

Wales follows Scotland in unveiling post-Xmas COVID curbs

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Wales on Wednesday became the latest UK nation to announce new COVID-19 curbs, as the government in London said it was cutting the isolation period required for positive cases.

The First Minister of the devolved assembly, Mark Drakeford, said that from December 26 socialising in Welsh pubs, cinemas and restaurants would be limited to groups of six people or less.

Two-metre distancing will return in [public places](#), pubs and other licensed premises will be table service only and staff will have to collect contact tracing details, and masks will be required once again.

Large events will essentially be banned, the maximum permissible number of people allowed to gather indoors set at 30, and outdoors at 50.

The moves by the [government](#) in Cardiff follow Scotland's unveiling of new rules there, which also come into force on December 26.

Scottish crowds will be capped at 500 for outdoor events, while for indoors the limit will be 100 standing or 200 seated, for at least three weeks.

That means the pandemic has forced the cancellation of Edinburgh's hugely popular New Year's Eve street party for the second successive year.

The UK has seen a surge in infections since Omicron became the dominant variant in recent weeks, with 90,629 cases reported on Tuesday alone.

The country is already one of the hardest hit in Europe, with a [death toll](#) of 147,433.

- Antiviral drugs deal—But UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has resisted calls to impose stricter rules over Christmas in England, unlike the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales, which have responsibility for their own health policies.

The embattled leader, reeling from weeks of scandals and setbacks—including growing discontent among his ruling Conservatives—has said he wants more evidence on Omicron's severity and ability to evade vaccines.

And on Wednesday, his government announced that those who have caught the virus but feel well can come out of self-isolation after seven days instead of 10, potentially allowing more to join family celebrations.

This rule only applies to people who have taken two negative lateral flow tests, NHS England said.

The government also announced it had signed deals to buy more than 4 million courses of two new antiviral drugs to treat COVID-19.

Pfizer's ritonavir and US rival Merck/MSD's molnupiravir will be available early next year in the UK, if both are approved by regulators.

Molnupiravir, sold as Lagevrio, is part of a national trial run by the University of Oxford that people can join if they have virus symptoms.

Britain was the first country in the world to approve it last month and the authorities will make it available to those at high risk of severe illness, such as people with cancer.

Pfizer's pill, marketed as Paxlovid, has yet to be authorised anywhere in the world. The company said Tuesday that clinical trials showed it reduced hospital admissions and deaths among at-risk [people](#) by almost 90 percent, when taken a few days after symptoms began.

Both drugs would be rolled out "as quickly as possible" once approved, said the government.

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