

UK eyes tougher quarantine as virus toll passes 100,000

January 26 2021, by Jill Lawless



Arriving passengers walk past a sign in the arrivals area at Heathrow Airport in London, Tuesday, Jan. 26, 2021, during England's third national lockdown since the coronavirus outbreak began. The British government are on Tuesday expected to discuss whether to force some travellers arriving in the UK to quarantine in hotels to try to curb the spread of coronavirus. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham)

Britain's official death toll in the coronavirus pandemic passed 100,000 on Tuesday, a dreaded milestone reached as the government considered requiring hotel quarantines for 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.

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 57 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 Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative government of being slow to act throughout the outbreak when it has come to lockdowns and travel restrictions.

Vaccines Minister Nadhim Zahawi said there would be an announcement Tuesday on plans for 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.



A digital display on a bus stop informs passengers of cleaning protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Oxford Street in London, Tuesday, Jan. 26, 2021. The U.K. will soon become the fifth country in the world to record 100,000 COVID-19 deaths, after the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico—all of which have much larger populations than Britain's 67 million people. As of Monday, the U.K.'s official coronavirus death toll was 98,531. (AP Photo/Alastair Grant)

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.

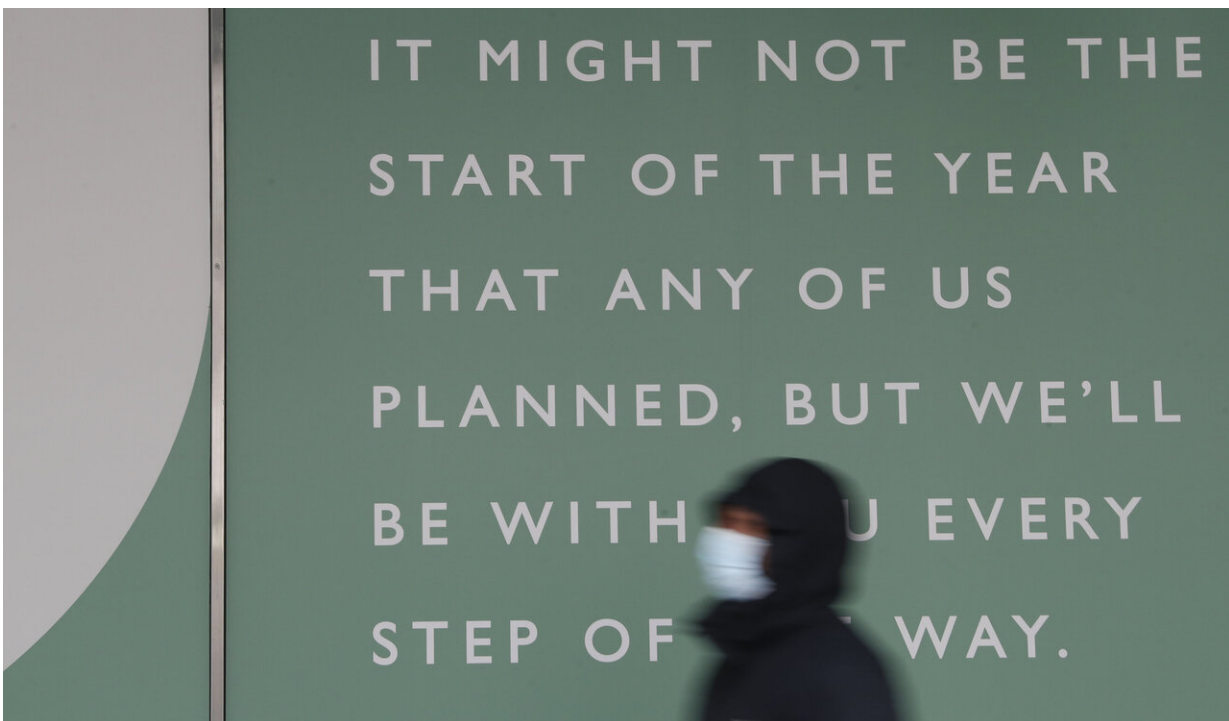
Zahawi did not give details of the planned the announcement but said tightening border rules was "the right thing to do, because ... as we

vaccinate more of the adult population, if there are new variants like the South African or the Brazilian variants, we need to be very careful."

Current lockdown rules, imposed to slow the spread of a new, more transmissible virus variant first identified in southeast England, 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.



A man wearing a mask to prevent the spread of COVID-19, walks past a

department store sign on Oxford Street London, Tuesday, Jan. 26, 2021. The U.K. will soon become the fifth country in the world to record 100,000 COVID-19 deaths, after the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico—all of which have much larger populations than Britain's 67 million people. As of Monday, the U.K.'s official coronavirus death toll was 98,531. (AP Photo/Alastair Grant)

"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.



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)



A man pushes luggage past a welcome to London sign at Heathrow Airport in London, Tuesday, Jan. 26, 2021, during England's third national lockdown since the coronavirus outbreak began. The British government are on Tuesday expected to discuss whether to force some travellers arriving in the UK to quarantine in hotels to try to curb the spread of coronavirus. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham)



People in the arrivals area at Heathrow Airport in London, Tuesday, Jan. 26, 2021, during England's third national lockdown since the coronavirus outbreak began. The British government are on Tuesday expected to discuss whether to force some travellers arriving in the UK to quarantine in hotels to try to curb the spread of coronavirus. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham)



A digital display on a bus stop tells passengers that it is mandatory to wear a mask to prevent the spread of COVID-19 on public transport in London, Tuesday, Jan. 26, 2021. The U.K. will soon become the fifth country in the world to record 100,000 COVID-19 deaths, after the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico—all of which have much larger populations than Britain's 67 million people. As of Monday, the U.K.'s official coronavirus death toll was 98,531. (AP Photo/Alastair Grant)



Pedestrians walk past a sign advising them to keep 2 meters apart on Oxford Street in London, Tuesday, Jan. 26, 2021. The U.K. will soon become the fifth country in the world to record 100,000 COVID-19 deaths, after the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico—all of which have much larger populations than Britain's 67 million people. As of Monday, the U.K.'s official coronavirus death toll was 98,531. (AP Photo/Alastair Grant)



A lone bus passenger sits on the top deck, wearing a mask to prevent the spread of COVID-19, in Oxford Street London, Tuesday, Jan. 26, 2021. The U.K. will soon become the fifth country in the world to record 100,000 COVID-19 deaths, after the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico—all of which have much larger populations than Britain's 67 million people. As of Monday, the U.K.'s official coronavirus death toll was 98,531. (AP Photo/Alastair Grant)

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.

British authorities are banking on a successful vaccination program to help the country suppress the outbreak and ease its current 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.

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