

Wales to become first European territory to re-enter lockdown (Update)

October 19 2020



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Wales will become the first territory in Europe to reimpose a full lockdown later this week, after First Minister Mark Drakeford announced Monday that the nation would shut down for two weeks to reduce a surge in coronavirus cases.

Approximately three million residents in Wales will be told to stay at home from Friday, except for very limited purposes such as exercise or employment, and cannot mix with each other indoors or outside under the new "firebreaker" measures.

Non-food retailers, cafes, restaurants, pubs and hotels as well as services such as hairdressers and beauticians must all close for 14 days from 6pm (1700 GMT) on Friday.

Schools, which will shut next week for a statutory holiday, will only reopen for primary, special-needs and some secondary school year groups during the second week of the lockdown.

Cases have surged across Wales over recent weeks, despite tightened local restrictions in various locations, with the seven-day rolling incidence rate standing at more than 130 cases per 100,000 people.

"This firebreak is our best chance of regaining control of the virus and avoiding a much-longer and damaging national lockdown," Drakeford said as he unveiled the new restrictions.

"Unless we act the NHS will not be able to look after the increasing number that are falling ill," he added, referring to the state-run health service.

Drakeford said the "difficult decision" to reimpose such stringent measures until November 9 had been made "with a heavy heart" and the two-week duration was "the shortest we can make it".

"We have a small window of opportunity to act," he said.

The Welsh leader noted £300 million (\$390 million, 331 million euros) would be allocated to an "economic resilience fund" to help struggling

businesses hit by the closure order.

MP hospitalised

The UK has suffered Europe's worst death toll from coronavirus, with more than 43,000 deaths, despite imposing a nationwide stay-at-home order in late March.

With fears of a second wave—nearly 19,000 new cases and 80 new deaths were reported on Monday—its four devolved governments are adopting different levels of restrictions to contain infection rates.

Northern Ireland announced Friday it would shut down pubs and restaurants for a month and extended the school holidays, while pubs and other licensed premises in central Scotland closed entirely earlier this month for 16 days.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who was criticised for acting too slowly earlier in the year, favours a strategy of localised lockdowns in England to avoid worsening the historic recession sparked by the outbreak.

"We keep all our measures under review but the prime minister has made very clear that he doesn't want a return to something like a national lockdown," his spokesman said Monday.

"You're not going to save lives in parts of the country that have higher infection rates by closing down parts of the country that have lower infection rates.

"Wherever possible, we want to introduce targeted local action."

However, Johnson's regional tiered approach is being tested by Andy

Burnham, the Labour mayor of the north west English city of Manchester.

Burnham has for several days been opposing a lockdown on his city without increased central government funding to help businesses and workers.

Johnson warned last week he may intervene if no deal can be reached to force the city into the top "very high" risk category, and his spokesman said Monday that local intensive care capacity could be overwhelmed by November 12.

Yasmin Qureshi, a Labour MP from nearby Bolton, announced on Twitter on Monday that she had been admitted to hospital with pneumonia after testing positive for the virus.

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