

**Carl Heneghan, Professor of Evidence-based medicine at Oxford University has said that the Coronavirus is not as deadly as was first thought and the public fear that is stopping the country returning to normal is unfounded.**

He says that said exaggerated fears over Coronavirus has led to “people going about their daily lives misunderstanding and overestimating their risk” and has called for the government to intervene to “proactively reassure the population”.

He said introducing local lockdowns could do more harm than good by forcing people into their homes, potentially infecting other vulnerable people that live with them.

Professor Heneghan – whose work led to a lowering of the official death toll after he revealed Covid deaths were being counted even if someone had subsequently died of other causes – spoke as he released new data revealing the infection fatality rate had fallen from 2-3 per cent in the height of the pandemic to 0.3.

He said if the downward trend continues the pandemic may end up no worse than a bad flu season.

Reasons for the fall, he said, could not only be down to the consequences of lockdown because cases are continuing to drop despite society opening up.

Rather it was linked to better understanding of how to treat Covid patients, more testing – diluting the number of severe and fatal cases – the fact that more younger people are catching the virus and that the virus is circulating at a much lower level.

He added that the lower death rate comes alongside a drop in Covid-related hospital admissions. Recent figures show there low numbers of Covid-19 patients being admitted despite infections having increased throughout July.

More than 1,000 Britons are now testing positive for covid-19 each day and the true background figure is estimated at four times this amount.

However there are currently fewer than 50 daily hospital admissions for the virus.

Professor Heneghan said: “We reset how we calculate the death rates. We now need to reset how we communicate the risks of the virus.

I am concerned people have become overly frightened and throughout this pandemic, the fear instilled in people has been a real problem.

“Many people misunderstand and overestimate their risk of Covid. This uncertainty is leaving them highly anxious and affecting schools, offices and how we go about our daily lives. The government needs to intervene to explain to people their true risks.”

He also called for an end to local lockdowns without better evidence of their need.

He said: “We now have more data which shows the disease is not as deadly as we first thought, and despite coming out of lockdown and the small increase in the detection of infections in certain areas we have not seen a corresponding increase in hospital admissions or critical care beds, or deaths.

“We have lost focus on the critical issue of the impact of the disease, and I don’t understand why this is the case. It is becoming increasingly clear that lockdowns are harmful – during the lockdown; for instance, we saw an increase in non-covid deaths.

“And when we lockdown people are forced into their homes, potentially increasing the risk of infection to other vulnerable members where they are more at risk than in well ventilated public places.

“We now need to rail back from opinion and start using an evidence-based approach.

“The lockdown policies at the moment in Preston, Oldham and Leicester have happened because more cases are detected as we have tested more in these areas.

However, an increase in infections doesn’t mean the disease is getting out of control as many of these cases will be asymptomatic or not serious.”