

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Europe, Great Britain > Great Britain & Northern Ireland (Europe) > Health (UK) > Epidemics (health, UK) > **Coronavirus (Britain): Boris Johnson to scrap most of England's Covid rules (...)**

Coronavirus (Britain): Boris Johnson to scrap most of England's Covid rules from 19 July

Tuesday 6 July 2021, by [ELGOT Jessica](#), [SAMPLE Ian](#) (Date first published: 5 July 2021).

PM will make England most unrestricted country in Europe despite saying cases could soar to 50,000 before date is reached.

Sajid Javid, the health secretary, told the Commons that schools should expect to stop sending home “bubbles” of children from 19 July, in time for many children’s summer holiday camps.

Standing alongside the prime minister, England’s chief medical officer, Prof Chris Whitty, warned that the epidemic was “significant and rising”. While hospitalisations were increasing, modelling suggested the health service would be able to handle the pressures, Whitty said.

“What the modelling would imply is that we will reach that peak before we get to the point where we have the kind of pressures we saw in January of this year. But inevitably, with all models you have to say that there’s some degree of uncertainty,” he said.

He said he expected this coming winter “may be very difficult for the NHS and I don’t think that’s a particularly controversial statement,” saying the health service would face the additional pressures of flu and waiting lists.

No 10 sources said contingency measures to deal with a significant rise in infections in the autumn would depend on booster jabs and surge testing and include the possibility of a wider use of Covid passports for mass events. “The aim is to avoid any repeat of the kind of restrictions we have seen for the past year,” a source said.

Ministers will hold on to powers to “reimpose economic and social restrictions at a local, regional or national level” if needed to suppress a dangerous new variant, according to a Whitehall document published on Monday.

Those measures would be a “last resort to prevent unsustainable pressure on the NHS,” the government said. It also said Covid status certificates could be introduced in the autumn or winter “if the country is facing a difficult situation” as a means of keeping events going and businesses open.

Keir Starmer called Johnson’s announcement “party management, not the public interest”. Johnson’s former adviser turned chief critic Dominic Cummings said the prime minister was in “‘let it rip’ mode”.

NHS representatives also reacted angrily. Jude Diggins, an interim director at the Royal College of Nursing, said: “This disease does not disappear on 19 July. No available vaccine is 100% effective ... Public mask-wearing is straightforward and well-established – government will regret the day it sent the wrong signal for political expediency.”

But Tory MPs heralded the change, shouting “hallelujah” in the House of Commons.

The government announced a further 27,334 UK Covid cases on Monday, with nine deaths within 28 days of a positive test. The chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, said the data showed that vaccines had “weakened the link between cases and hospitalisation ... [it’s] not a completely broken link”.

Johnson, Vallance and Whitty all said they would continue to wear their masks in crowded spaces or if asked by others, as opposition to the move mounted from regional mayors and trade unions.

Scientists advising the government also sounded alarm. Prof Calum Semple, who sits on the government’s Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage), said it was essential that people took responsibility themselves if no guidelines were in place. “It’ll be for the silent and sensible majority to take the lead,” he said.

Prof John Drury, a member of a subgroup to Sage, said the opening up was a clear signal that high infection rates would be the price of freedom. “It’s a political choice about the extent to which it’s OK that some people get very ill,” he said.

Labour said lifting all restrictions would leave millions of people who have not had both jabs, including children, susceptible to long Covid. Starmer called for a rethink. “We all want the restrictions to be lifted. We are going to have to find a way of living with the virus. But that can’t just be a soundbite. We need a proper plan and to throw off all protections at the same time, when the infection rate is still going up is reckless. We need a balanced approach.”

Jessica Elgot and Ian Sample

P.S.

• The Guardian. Mon 5 Jul 2021 20.43 BST:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/05/boris-johnson-says-most-covid-rules-likely-to-end-in-england-on-19-july>