

Johnson: England to lift last virus restrictions on July 19

July 12 2021, by Pan Pylas and Sylvia Hui



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson speaks during a media briefing on coronavirus in Downing Street, London, Monday, July 5, 2021. Johnson says people in England will no longer be required by law to wear face masks in indoor public spaces and to keep at least 1 meter (3 feet) apart as soon as later this month. Johnson on Monday confirmed plans to reopen society despite rising coronavirus cases. Credit: Daniel Leal-Olivas/Pool Photo via AP

All remaining lockdown restrictions in England will be lifted in a week despite a sharp rise in coronavirus cases, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson confirmed Monday. He said it was "the right moment to proceed" as schools close for summer vacation but urged people to "proceed with caution."

Johnson said although risks of the pandemic remain, [legal restrictions](#) will be replaced by a recommendation that people wear masks in crowded places and on public transport. Nightclubs and other venues with crowds should use [vaccine](#) passports for entry "as a matter of social responsibility," he added.

"This pandemic is not over. This disease, coronavirus, continues to carry risks for you and your family. We cannot simply revert instantly from Monday July 19 to life as it was before COVID," Johnson said.

The final stage of easing England's lockdown means that all restrictions on social gatherings will be removed and social distancing measures will be scrapped. Nightclubs can reopen for the first time since March last year, and there will no longer be limits on people attending concerts, theaters, weddings or sports events.

Earlier, Health Secretary Sajid Javid said it was the right time to allow Britons a chance to return to normal life. The government's decision balances the harms brought by COVID-19 and damage done by continued restrictions, he said.



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson claps hands on the tribune beside his wife Carrie prior the Euro 2020 soccer championship final between England and Italy at Wembley stadium in London, Sunday, July 11, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Frank Augstein, Pool

Javid told Parliament that Britain's successful vaccine rollout means that nine out of 10 adults in the U.K. now have antibodies against the virus. The government is on track to meet its target of offering all adults a first vaccine dose by July 19, the day when all remaining lockdown restrictions, including mandatory mask-wearing, are to be lifted.

As of Monday, 87% of the U.K.'s adult population have had their first dose, and 66% have had both doses. At the same time infections have soared in recent weeks, running at over 30,000 new cases daily, driven by the delta variant.

Javid said while new infections could reach 100,000 a day later in the summer, two doses of the vaccine offer effective protection against serious illness from the virus and officials believe the surge in cases will not put "unsustainable pressure" on hospitals.

Waiting any longer to lift restrictions will risk having the virus spread peak in the autumn and winter, when children return to school and hospitals are most likely to be overwhelmed by seasonal infections, Javid and Johnson said.



In this handout photo provided by UK Parliament, Britain's Health Secretary Sajid Javid updates MPs on the governments coronavirus plans, in the House of Commons, London, Monday, July 5, 2021. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson says people in England will no longer be required by law to wear face masks in indoor public spaces and to keep at least 1 meter (3 feet) apart as soon as later

this month. Johnson on Monday confirmed plans to reopen society despite rising coronavirus cases. Credit: Jessica Taylor/UK Parliament via AP

"There will never be a perfect time to take this step, because we simply cannot eradicate this virus—whether we like it or not, coronavirus is not going away," Javid said.

Many of the infections have occurred among younger people who have yet to receive a first dose of vaccine. The government has no plans yet to offer vaccines to children under 18.

The British government believes that the vaccine rollout has mostly severed the link between infections and those needing hospitalization. The numbers of people requiring hospitalization or dying from COVID-19 have stayed low and broadly stable, though they have been edging up in recent days.

Still, concerns over the rapid increase in cases has piled pressure on the government to take a more cautious approach over lifting restrictions.

Jonathan Ashworth, the health spokesperson for the opposition Labour Party, said Javid's plan was akin to "pushing his foot down on the accelerator while throwing the seat belts off." And Stephen Griffin, associate professor at Leeds University's school of medicine, called the move an irresponsible gamble.



People wearing face masks to protect against coronavirus, walk, in central London, Monday, July 12, 2021. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is set to confirm that all remaining lockdown restrictions in England will be lifted in a week's time while urging people to remain cautious amid a huge resurgence of the coronavirus. Johnson is expected to say at a news conference later Monday that face masks and all social distancing measures will be lifted in England on July 19. Credit: Dominic Lipinski/PA Wire(/PA via AP



In this handout photo provided by UK Parliament, Britain's Shadow Health Secretary Jonathan Ashworth responding to a statement from Health Secretary Sajid Javid to MPs on the governments coronavirus plans, in the House of Commons, London, Monday, July 5, 2021. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson says people in England will no longer be required by law to wear face masks in indoor public spaces and to keep at least 1 meter (3 feet) apart as soon as later this month. Johnson on Monday confirmed plans to reopen society despite rising coronavirus cases. Credit: Jessica Taylor/UK Parliament via AP

"I am dumbfounded by the notion that public health can be left to individual choice when, in the case of infectious disease it is, in fact, the epitome of collective responsibility," Griffin said. "Government messaging on restrictions currently amounts to an outright oxymoron by urging caution whilst simultaneously allowing all guidance to be lifted."

Peter Openshaw, a member of a group that advises the government on new and emerging respiratory viruses, said it was vital to keep some protective measures in place, such as wearing masks.

"I really don't see why people are reluctant to wear face coverings, it is quite clear that they do greatly reduce transmission," he told BBC radio. "Vaccines are fantastic but you have to give them time to work."

The British government, which enforced one of the longest lockdowns in the world, has lifted restrictions for England in a series of steps that began with reopening schools in March. The fourth and final stage was delayed last month to provide time for more people to be vaccinated amid the rapid spread of the delta variant.

Other parts of the U.K.—Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—are following their own, broadly similar, road maps out of lockdown.

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