The Covid-19 crisis is severely straining our medical services and economy. As well as increasing medical capacity, doctors are calling to lower the baseline of NHS demand for preventable reasons like road crashes by rapid introduction of public health policies. Medical experts want emergency measures to reduce speed limits. 20’s Plenty for Us support their urgent requests for 20mph limits in built up areas to help the NHS and economy by saving hospital beds and resources.

As well as ‘flattening the curve’ (eg by lockdown) and scaling up NHS facilities, medics are making urgent calls to Government for emergency public health rules in a letter to the Times and on https://lowerthebaseline.org/. The aim is to cut baseline load. On Sunday 22 March Dr Robert Hughes (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine) and 109 others said “each month there are nearly 3,000 road traffic collision-related admissions to NHS hospitals in England alone. Lowering and enforcing speed limits would reduce the frequency and severity of road traffic collisions.”

A British Medical Journal blog on 24 March by Sunil Bhopal (NIHR clinical lecturer in population health paediatrics, Newcastle University, and honorary assistant professor, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine) and four other experts said “First, we suggest an immediate reduction in motor vehicle speed limits. In England alone there are around 35,000 non-fatal admissions to hospital every year related to road traffic accidents; more than one in 10 of these are serious and likely to require intensive support, including anaesthesia and surgery. Evidence from around the world shows that lowering speed limits can lead to major reductions in injuries. In Canada, for example, lowering the speed limit from 40km/h to 30km/h was associated with a 28% decrease in pedestrian-motor vehicle collisions and a 67% decrease in major and fatal injuries. This measure would be particularly important in supporting those who follow government advice and avoid non-essential use of public transport in order to maintain social distancing. We therefore suggest that the government urgently explore an emergency reduction of all national speed limits to 50mph, and to 20mph in urban areas.”

Travel patterns are changing. People are being warned off public transport due to social distancing by 2m. The Government has banned non-essential travel, so traffic is reducing but traffic danger is also affected by speed, driver errors, weight and maintenance. London police are reporting rising speeding. We are all under strain and stressed with some exhausted by longer hours and childcare. Driver errors per mile could well be rising. For walkers social distancing on narrow pavements causes some to step into roads or cross roads frequently without safe crossings. People still need to get out to exercise on foot and by cycle. Children off school are being escorted by novice carers. Danger partially relates to what drivers expect. More surprise events are happening – high speeds, people off pavements, novice cyclists wobbling, tired driving etc. This negative spiral is being compounded by growing poverty and increasingly desperate circumstances!

Rod King MBE, Founder of 20’s Plenty for Us commented:-

“The Welsh Government already has 20mph as nationally agreed policy. It’s been signed up to by the UK in February’s ‘Stockholm Declaration’ as global best practice’. Every road injury is a preventable and unnecessary drain on emergency services and NHS at a time when both are facing critical Covid-19 workloads. Now is not the time to defend the no-longer-fit-for-purpose 30mph limit for roads on which we have 100,000 injuries each year. It’s why we support the doctors’ call to say 20’s Plenty for built-up roads and lower the baseline load on the NHS.”

20’s Plenty support the call for immediate reductions in road speeds from doctors. We call for Government announcements and phone texts to require drivers to obey new lower limits now.

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1 http://www.20splenty.org/covid-19_and_lower_speeds
3 http://www.20splenty.org/global_ministers_mandate_20mph