

Scotland to begin initial easing of virus lockdown

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Scotland's devolved government said Thursday it would start to ease slightly its coronavirus lockdown for the first time, two weeks after the rules began to be relaxed in England.

Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said the "careful changes", which would come into effect on Friday, focus mainly on "outdoor activity" because the risk of the virus spreading is lower outside.

People will now be allowed outside their homes for unlimited periods of leisure time, instead of only for an hour to exercise, and can meet with members of one other household.

But social distancing of at least two metres must be maintained at all times.

"You will also be able to, from tomorrow, sit or sunbathe in parks and open areas," Sturgeon told reporters at her daily virus briefing.

"I'm sure that will be welcomed by many—but especially by those who do not have gardens."

Most outdoor work can resume, and the construction industry will be allowed to restart site preparations, she added.

Garden centres and plant nurseries can reopen some services, while drive-through [food outlets](#) will be allowed to restart.

From next Wednesday, childminding services and nurseries that can operate outdoors will also be permitted to open.

However, there will continue to be limits on the number of children that can be cared for, with guidance for childminders set to be issued on Monday.

Sturgeon also said non-essential shops, pubs, restaurants and cafes must remain closed, though takeaway food outlets which have been operating can continue to do so.

She added further consultation and monitoring of the transmission rate of the virus would be required before the next phase of relaxing the rules could go ahead.

The UK government's rolling daily count of deaths by someone who had tested positive for COVID-19, now stands at 37,460, with 2,316 of those cases in Scotland.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson began easing England's lockdown measures in mid-May, but devolved leaders in Edinburgh, as well as Wales and Northern Ireland, have moved at a slower pace.

The governments in London and Scotland launched new contact tracing schemes on Thursday, which they hope will allow the lockdown to be relaxed further in the coming weeks.

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