

British PM hospitalised with coronavirus but 'still in charge'

April 6 2020

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was in hospital on Monday undergoing tests after suffering "persistent" symptoms of coronavirus for 10 days, but colleagues insisted he remains in charge of the government.

Johnson announced on March 27 that he had tested positive for COVID-19, becoming the most high-profile world leader to be infected with the disease that has spread rapidly across the globe.

The 55-year-old had been self-isolating in his Downing Street flat but on Sunday evening, still suffering a high temperature among other symptoms, he was admitted to hospital on the advice of his doctor.

Officials said it was a "precautionary step" but it has raised questions about how ill the Conservative leader really is—and if he can still run the country.

"Today he's in hospital having the tests, but he will continue to be kept informed as to what's happening and to be in charge of the government," his housing minister, Robert Jenrick, told BBC television.

The government has been criticised for initially refusing to follow other European countries in requiring people to stay home as the virus spread.

And Johnson himself said in early March that he was still shaking hands with people.

But two weeks ago he ordered a nationwide lockdown and Britain is now in the grip of a serious outbreak, with almost 50,000 confirmed hospital cases and nearly 5,000 deaths so far.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock and the heir to the throne, Prince Charles, have both been infected with coronavirus, although they have since recovered.

In response to the crisis, Queen Elizabeth II made a rare public address on Sunday night, evoking the spirit of World War II and urging Britons to stay united.

"We will be with our friends again, we will be with our families again, we will meet again," she said.

Working non-stop

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab chaired the government's daily coronavirus meeting on Monday in Johnson's place.

He has been nominated to take over temporarily if the prime minister is incapacitated.

Johnson has been working "phenomenally hard" during the crisis, Jenrick said, adding that he would be finding it "very frustrating" to be ill.

The prime minister is not known to have any underlying health issues, although he has struggled with his weight, but some questioned if he should have taken more time off.

Junior health minister Nadine Dorries, who also had coronavirus but has recovered, added: "Many with #COVID19 are felled by

fatigue/temperature and use isolation to sleep and recover.

"Boris has risked his health and worked every day on our behalf to lead the battle against this vile virus."

Sarah Vine, a newspaper columnist and wife of senior cabinet minister Michael Gove, added: "Boris has worked non-stop throughout his illness—and now we see the result."

Persistent symptoms

US President Donald Trump said he was "hopeful and sure" Johnson would recover, calling the prime minister "a friend of mine" and a "great leader".

Johnson's pregnant partner, Carrie Symonds, moved out of Downing Street after some staff fell ill. But she said on Saturday she had just spent a week in bed with symptoms, although she has not been tested.

Officials say Johnson was admitted to hospital not because his condition worsened but because it had not improved. There was no need for an ambulance.

"The prime minister continues to have persistent symptoms of coronavirus ten days after testing positive for the virus," a spokeswoman said on Sunday.

The Times newspaper reported that the prime minister had been given oxygen treatment.

"Doctors will be monitoring important vital signs such as oxygen saturations," said Rupert Beale, group leader at the cell biology of infection laboratory at the Francis Crick Institute.

He said they would also check Johnson's blood to "see what the immune response to the virus looks like, and to assess liver and kidney function", and may also perform an electrocardiogram to check the heart.

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