

UK eyes traveler quarantine as virus toll passes 100,000

January 26 2021, by Jill Lawless



In this May 5, 2020 file photo a member of medical staff cares for a patient with coronavirus in the intensive care unit at the Royal Papworth Hospital in Cambridge, England. More than 100,000 people have died in the United Kingdom after contracting the coronavirus. That's according to government figures released Tuesday Jan. 26, 2021. Britain is the fifth country in the world to pass that mark, after the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico, and by far the smallest. The U.S. has recorded more than 400,000 COVID-19 deaths, the world's highest total, but its population of about 330 million is about five times

Britain's. (Neil Hall/Pool via AP, File)

Britain's official death toll in the coronavirus pandemic passed 100,000 on Tuesday, a dreaded milestone reached as the government considered imposing hotel quarantines on international travelers to stop new virus variants reaching the country.

The government said 100,162 people have died in the pandemic after testing positive for the virus, including 1,631 new deaths reported Tuesday.

"it is hard to compute the sorrow contained in that grim statistic," a somber Prime Minister Boris Johnson said. "The years of life lost, the family gatherings not attended and, for so many relatives, the missed chance even to say goodbye."

Britain is the fifth country in the world to record 100,000 virus-related deaths, after the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico, and by far the smallest. The U.S. has recorded more than 400,000 COVID-19 deaths, the world's highest total, but its population of about 330 million is about five times the size of Britain's 67 million.

As in other countries, the real toll is likely even higher. U.K. statistics agencies say that the number of deaths registered that mention COVID-19 on the death certificate is more than 108,000.

Opposition politicians and public health officials accuse Johnson's Conservative government of being slow to act throughout the outbreak when it has come to lockdowns and travel restrictions. A more transmissible new variant identified in southeast England late last year also helped push infections to new highs and plunged the country into its

third lockdown.



In this Tuesday, March 3, 2020 file photo Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson reacts during a press conference at Downing Street on the government's coronavirus action plan in London. More than 100,000 people have died in the United Kingdom after contracting the coronavirus. That's according to government figures released Tuesday Jan. 26, 2021. Britain is the fifth country in the world to pass that mark, after the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico, and by far the smallest. The U.S. has recorded more than 400,000 COVID-19 deaths, the world's highest total, but its population of about 330 million is about five times Britain's. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein, File)

Johnson said at a televised news conference that he took "full

responsibility for everything that the government has done."

"What I can tell you is that we truly did everything we could, and continue to do everything that we can, to minimize loss of life and to minimize suffering in what has been a very, very difficult stage and a very, very difficult crisis for our country," he said.

British authorities are banking on a successful vaccination program to help the country suppress the outbreak and ease the lockdown. So far more than 6.8 million people have received the first of two doses of a vaccine, and the government aims to give 15 million people, including everyone over 70, a jab by Feb. 15.

Johnson has promised a public inquiry into Britain's handling of the outbreak—but not until the crisis is over.



In this Wednesday March 11, 2020 file photo, a general view from the Grand Stand as Envoi Allen ridden by Davy Russell wins the Ballymore Novices' Hurdle day two of the Cheltenham Horse Racing Festival at Cheltenham Racecourse, England. More than 100,000 people have died in the United Kingdom after contracting the coronavirus. That's according to government figures released Tuesday Jan. 26, 2021. Britain is the fifth country in the world to pass that mark, after the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico, and by far the smallest. The U.S. has recorded more than 400,000 COVID-19 deaths, the world's highest total, but its population of about 330 million is about five times Britain's. (Tim Goode/PA via AP, File)

"We will make sure we learn the lessons and reflect and prepare," he said.

Johnson was meeting with senior officials Tuesday evening to consider tighter border measures. The BBC reported that U.K. citizens and residents arriving from most of southern Africa and South America, as well as Portugal, will have to self-isolate in a hotel for 10 days at their own expense.

Quarantine hotels have been used to limit virus transmissions in countries including Australia, New Zealand, China, India and Singapore but the practice has not been widely adopted in Europe.

Current lockdown rules bar Britons from taking foreign holidays, although essential travel is allowed. People arriving from overseas are already required to self-isolate in Britain, but enforcement is patchy.

Nick Thomas-Symonds, law-and-order spokesman for Britain's opposition Labour Party, said only a "comprehensive hotel quarantine

system" would be strong enough to keep new strains of the virus from spreading in the U.K.



In this March 17, 2020 file photo people on a busy tube train at rush hour despite Prime Minister Boris Johnson calling on people avoid all non-essential contacts and travel, in London. More than 100,000 people have died in the United Kingdom after contracting the coronavirus. That's according to government figures released Tuesday Jan. 26, 2021. (Ian Hinchliffe/PA via AP, File)



In this Tuesday, March 31, 2020 file photo a patient is helped from an ambulance as they arrive at St Thomas' Hospital, one of many hospitals that are in the front line of the coronavirus outbreak, in London. (AP Photo/Kirsty Wigglesworth)



In this Sunday, April 5, 2020 file photo a woman is told to go home by a police officer on a motorbike to stop the spread of coronavirus and keep the park open for people observing the British government's guidance of social distancing, only using parks for dog walking, one form of exercise a day, like a run, walk, or cycle alone or with members of the same household, on Primrose Hill in London. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham, File)



In this March 17, 2020 file photo people stand drinking outside the Coach & Horses pub on Saint Patrick's Day in the Covent Garden district of central London, which is a popular tourist area. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham, File)



In this May 5, 2020 file photo members of the medical staff care for a patient with coronavirus as they are treated in the intensive care unit at the Royal Papworth Hospital in Cambridge, England. More than 100,000 people have died in the United Kingdom after contracting the coronavirus. That's according to government figures released Tuesday Jan. 26, 2021. Britain is the fifth country in the world to pass that mark, after the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico, and by far the smallest. The U.S. has recorded more than 400,000 COVID-19 deaths, the world's highest total, but its population of about 330 million is about five times Britain's. (Neil Hall/Pool via AP, File)



In this Wednesday, April 8, 2020 file photo a video screen displays a message urging people to stay home in a nearly deserted Piccadilly Circus in London. More than 100,000 people have died in the United Kingdom after contracting the coronavirus. That's according to government figures released Tuesday Jan. 26, 2021. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham, File)



In this May 5, 2020 file photo a patient with coronavirus is treated in the intensive care unit at the Royal Papworth Hospital in Cambridge, England. (Neil Hall/Pool via AP, File)



In this Aug. 26, 2020 file photo a nurse holds a painting of Prime Minister Boris Johnson clapping with blood on his hands as part of a demonstration of NHS workers at hospitals across London to demand a 15 per cent pay rise by the government in London.(AP Photo/Kirsty Wigglesworth, File)



In this Wednesday, June 24, 2020 file photo on Britain's hottest day of the year so far with temperatures reaching 32.6 degrees Celsius (90 degrees Fahrenheit) at Heathrow airport, people relax on Brighton Beach in Brighton, England. More than 100,000 people have died in the United Kingdom after contracting the coronavirus. That's according to government figures released Tuesday Jan. 26, 2021. Britain is the fifth country in the world to pass that mark, after the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico, and by far the smallest. The U.S. has recorded more than 400,000 COVID-19 deaths, the world's highest total, but its population of about 330 million is about five times Britain's. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham, File)



In this Sept. 22, 2020 file photo a waiter serves in a restaurant in Soho in London. More than 100,000 people have died in the United Kingdom after contracting the coronavirus. That's according to government figures released Tuesday Jan. 26, 2021. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein, File)



In this Wednesday, Sept. 23, 2020 file photo British Health Secretary Matt Hancock walks through Downing Street on his way into number 10, in London. More than 100,000 people have died in the United Kingdom after contracting the coronavirus. That's according to government figures released Tuesday Jan. 26, 2021. Britain is the fifth country in the world to pass that mark, after the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico, and by far the smallest. The U.S. has recorded more than 400,000 COVID-19 deaths, the world's highest total, but its population of about 330 million is about five times Britain's. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham, File)



In this Sept. 26, 2020 file photo riot police face protesters who took part in a 'We Do Not Consent' rally at Trafalgar Square, organised by Stop New Normal, to protest against coronavirus restrictions, in London. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein, File)



In this May 5, 2020 file photo members of the clinical staff wearing Personal Protective Equipment PPE care for a patient with coronavirus in the intensive care unit at the Royal Papworth Hospital in Cambridge, England. More than 100,000 people have died in the United Kingdom after contracting the coronavirus. That's according to government figures released Tuesday Jan. 26, 2021. Britain is the fifth country in the world to pass that mark, after the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico, and by far the smallest. (Neil Hall/Pool via AP, File)



In this Sept. 30, 2020 file photo Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson gestures, during a coronavirus briefing in Downing Street, London. More than 100,000 people have died in the United Kingdom after contracting the coronavirus. That's according to government figures released Tuesday Jan. 26, 2021. Britain is the fifth country in the world to pass that mark, after the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico, and by far the smallest. (Jack Hill/Pool Photo via AP, File)



In this Dec. 2, 2020 file photo face masks to curb the spread of coronavirus are displayed for sale on a stall as non-essential shops are allowed to reopen after England's second lockdown ended at midnight, on Oxford Street, in London. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham, File)



In this Tuesday, Dec. 8, 2020 file photo a nurse administers the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine at Guy's Hospital in London as U.K. health authorities rolled out the first doses of a widely tested and independently reviewed COVID-19 vaccine. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein, File)



In this Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2021 file photo a patient is pushed on a trolley outside the Royal London Hospital in east London during England's third national lockdown since the coronavirus outbreak began. More than 100,000 people have died in the United Kingdom after contracting the coronavirus, less than a year into Europe's deadliest outbreak, figures from the government showed Tuesday. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham, File)



In this Saturday, Dec. 12, 2020 file photo crowds of shoppers walk under the Christmas lights in Regent Street, in London. (AP Photo/Alberto Pezzali, File)



In this Jan. 17, 2021 file photo travelers arrive at Heathrow Airport in London. Britain is the fifth country in the world to record 100,000 virus-related deaths, after the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico, and by far the smallest. The U.S. has recorded more than 400,000 COVID-19 deaths, the world's highest total, but its population of about 330 million is about five times Britain's. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein, File)



In this Jan. 19, 2021 file photo a man wearing a face mask walks past a globe in front of the London School of Economics in London. Britain is the fifth country in the world to record 100,000 virus-related deaths, after the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico, and by far the smallest. The U.S. has recorded more than 400,000 COVID-19 deaths, the world's highest total, but its population of about 330 million is about five times Britain's. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein, File)

"It cannot be restricted to only a handful of countries, leaving gaping holes in our defenses against different strains of the virus emerging around the world," he said.

Former Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt, a Conservative, said the biggest problem was that many people already in the U.K. do not comply with self-isolation orders.

"I think the elephant in the room in this is not the 10,000 or so people who arrive in the U.K. every day, it is the 30,000 people in the U.K. already who are asked to quarantine by Test and Trace and are not doing so," Hunt told the BBC.

He backed calls for a self-isolation payment from the government so people exposed to the virus or infected did not lose income by staying at home.

"We may also need to enforce more compliance, but I think you can only do that if you are making people a reasonable offer to support them financially for any losses they may have from having to stay home," Hunt said.

People arriving in the U.K. from abroad also must show they have tested negative for COVID-19. Britain recently banned direct flights from South Africa, Brazil and Portugal—and barred entry to travelers from there and some nearby countries—in response to new variants of the virus.

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