

UK health leaders call for COVID curbs as infections rise

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Healthcare leaders urged the British government Wednesday to reinstate some coronavirus restrictions to ease pressures on hospitals because of spiralling case numbers.

But ministers remain opposed to reintroducing any curbs, arguing the situation is still far better than earlier this year and the country is learning to "live with the virus".

A total of 223 deaths from COVID-19 were registered on Tuesday—the highest 24-hour toll since March—while there is mounting concern at daily case rates.

The country is averaging more than 40,000 new cases a day for the first time since the summer, and the number of patients admitted to hospital is increasing.

Matthew Taylor, head of the NHS Confederation representing the state-run health service in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, said hospitals were feeling severe pressure and action was needed as the busier winter period approaches.

"We've got a very particular problem over this winter, and we need to act," he told Sky News.

Taylor said health leaders report the worsening COVID-19 situation means they are missing key targets in areas such as waits in emergency departments, ambulance response times and treatment backlogs.

"Is it better to act early and take measures which don't stop the economy working—but I recognise they are inconvenient for people—or do we wait for things to get worse and possibly risk having to take more severe measures?" he added.

'Policy is working'

The government, which lifted coronavirus restrictions in July, insists it is closely watching the statistics, which have been attributed to high numbers of infections in [school-age children](#).

But it maintains the situation does not yet warrant a return to restrictions, such as compulsory indoor mask-wearing and working from home where possible.

"I don't see any cause for changing the course at this minute," Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng told the BBC. "This is a virus that we are learning to live with.

"Clearly any increase is concerning and we're monitoring the data on a daily basis.

"But for now, we think that this policy is working," he added, referring to the government's vaccination campaign and latest offer of booster jabs to the more vulnerable.

Britain's stubbornly high infection rates contrast sharply with its European neighbours and have prompted fresh questions of the decision to relax all restrictions.

It has mainly used the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, which was shown to be less effective at preventing infection from the Delta variant than the mRNA vaccines such as Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna predominantly used in Europe.

The country also began its vaccination programme earlier, prompting questions about whether immunity is now waning, similar to Israel's experience.

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