

England resumes outdoor gatherings as COVID lockdown eases

March 29 2021



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England enters the second phase of its lockdown easing on Monday thanks to a successful vaccination drive, but the government is urging vigilance as another wave of coronavirus sweeps Europe.

After schools reopened on March 8, England's stay-at-home order will be relaxed to enable outdoor gatherings of up to six people, or two households, in what newspapers are dubbing "Happy Monday".

While elite sports such as Premier League football have continued during the latest lockdown—minus fans—the new rules will allow amateur team sports to resume, along with tennis, golf, basketball and swimming outdoors.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he hoped that Monday "will kick-start a Great British summer of sport—with people of all ages reunited with teammates, and able to resume the activities they love".

"But we must remain cautious, with cases rising across Europe and new variants threatening our [vaccine rollout](#)," he added, urging the public to adhere to guidance on social distancing and hygiene.

In the third phase of reopening from April 12, the government plans to allow outdoors drinking in pub gardens, and non-essential retail such as hairdressers in England.

The devolved governments of the UK's other nations—Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—are moving at their own pace.

Johnson, whose own hair has grown increasingly unruly, said he was looking forward to going to the barbers, and to a pint of beer.

While conceding that continental Europe's latest wave of COVID-19 could hit Britain in about three weeks, he said at the weekend that the "key difference" was the vaccination drive.

"And as things stand, I can see absolutely nothing in the data to dissuade me from continuing along our roadmap to freedom, unlocking our

economy and getting back to the life we love," Johnson said on Saturday.

With more than 126,000 deaths, Britain has one of the world's worst mortality rates from the pandemic.

But on Sunday it passed the milestone of inoculating more than 30 million adults with a first dose of [coronavirus](#) vaccine, and the government intends to lift the lockdown fully in June.

It has so far been using two jabs, developed by Oxford University/AstraZeneca and BioNTech/Pfizer.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said the first batch of 17 million doses ordered by Britain of a third vaccine, from US company Moderna, was expected next month.

That would alleviate concerns about supplies from a major vaccine manufacturer in India, and an ongoing row with the European Union over AstraZeneca exports.

Dowden insisted the vaccination programme remains "on course" to hit the government's target of offering a first jab to all adults by the end of July, and said follow-up second doses were also on target.

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Citation: England resumes outdoor gatherings as COVID lockdown eases (2021, March 29)
retrieved 5 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-03-england-resumes-outdoor-covid-lockdown.html>

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