

UK at 'tipping point:' England braces for more restrictions

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People attend an anti-lockdown protest outside the Senedd Cymru in Cardiff Bay, Wales, Sunday, Oct. 11, 2020. So far the U.K. has experienced Europe's deadliest virus outbreak, with over 42,750 confirmed deaths. (Ben Birchall/PA via AP)

Millions of people in northern England are anxiously waiting to hear how

much further virus restrictions will be tightened as one of the British government's leading medical advisers warned Sunday that the country is at a crucial juncture in the second wave of the coronavirus.

England's deputy chief medical officer, Professor Jonathan Van-Tam, said the U.K. is at a "tipping point similar to where we were in March" following a sharp increase in new [coronavirus](#) cases.

"But we can prevent history repeating itself if we all act now," he said. "Now we know where it is and how to tackle it—let's grasp this opportunity and prevent history from repeating itself."

All across Europe including the U.K., there have been huge increases in coronavirus cases over the past few weeks following the reopening of large sectors of the economy, as well as schools and universities. Infection levels,—and deaths—in the U.K. are rising at their fastest rates in months.

Without quick action, there are fears that U.K. hospitals will be overwhelmed in the coming weeks at a time of year when they are already at their busiest with winter-related afflictions like the flu. The U.K. has experienced Europe's deadliest outbreak, with an official death toll of 42,825, up another 65 on Sunday.

Although coronavirus infections are rising throughout England, northern cities like Liverpool, Manchester and Newcastle have seen a disproportionate increase. While some [rural areas](#) in eastern England have less than 20 cases per 100,000 people, major metropolitan areas such as Liverpool, Manchester and Nottingham have recently recorded levels above 500 per 100,000, nearly as bad as Madrid or Brussels.



People attend an anti-lockdown protest outside the Senedd Cymru in Cardiff Bay, Wales, Sunday, Oct. 11, 2020. So far the U.K. has experienced Europe's deadliest virus outbreak, with over 42,750 confirmed deaths. (Ben Birchall/PA via AP)

As a result, national restrictions such as a 10 p.m. curfew on pubs and restaurants have been supplemented by local actions, including in some cases banning contacts between households. In Scotland's two biggest cities, Glasgow and Edinburgh, pubs have already closed for 16 days to suppress the outbreak.

In response to the virus' resurgence, Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to announce a new three-tier local lockdown system for England on Monday, which could temporarily close pubs and restaurants

in the virus hot spots. The speculation is household mixing, indoors or outside, will be banned in those areas put under the tightest restrictions. Liverpool's local leader has said he expects his city to face the most onerous restrictions from Wednesday.

He is briefing members of the Cabinet by conference call Sunday.



People are out socializing in Liverpool city centre, ahead of the 10 p.m. curfew that pubs and restaurants are subject to in order to combat the rise in coronavirus cases in England, Saturday, Oct. 10, 2020. Prime Minister Boris Johnson is on Monday expected to back a new three-tier local lockdown system, which could see pubs and restaurants in coronavirus hotspots in England being temporarily closed. (Peter Byrne/PA via AP)

Local leaders in northern England have vented their fury at the Conservative government over what they see as an "inadequate" wage support scheme that it announced Friday and for not properly telling them about the upcoming restrictions. The wage plan aims to help employees in companies that are forced to close because of virus restrictions, but mayors say it's not generous enough in paying only two-thirds of employees' wages and doesn't compensate those indirectly hit by any business closures, such as drink suppliers to pubs.

Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick on Sunday sought to assuage concerns that the government was being overly hierarchical in its approach. He also indicated that local authorities will be given more control over the national test and trace program, which has struggled to live up to Johnson's prediction that it would be "world-beating."

"In addition to the national infrastructure which is developing and increasing with every passing week, we're also going to be making use of local councils to do contact tracing in particular, because there is clear evidence that local councils are good at that, as you'd expect," he told the BBC.



A woman holds a banner during an anti-lockdown protest outside the Senedd Cymru in Cardiff Bay, Wales, Sunday, Oct. 11, 2020. So far the U.K. has experienced Europe's deadliest virus outbreak, with over 42,750 confirmed deaths. (Ben Birchall/PA via AP)



A worker removes tables from outside the Beehive Inn, as temporary restrictions announced by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon to help curb the spread of coronavirus have come into effect from 6pm, in Edinburgh, Friday, Oct. 9, 2020. (Andrew Milligan/PA via AP)



A man stacks away chairs outside The Last Drop pub, as temporary restrictions announced by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon to help curb the spread of coronavirus have come into effect from 6pm, in Edinburgh, Friday, Oct. 9, 2020. (Andrew Milligan/PA via AP)



Left over ice dumped on the street in Glasgow in a protest by hospitality workers, as temporary restrictions announced by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon to help curb the spread of coronavirus have come into effect from 6pm, in Glasgow, Scotland, Friday, Oct. 9, 2020. (Douglas Barrie/PA via AP)



Left over ice dumped on the street in Glasgow in a protest by hospitality workers, as temporary restrictions announced by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon to help curb the spread of coronavirus have come into effect from 6pm, in Glasgow, Scotland, Friday, Oct. 9, 2020. (Douglas Barrie/PA via AP)



Two women walk past pubs in Edinburgh, as temporary restrictions announced by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon to help curb the spread of coronavirus have come into effect from 6pm, in Edinburgh, Friday, Oct. 9, 2020. (Andrew Milligan/PA via AP)

As well as facing questions over its coronavirus strategy, government members were having to respond to accusations of potential wrongdoing.

Jenrick, himself, denied there was anything wrong in the fact that he and a junior minister in his department approved payments to towns in each other's constituencies from a government fund earmarked for deprived areas. He insisted there was a "robust and fair" methodology behind the allocations.

Separately, Health Secretary Matt Hancock denied claims that he broke the government's drinking curfew after the Mail on Sunday newspaper claimed he was seen having a drink in a House of Commons bar after 10 p.m.

"The proposed timeline of events is false and no rules have been broken," a spokesman for the health secretary said.

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