

# Pubs to stay shut in many areas in new English virus curbs

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Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson waves as he leaves 10 Downing Street in London, Thursday, Nov. 26, 2020. Johnson leaves self-quarantine today after having close contact with a lawmaker who contracted the coronavirus in mid November. (AP Photo/Kirsty Wigglesworth)

Most people in England will continue to face tight restrictions on socializing and business after a nationwide lockdown ends next week, with pubs and restaurants ordered to remain shut in areas that are home to more than 20 million people.

The government announced details on Thursday of three-level regional measures that will take effect Dec. 2. Only three remote and island areas with a total population of 700,000 are in the lowest tier, where pubs and restaurants can open almost as normal and members of different households can meet up indoors.

More than half of England's 56 million people, including London's 8.6 million residents, are in the middle level, where most shops, restaurants and leisure businesses can open—with some restrictions—and audiences can return in limited numbers to theaters and sports stadiums.

Another 23 million people in a huge chunk of central and northern England, including the large cities of Birmingham and Manchester, along with the large southeastern county of Kent, will be placed in the top tier, where pubs and restaurants can only serve takeout and delivery, and leisure venues such as cinemas and bowling alleys must stay closed. Shops, gyms, hairdressers and beauty parlors will be able to open across the country, however.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said "tough measures" would be needed until spring, when it's hoped a combination of vaccines and mass testing can help life return to normal.

"If we ease off now we risk losing control over this virus all over again, casting aside our hard-won gains and forcing us back into a New Year national lockdown, with all the damage that would mean," he said at a news conference.



London taxi driver Michael Harris, dressed as Santa Claus, who said he was in hospital with coronavirus for three weeks earlier in the year, poses for photographs outside Burlington Arcade, during England's second coronavirus lockdown in London, Wednesday, Nov. 25, 2020. With major COVID-19 vaccines showing high levels of protection, British officials are cautiously—and they stress cautiously—optimistic that life may start returning to normal by early April. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham)

The government imposed a four-week lockdown in England early this month to curb an autumn surge in coronavirus cases, with travel restricted and nonessential businesses closed. The government's statistics office says the infection rate appears to have leveled off, but Health Secretary Matt Hancock said "we must remain vigilant."

The measures must be approved by Parliament, which is due to vote next week. Johnson faces opposition from some of his own Conservative Party lawmakers, who say the economic damage from the measures outweighs the public health gains.

Operators of pubs and theaters were among those warning that they can't make money under conditions imposed in tier 2, where alcohol can only be served with meals and entertainment venues are restricted to half capacity.

"There has got to be a real danger that if these restrictions aren't lifted very, very soon now there will be a lot of businesses that simply won't reopen," said Conservative legislator Graham Brady, who said he planned to vote against the "authoritarian" measures.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own set of restrictions.

The new measures will be reviewed Dec. 16 and lifted for five days over Christmas across the whole U.K. During the festive period travel restrictions will be paused and up to three households will be able to form a "Christmas bubble" for socializing.



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Britain has had Europe's worst coronavirus outbreak, with more than 57,000 confirmed deaths.

The government hopes that a combination of mass testing using rapid-turnaround tests and vaccines will allow most restrictions to be lifted by spring 2021.

Hancock said a mass testing project in Liverpool reduced infections by three-quarters and allowed the city to be moved down from tier three to tier two.

Three coronavirus vaccines, developed by Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca, have shown promising results in clinical trials but have yet to be approved by Britain's medicines regulator.

In the meantime, government scientific advisers are warning people to be careful when using their temporary freedom to meet family and friends at Christmas.

"Would I want someone to see their family? Of course, that's what Christmas is about," England's Chief Medical Officer, Chris Whitty, said.

"But would I encourage someone to hug and kiss their elderly relatives? No, I would not."

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