

Scotland prepares to reopen but not as much as England

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Scotland will partially ease some of its coronavirus restrictions from next week, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said on Tuesday, but unlike in England, insisted face coverings should remain for the foreseeable

future.

The decision of the devolved parliament in Edinburgh to go slower than the UK government in London, which sets [health policy](#) in England, creates different rules north and south of the border.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his Health Secretary Sajid Javid have announced that all coronavirus curbs will be removed on Monday, but scientists have warned the move is too fast, and could see infection rates spiral.

Scottish National Party leader Sturgeon in particular was critical of Johnson's plan to end mandatory mask-wearing, which has become a political issue and stoked anger within his own party.

"If government believes measures like this matter—and this government does—we should say so, we should do what is necessary to ensure compliance," she told lawmakers.

"And we should be prepared to take any resulting flak from those who disagree.

"We shouldn't lift important restrictions to make our lives easier and then expect the public to take responsibility for doing the right thing."

Johnson has appealed for "common sense" on what some British media have dubbed "freedom day", shifting the onus from [government](#) "diktat" to personal responsibility.

Javid has conceded [infection rates](#) could surge to 100,000 a day in the coming months but is putting his faith in increasing vaccination rates to prevent that translating into more hospital admissions—and deaths.

Sturgeon said the mandatory wearing of face coverings "will remain in place, not just now but in all likelihood for some time to come" to help protect the most vulnerable.

"This is a time for continued caution," she added.

Under the new rules in Scotland, indoor gathering restrictions in homes will be relaxed from Monday and up to 10 individuals from four households will be able to meet in public indoor spaces like pubs and restaurants.

However, plans for workers to return to offices will be postponed until August 9, when all legally required COVID restrictions are expected to be finally scrapped.

Nightclubs will remain closed under the Level 0 restrictions and pubs operating indoors will have to close at midnight—an hour later than currently.

Johnson has been criticised for reacting too slowly to the outbreak last year, of repeatedly hesitating in imposing lockdown restrictions and lifting curbs too early.

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