study of 237 adults in Wuhan, China, found it "did not provide significant benefits" over a placebo (a substance given to a patient in a trial that has no physical effect on them). The study may also not be as accurate as was hoped. That's because it was stopped early after scientists were unable to recruit enough patients due to the steep fall in COVID-19 cases in China.