

# Scientists round on UK over plan to end COVID curbs

July 16 2021

---



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

The UK government's plan to scrap day-to-day pandemic restrictions in England next week is reckless and has no basis in science, international experts warned on Friday, with one arguing it amounts to premeditated

murder.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said this week it was "highly probable" the worst of the coronavirus pandemic was over as he pressed ahead with Monday's reopening, despite the Delta variant spreading out of control.

He has said the UK can reopen because two-thirds of adults are now fully vaccinated, but England's Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty warned that infection rates were on track to reach "quite scary" levels.

International scientists including advisers to other governments had brutal words for Johnson.

"I've written that I believe that the strategy of herd immunity is actually murderous," US scientist William Haseltine said after an emergency discussion among experts about the UK plan.

Aiming for herd immunity would mean pursuing a policy in the knowledge that it would lead to many thousands of deaths, he said.

"It is a disaster as a policy," he added.

The UK government denies it is pursuing a policy of "herd immunity" by letting the Delta variant rip, but concedes that daily [infection rates](#) could surge to 100,000 in the weeks ahead, which would put further pressure on hospitals.

"I don't think we should underestimate the fact that we could get into trouble again surprisingly fast," Whitty said on Thursday, urging the public "to take things incredibly slowly" as restrictions ease.

From Monday—dubbed "Freedom Day" by some media—the government will lift most restrictions on public gatherings in England

and allow businesses such as nightclubs to reopen.

Mandates covering [face masks](#) and work from home will be lifted as Johnson promotes a new approach of personal responsibility, although he has also urged people not to "throw caution to the winds".

But that is just what Johnson is doing with a policy of allowing the virus to spread, "infect people, make them ill, and have them die", according to professor Gabriel Scally at the University of Bristol.

The government's stated approach of lifting controls now before any winter surge of respiratory disease is marked by "moral emptiness and epidemiological stupidity", he said.

## 'Pingdemic'

The devolved governments of Scotland and Wales set their own health policy and will keep in place a legal requirement to wear face coverings in enclosed spaces such as shops and on [public transport](#). Northern Ireland looks set to follow suit.

The scientists attending Friday's online meeting warned that England was falling out of step not just with its neighbours in the UK but with the rest of the world.

The meeting was organised by the authors of a protest letter published by medical journal The Lancet last week that originally carried 122 signatures.

Another 1,400 scientists have since added their names.

"In New Zealand we've always looked to the UK for leadership," said Michael Baker, professor of public health at the University of Otago in

Dunedin.

"You have a remarkable depth of scientific knowledge. You've done remarkably well in vaccine development and rollout. Remarkable clinical trials that we're drawing on," he said.

"And that's why it just seems so remarkable that you're not following even basic public health principles here."

Professor Shu-Ti Chiou, former head of Taiwan's Health Promotion Administration, said she was "very concerned" that younger age groups and clinically vulnerable people were left exposed by the UK plan.

"In our culture there is a saying that it is unethical to take the umbrella away from people while it's still raining," Chiou said.

"And it's actually raining very hard."

The surge in infections sweeping Britain led to more than 530,000 people being instructed to self-isolate by a government-run app in the week to July 7, the highest total since January, according to latest data.

Some companies such as carmaker Nissan have been losing staff en masse after they were pinged by the app—in a brewing crisis described by UK newspapers as a "pingdemic".

Butchers, another industry hit hard, have even warned of national meat shortages unless the app is made less sensitive.

© 2021 AFP

Citation: Scientists round on UK over plan to end COVID curbs (2021, July 16) retrieved 18 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-07-scientists-uk-covid-curbs.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.