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Second wave is on its way - and Oxford University professor explains why there's no way we can stop it

Professor Sir John Bell thinks there is a 'really bumpy' winter ahead for the UK

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A top academic has warned of a second wave of coronavirus and a difficult winter ahead.

Professor Sir John Bell, regius professor of medicine at the University of Oxford, said he thinks there is a “really bumpy” winter on the way, especially with the additional risk of flu.

The expert also pointed out the importance of easy-to-access tests which are non-invasive, particularly for schools and universities.

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Speaking on a Royal Society of Medicine webinar, Prof Bell said: "My bet is that we will get a second wave, and the vaccines won't get here in time to stop the second wave.

"And I'm not sure the new home testing is going to get there in time either, but it perhaps will take the edge off it.

"But then I suspect by Christmas or early in the new year, there may be more than one option for vaccines.

"My suspicion is the vaccines will work a bit, they won't sterilise people, but they'll take the edge off the disease, and they'll definitely be worth using for a population.

"But they won't... they're not going to solve this problem. And by the way, the rest of the world is still going to have Covid going through the winter."

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He added: "But just to be crystal clear, it's going to be a bumpy winter. There's nothing I can see that's going to make this an easy winter."

Prof Bell pointed out that people are "still sceptical" about vaccines, adding: "There's a real issue of trust I think at the moment.

"And we've got to maintain that trust if we're going to make any vaccine programme successful."

Speaking about testing and schools, Prof Bell said there is data which suggests that children are "pretty infectious" when they have the virus.

"They're usually asymptomatic and they're quite infectious, so managing the disease in a school environment is going to be really important for overall trace, trace and isolate programme," he said.

He said easy-to-access tests which are non-invasive will be a "real differentiator" in our ability to manage the disease.

"I think every school is going to want some capacity to do that, as will universities, as will boarding schools and independent schools," he said.

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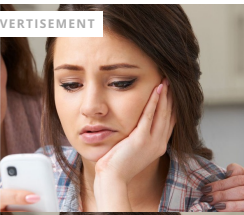
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Prof Bell also said it may be easier to get to herd immunity if lots of people have T-cell immunity.

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Scientists have already said measuring T-cell response could be a more reliable indication of how coronavirus is spreading in the community than antibody testing.

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T-cells can wipe out viruses if usual immune cells are unsuccessful, with so-called "killer" T-cells attacking the illness directly.

Prof Bell said: "People calculating herd immunity I don't think assumed that we would have this level of T-cell immunity in the population.

"And that may make it easier to get to herd immunity if lots of us have got T-cell immunity that largely protects us from the disease, so we may be closer to herd immunity than we originally thought, and it'll be interesting to see how that plays out."

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