

UK officials: Vaccines effective against Indian variant

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British health officials expressed optimism Sunday that the coronavirus restrictions remaining in England can be lifted in June after an official study found that the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines offer effective

protection against the variant first identified in India.

Authorities in Britain have expressed concern in recent weeks that increasing cases of the Indian variant could jeopardize the U.K.'s so-far successful plan to reopen its economy. More than 2,880 cases of the Indian variant have been recorded in England, figures show.

The government has said the variant appears to be more transmissible, but there was still uncertainty about how concerning this was.

Jenny Harries, chief executive of the U.K. Health Security Agency, said officials in England are on track to proceed with the final stage of unlocking the country from June 21 if the public remains cautious.

"It's looking good if people are continuing to observe all of the safety signals," she told the BBC. However, she warned that the Indian variant is starting to become the dominant strain in parts of northwestern England, and people in hotspot areas need to be vigilant.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock also said he was "increasingly confident" the country can follow its unlocking plans.

Their comments came after a study by Public Health England found that two doses of the Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccines offer "high levels of protection" against symptomatic disease from the Indian variant.

The study, which took place between April 5 and May 16, found that the Pfizer [vaccine](#) is 88% effective against the variant after two doses. That compared with 93% effectiveness against the variant first identified in Kent, England, researchers said.

The AstraZeneca jab was 60% effective after both doses against the Indian variant, compared with 66% against the Kent variant.

Both vaccines were only 33% effective against symptomatic disease from the Indian variant three weeks after the first dose.

Tough lockdown rules eased in most parts of the U.K. earlier this month, largely thanks to an efficient vaccine rollout program. Socializing indoors in limited numbers are again allowed in homes, restaurants and pubs, and a blanket ban on traveling abroad was also partly lifted.

Officials have said they plan to reopen nightclubs and allow large events like festivals from June 21 if infection rates continue to stay low.

More than 37.7 million people, or 72% of the [adult population](#), have had their first vaccine dose in the U.K. About 42% have had their second dose.

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