

London, South Essex, and South Hertfordshire to move to Tier 3 restrictions

- Tier 3 Restrictions will apply in all 32 London boroughs and the City of London, parts of Essex and parts of Hertfordshire from the beginning of Wednesday 16 December
- Latest data shows an exponential rise in cases as well as rising local hospital admissions which will soon put additional pressure on already overstretched NHS capacity

All 32 London boroughs and the City of London, and parts of both Essex and Hertfordshire will be moved to Tier 3 restrictions, coming into effect from the beginning of Wednesday 16 December, the government has announced today.

The areas that are being moved to Tier 3 are:

- all of London's 32 boroughs and the City of London
- in Essex: Basildon, Brentwood, Harlow, Epping Forest, Castle Point, Rochford, Maldon, Braintree, Chelmsford – and two unitary authorities Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea Borough Councils
- in Hertfordshire: Broxbourne, Hertsmere, Watford and Three Rivers

The latest epidemiological data shows an exponential rise in confirmed cases in these areas, necessitating emergency action ahead of the scheduled review point on 16 December.

Since the end of national restrictions, the situation in London, part of Essex and South Hertfordshire has deteriorated. New cases have continued to rise and hospital admissions have increased. Without urgent action this trend would continue at an increasingly rapid rate, leading to a rise in hospital admissions and deaths in the following two weeks, hitting the NHS at its busiest time of year. Latest figures from the ONS showed almost 1 in 3 people in England show no symptoms of having the virus but are still able to pass it on- requiring everyone to play their part to prevent the situation worsening.

The London weekly case rate at 225 per 100,000 people is already the highest regional rate in the country. Havering has the highest rates in London, at 471 per 100,000. These rates do not include the most recent days of incomplete data which show the sharpest rises.

In South Essex, case rates are greater than 200 per 100,000 in 10 out of 14 local authorities and are increasing across the area, with cases in Basildon reaching 563 per 100,000. In South Hertfordshire case rates are greater than 150 per 100,000 in 4 out of the 5 local authorities bordering London and have increased by 10% or more over the last 7 days. Broxbourne's cases have reached 358 per 100,000.

As of 11 December there were 2,212 hospital beds occupied by COVID-19

patients and 261 mechanical ventilation beds occupied by COVID-19 patients in London, up from 1,766 occupied hospital beds and 242 occupied ventilation beds on 6 December. Daily hospital admissions in London for COVID-19 have increased from 179 on 6 December to 277 on 11 December.

All available data has been reviewed and assessed.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

I know that this is difficult news. I know it will mean plans disrupted, and that for businesses affected, this will be a very significant blow.

So this action is absolutely essential, not just to keep people safe, but because as we've seen early action can help prevent more damaging and longer lasting problems later

Professor Kevin Fenton, London Regional Director for Public Health England, said:

The number of COVID-19 cases in London has increased significantly over the past two weeks and we continue to experience the highest case rates of anywhere in the country.

We are now in a situation of exponential growth which, if left unchecked, would lead to a rapid escalation in cases and hospitalisations that could overwhelm our NHS services over the festive period and into the New Year.

Whilst no-one wants to see London under tighter restrictions, the stark reality of the situation means we have no choice. Londoners have shown fantastic resilience in combating this virus to date and we all now have a key role to play in limiting its impact on ourselves and our loved ones over the coming weeks.

London boroughs, City of London and the named parts of Essex and Hertfordshire will be eligible for the ongoing rollout of community testing for those living under Tier 3 restrictions to further tackle the spread of the virus. Further details will be set out shortly.

The government has already confirmed on Friday that a targeted testing drive had begun for secondary school and college students in parts of North East London, Essex and Kent.

The government has made it a national priority that education and childcare settings should continue to operate as normal as possible during the coronavirus outbreak. This remains the default position for all areas irrespective of local restriction tiers.

The Chief Medical Officer has been clear that schools should remain open and has highlighted the damage caused by not being in education to children's learning, development and mental health, which greatly outweighs any other risks. Children are at very low risk from the virus, and staff are not at higher risk than those working in other sectors.

These restrictions, alongside the other parts of Essex and Hertfordshire and all other areas in England, will continue to be formally reviewed as planned on Wednesday 16 December.