

UK considers first local lockdown in COVID-19 pandemic

June 28 2020, by Danica Kirka



In this file photo dated April 17, 2020, showing nearly empty streets in Leicester to help curb the spread of the coronavirus. The English city of Leicester is reported Sunday June 28, 2020, to be suffering from a spike in coronavirus cases, leading to speculation that the city could be subject to Britain's first local COVID-19 lockdown later this week. (Joe Giddens/PA via AP)

Britain's government is considering a lockdown for the central English city of Leicester amid a spike of COVID-19 cases—the first time that a single U.K. area would face such an extreme measure during the pandemic.

The Sunday Times first reported that a lockdown could come within days after 658 new cases were recorded in the Leicester area in the two weeks up to June 16. Home Secretary Priti Patel acknowledged in a BBC interview Sunday that ministers were considering the move.

"There will be support going into Leicester and in fact the health secretary was in touch with many of us over the weekend explaining some of the measures, the support on testing, resources that will go into the local authority as well," Patel said. "With local flare-ups it is right we have a localized solution."

But Patel gave no indication of the number of people who could be affected by the local lockdown being discussed or whether the surrounding area would be affected. Leicester has a city population of 330,000.

The spike comes amid fears that the disease has been spreading through the city's large Asian community, who often live in multi-generational households. The local outbreak underscores the disproportionate hit that the pandemic has had on Britain's minority communities.



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Britain has Europe's worst confirmed [coronavirus](#) death toll, with some 43,600 dead and Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative government has been strongly criticized for what has been seen as a slow, chaotic response to the pandemic.

Britain is now slowly emerging from a total national lockdown imposed on March 23, with plans to ease things further by early next month. That reopening plan has rested on the notion that local outbreaks could be

tamped down through aggressive programs to track, test and trace those infected.

Now with a test case in the offing, it is becoming clear that carrying out such a plan may not prove so simple.

Keith Neal, emeritus professor of the epidemiology of infectious diseases at the University of Nottingham, said defining the lockdown area would be "one of the biggest problems," as local authority boundaries can run down the middle of a street.



A sign welcomes people to the English city of Leicester, Sunday June 28, 2020, as the city is reported to be suffering from a spike in coronavirus cases. The Government has said it is supporting officials in Leicester in their battle against COVID-19, after a report the city could be subject to Britain's first local

lockdown later this week. (Joe Giddens/PA via AP)

People will be confused as to who is in the [lockdown](#) and who is out, he said.

"Locking down at the regional level would be seen as unfair or worse, as Leicester City has really very little to do with rural Lincolnshire," he said. "People do not identify with their regional boundaries and many would not actually know where they are."

Local lawmaker Claudia Webbe accused the government of being slow to respond and said that [local authorities](#) have not been given the help and the information they need to attack the outbreak head on.

"What they've been doing is giving Leicester bows and arrows to address a major pandemic problem," she told the BBC. "This is ridiculous."

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