

UK's Johnson set to confirm England unlocking will go ahead

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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

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is set to confirm Monday that all remaining lockdown restrictions in England will be lifted in a week's

time while urging people to remain cautious amid a resurgence of the coronavirus.

Johnson is expected to say at a news conference that legal rules on social distancing and mask-wearing will be lifted in England on July 19. However, given the sharp rise in new cases, he is also likely to downplay talk of "Freedom Day."

The U.K. as a whole has seen infections soar in recent weeks as a result of the delta variant. Daily [infection](#) levels are running at over 30,000, their highest rates since January. Most infections have largely occurred among [younger people](#), many of whom have yet to receive a first dose of vaccine.

Though the [government](#) has warned that daily case numbers will rise further, potentially hitting 100,000 at some point this summer, it is pressing on with the unlocking because of the rapid rollout of vaccines. As of Sunday, 69% of the population has received at least one vaccine dose while 52% have had two.

The government hopes that the [vaccine](#) rollout has severely disrupted the link between infections and those needing hospitalization. However, both the number of people requiring hospitalization and dying from COVID-19 have been edging up in recent days though not at the same rate as infections.

Still, concerns over the rapid increase in cases has piled pressure on Johnson to take a more cautious approach over the latest unlocking. For example, he is expected to recommend that people continue to wear [face masks](#) in enclosed places, such as on [public transport](#) and in shops.

Public health officials and scientists have been voicing their concerns, saying ditching masks and social distancing altogether could be

dangerous.

Professor 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 face coverings.

"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 and in the meantime keeping up all those measures which we have learned to reduce the transmission is to me really vital."

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, which was first discovered in India.

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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