

Britain takes its biggest step yet out of lockdown

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Younger children went back to schools in England on Monday and parliament geared up to resume normal service, as the world's second-worst-hit country in the coronavirus outbreak took its biggest step yet out

of a lockdown that police warned was becoming difficult to enforce.

Outdoor markets also swung open their gates and car showrooms tried to lure back customers and recoup losses suffered since Britain effectively shut down for business on March 23.

But sales at stalls were slow and some schools had half-empty classrooms due to lingering fears that a virus that has officially killed 38,500 people in Britain—and probably thousands more—was still circulating.

The devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have taken a more cautious approach, with more limited easing of restrictions, and schools remain shut.

"It's very different from usual," Danish Londoner John Jellesmark said on a visit to the usually bustling Camden Market in the north of the capital.

"It's still pretty slow, it looks like the market is basically waking up."

Too much, too soon?

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has set out a timeline that allows two million [younger children](#) in England to return to school on Monday and older ones from June 15.

But a survey conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research found that primary [school](#) leaders expect about half the families to keep their children home.

At Halley House School, in east London, principal Claire Syms said children who do turn up need to feel comfortable in an unfamiliar setting where the desks are spaced out and many around them wear masks.

"We've been really conscious about keeping things as normal and as consistent as we can for our children," Syms told AFP.

"We're really mindful of their wellbeing and their mental health."

The UK government has been encouraged by the positive experience of other European countries that have started to return to something resembling the old way of life.

The House of Commons returns from a break on Tuesday, and Johnson's minister for parliament, Jacob Rees-Mogg, wants MPs to start voting in person again, instead of remotely.

The issue was expected to be put to a physical vote.

But critics of the easing believe the so-called R rate of transmission—estimated nationally at between 0.7 and 0.9—was still dangerously close to the 1.0 figure above which the virus' spread grows.

They have warned the virus was still spreading too fast, and any return to work puts more vulnerable staff at risk.

'Unenforceable'

Scientists and lawmakers are not the only ones to express concern, despite the government insisting the reopening measures were "cautious and phased".

"We're only able to take these steps because of what we have achieved together so far," finance minister Rishi Sunak said as he toured Tachbrook Market in Pimlico, central London.

London's Metropolitan Police Federation chairman Ken Marsh said

current rules such as those allowing people to gather in groups of six in England were unenforceable.

"I don't think the public are taking much notice of what is laid down in front of them," Marsh told The Daily Telegraph. "They are doing it how they want to do it."

English parks and beaches have been inundated with people over two successive weekends during what meteorologists said was the driest May in more than 100 years.

Police had warned after seeing growing numbers ignore social distancing measures a week ago that they were serious about sanctioning those who gather in large groups.

But some London parks looked like one giant party on Sunday and police issued just a tiny fraction of the fines they had before people were allowed to leave their homes more freely on May 13.

"Policing have told the government that unless it's a huge gathering, it's pretty much unenforceable now," a senior police source told The Daily Telegraph.

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