

Australian state goes back in lockdown as UK economy shrinks record amount

February 12 2021



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Australia ordered more than six million people into an emergency coronavirus lockdown Friday, throwing a showpiece tennis tournament into disarray as the pandemic's economic cost was laid bare in badly hit

Britain.

The decision to confine the people of Melbourne and surrounding areas to their homes for five days illustrates the tough choices faced by many nations as they struggle to balance reopening and keeping infections under control.

"It's rough. It's going to be a rough few days for everyone," said tennis star Serena Williams, reacting to the lockdown news moments after her latest victory.

The move comes as the COVID-19 death toll heads towards 2.4 million, with 107 million people sickened since the virus emerged in China a little over a year ago.

Victoria state Premier Daniel Andrews said the lockdown was needed to halt an outbreak of the "hyper-infectious" UK strain of COVID-19, which leaked from a quarantine hotel at Melbourne airport.

"I am confident that this short, sharp circuit-breaker will be effective. We will be able to smother this," he said.

But the timing for Melbourne could not be worse.

The city—COVID-free for three months—is currently hosting the Australian Open Grand Slam, with tens of thousands of socially distanced fans gathering to watch [international players](#).

While play will continue under the restrictions, fans will no longer be permitted and players must restrict themselves to biosecure "bubbles".

The shutdown will not comfort Japan's Olympic organisers, with the much more complicated Tokyo games due to kick off in July after

multiple delays.

And closer to home, Melbourne business owners were left distraught at being forced to close over Valentine's Day weekend, when many had hoped to recoup losses following the brutal 100-day lockdown last year.

'Serious shock'

On the other side of the world, the UK—which has Europe's highest virus death toll after a heavily criticised initial response to the pandemic—reported a record contraction in its economy.

Finance minister Rishi Sunak admitted the impact would be a "serious shock" and warned: "We should expect the economy to get worse before it gets better."

Official data released Friday showed the economy shrank by a record 9.9 percent last year on the fallout from the [coronavirus](#) crisis, despite a one percent gain in the fourth quarter.

Much of the UK re-entered lockdown in early January to curb the more transmissible COVID-19 variant, with restrictions similar to initial curbs imposed in late March last year.

There were [financial woes](#) elsewhere in Europe, with top Dutch bank ING announcing Friday that profits had plummeted 48 percent due to the pandemic.

The British data came one week after the Bank of England forecast economic recovery on the back of the UK's successful ongoing vaccines rollout.

'A breath of fresh air'

In the United States—the world's hardest-hit country with more than 470,000 deaths—Joe Biden announced plans to vaccinate nearly all American citizens by the end of July.

On Thursday the US president said deals had been struck for 100 million more Moderna and 100 million more Pfizer vaccines.

With the latest vaccine purchases, the United States is on track "to have enough supply for 300 million Americans by the end of July", Biden said, meaning enough inoculations for all eligible people.

The US immunisation campaign had gotten off to a shaky start in December, and even as recently as Thursday, Los Angeles moved to temporarily close five major inoculation centres including its giant Dodger Stadium site, due to vaccine shortage.

And in Canada, people celebrated the reopening of Montreal's Museum of Fine Arts, rescuing the institution from financial ruin after being shuttered for months.

Richard Cassidy, 45, described being allowed back in to see the art as "like a dose of medicine, a breath of fresh air".

© 2021 AFP

Citation: Australian state goes back in lockdown as UK economy shrinks record amount (2021, February 12) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-02-australian-state-lockdown-uk-economy.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is

provided for information purposes only.