

Tough virus rules imposed on Manchester after talks collapse

October 20 2020, by Jill Lawless and Sylvia Hui



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson speaks, during a coronavirus media briefing in Downing Street, London, Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2020. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson says he is imposing the highest level of coronavirus restrictions on the Greater Manchester region, after days-long negotiations between his government and local leaders who reject the measures broke down with no deal reached. (Leon Neal/Pool Photo via AP)

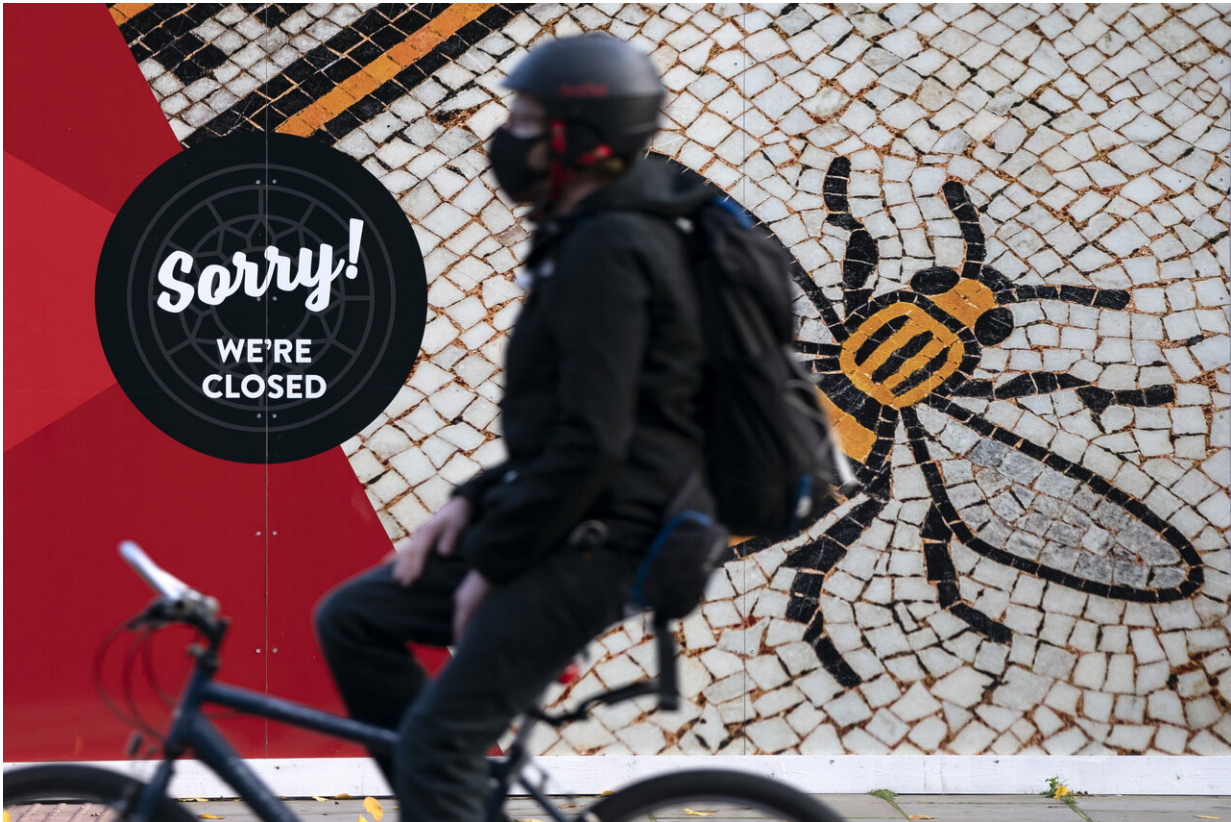
British Prime Minister Boris Johnson imposed strict coronavirus restrictions on England's second-largest urban area Tuesday, after talks with officials in Greater Manchester collapsed over how much financial aid should be handed to residents whose livelihoods will be hit by the new measures.

Johnson, who has been struggling to impose his plan for localized restrictions on restive regions, said he "bitterly" regrets ordering measures that would damage businesses. But he stressed that not acting would put lives and the health care system in Manchester at risk.

Britain's government and local politicians have been standing off for days over the effectiveness of a three-tier alert system Johnson introduced last week. Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham has been fighting for more financial support for workers and businesses affected by the restrictions in his region of almost 3 million people.

At a minute past midnight on Friday, Greater Manchester will join the Liverpool and Lancashire regions of northwest England which have been placed in Tier 3, the highest level. That means that pubs have to close, and people are barred from mixing with members of other households. Officials also advise against travel into and out of Tier 3 areas.

"Unfortunately an agreement wasn't reached and I do regret this," Johnson said, adding that his government has made a "generous and extensive offer" to support the region's businesses but Burnham refused.



A man on a bike rides past a sign in Manchester, England, Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2020. The British government appeared poised Tuesday to impose strict coronavirus restrictions on England's second-largest city after talks with officials in Greater Manchester failed to reach an agreement on financial support for people whose livelihoods will be hit by the new measures(AP Photo/Jon Super)

Burnham, a member of the opposition Labour Party, accused Johnson's government of walking away from negotiations. He had sought 90 million pounds (\$117 million) to help people get through the winter, and had been willing to accept 65 million pounds. It was unclear how much the city would receive.

He said the restrictions would affect the poorest and those in greatest need for financial help: "people working in pubs, in bookies, driving

taxis, people too often forgotten by those in power."

Burnham added that Manchester has been under some form of restrictions for months, and tightening them further "would be certain to increase levels of poverty, homelessness and hardship within our city region."

"It cannot be right to close people's place of work, to shut somebody's business, without giving them proper support," he told reporters. "It's brutal to be honest, isn't it. This is no way to run the country in a national crisis."



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson returns to Downing Street after attending a Cabinet meeting in London, Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2020. (AP Photo/Kirsty Wigglesworth)

Johnson's government is resisting a recommendation from its scientific advisers to have a short "circuit-breaker" lockdown to curb the spread of coronavirus. Instead it has adopted a three-tier system for England, with areas classed as medium, high or very high virus risk.

Authorities across the U.K. are imposing new restrictions on business and social interactions as COVID-19 infections rise throughout all age groups, filling hospital beds and intensive care wards. Britain has Europe's deadliest coronavirus outbreak, with almost 44,000 confirmed deaths.

Under the U.K.'s system of devolved government, the regional administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales control health policy in their areas and the U.K. government makes the rules for England.

In Scotland, pubs and other leisure facilities are closed and sports and live events are banned in the biggest cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, with slightly less stringent restrictions elsewhere.



Greater Manchester mayor Andy Burnham speaks to the media outside Bridgewater Hall, following last-ditch talks with the Prime Minister aimed at securing additional financial support for his consent on new coronavirus restrictions, in Manchester, England, Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2020. The British government appeared poised Tuesday to impose strict coronavirus restrictions on England's second-largest city after talks with officials in Greater Manchester failed to reach an agreement on financial support for people whose livelihoods will be hit by the new measures (AP Photo/Jon Super)



Greater Manchester mayor Andy Burnham looks on, outside Bridgewater Hall, following last-ditch talks with the Prime Minister aimed at securing additional financial support for his consent on new coronavirus restrictions, in Manchester, England, Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2020. The British government appeared poised Tuesday to impose strict coronavirus restrictions on England's second-largest city after talks with officials in Greater Manchester failed to reach an agreement on financial support for people whose livelihoods will be hit by the new measures (AP Photo/Jon Super)



A woman walks by coronavirus related graffiti on a wall, in Manchester, England, Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2020. The British government appeared poised Tuesday to impose strict coronavirus restrictions on England's second-largest city after talks with officials in Greater Manchester failed to reach an agreement on financial support for people whose livelihoods will be hit by the new measures(AP Photo/Jon Super)



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson walks across Downing Street to attend a Cabinet meeting in London, Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2020. (AP Photo/Kirsty Wigglesworth)



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson speaks, during a coronavirus media briefing in Downing Street, London, Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2020. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson says he is imposing the highest level of coronavirus restrictions on the Greater Manchester region, after days-long negotiations between his government and local leaders who reject the measures broke down with no deal reached. (Leon Neal/Pool Photo via AP)

Northern Ireland has closed schools for two weeks, banned most social gatherings and shut down many businesses including bars and restaurants for a month.

Wales has gone the furthest, announcing a two-week "firebreak" lockdown starting Friday that will close all non-essential businesses and ban most trips outside the home.

Welsh First Minister Mark Drakeford said he was opting for a short, sharp shock over a longer period of less stringent restrictions.

"The advice to us—partly because of the impact on people's mental health—was that if you could keep this period of time as short as you could, that would help to mitigate that impact," Drakeford told the BBC.

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